

Senator Lloyd Smucker  
Urban Affairs & Housing Committee Hearing  
June 11, 2009

Want to kick off this event with a few words about the home-field community. Appreciate that the committee accepted the invitation to sample our storied Lancaster County hospitality. The other thing you can always count on around here is the dispensing of good, old-fashioned common sense. Both should be in view today.

Across the community, people have much to relate about consistent cooperation and aggressive development efforts producing results, new businesses and shops, expanded cultural and recreational facilities, street after street taking on a spruced up look and energy. There is a confidence in the future that has not always been evident.

Clearly, Lancaster does not fit the stereotype of the distressed third-class city. Still, even a well-run city faces formidable financial challenges. Public safety costs and infrastructure repairs are just two of the leading obligations that are increasingly hard to satisfy.

There is a lot of private investment, and public investment, and partnerships between the two. The lesson here is that not all progress is inspired, compelled, or paid for by government.

We are fortunate to have strong institutions – a major hospital and other health care entities, colleges and universities, cultural and civic associations – contributing in varied and important ways. Local idea generation is a given. How we can further help turn promising plans into productive projects is part of what we hope to learn over the next several hours.

Most of what we want to see – a sense of community ownership, neighborhood revitalization – is helped along by quality, available, and affordable housing. When it comes to strengthening neighborhoods, there is a rather simple equation: curb blight, and cure a batch of problems.

In the modern age, the reputation and allure of a city is tied in part to the reputation of its schools. We have a lot of capable and dedicated people doing the hard work of providing for urban education. The common challenges facing schools are intensified in cities. But again, there are all sorts of encouraging aspects and positive signs found in Lancaster schools.

In assembling this hearing, we tried to avoid the standard parade of groups shopping merely for more state money. Pleased with the lineup of capable and accomplished individuals who can share success stories and offer suggestions for strategies that will keep our Commonwealth's cities on the comeback trail.