

May 5, 2022

*Susquehanna County Economic  
Development Advisory Board  
Update*



Breakfast  
Sponsored By



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**Career Brief**

Anirban Basu is Chairman & CEO of Sage Policy Group, Inc., an economic and policy consulting firm headquartered in Baltimore, Maryland with an office in Orlando, Florida. The firm provides strategic analytical services to energy suppliers, law firms, medical systems, government agencies, and real estate developers among others.

In 2014, Maryland Governor Larry Hogan appointed him Chair of the Maryland Economic Development Commission (2014-2021). He serves as Chairman of the Baltimore County Economic Advisory Committee. He is also the Chief Economist to Associated Builders and Contractors, the Chief Economist of the Maryland Bankers Association, and Chief Economic Advisor to the Construction Financial Management Association. He serves or has served similar functions for Visit Baltimore, Maryland Realtors, and Marcum, LLP.

He has lectured at Johns Hopkins University, most recently in Global Strategy, and has also taught international economics, urban economics, micro- and macroeconomics at Hopkins. His radio show can be heard weekdays on 88.1FM, WYPR, Baltimore.

In both 2007 and 2016, the Daily Record newspaper selected Mr. Basu as one of Maryland’s 50 most influential people. The Baltimore Business Journal named him one of the region’s 20 most powerful business leaders in 2010.

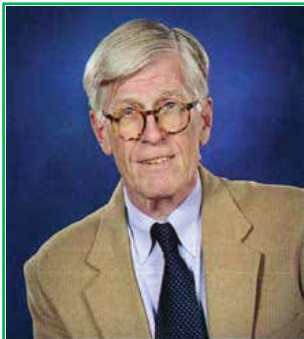
Dr. Basu has been on many boards over time, including First Mariner Bank, the Baltimore City Public School System, Port Discovery, the Baltimore School for the Arts, and Union Memorial Hospital. He is currently on the boards of the University of Maryland School of Law, St. Mary’s College, the University of Maryland Medical Center, the University System of Maryland Foundation, the Center for Emerging Media, the Lyric Opera House and the Archdiocese of Baltimore School System.

Dr. Basu earned his B.S. in Foreign Service at Georgetown University. He earned his Master’s in Public Policy from Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government, and his Master’s in Economics from the University of Maryland, College Park. His Juris Doctor was earned at the University of Maryland School of Law. His doctoral work was completed at UMBC with a concentration in health economics.

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## THE BEST OF TIMES?

**George Conner, Advisory Board President**

It is a challenge to review the past year and look forward to the year ahead given the current cultural and political landscape. Who would have predicted in 2019 what the next years would bring? The tumultuous business climate caused by Covid-19 and the reaction to the pandemic has left many in the business community reeling. Is it the best of times or the worst of times? Who can say, but it is our time and many business people have seized the opportunity to move their enterprise ahead.

My company, like many others, has seen supply chain problems with shortages, long lead times, and higher prices the new norm. At the same time, consumer demand continues to be strong, although modified, by the influence of the internet and easy access to information (and disinformation) on products and pricing. We truly exist in a global economy as world-wide product and shipping challenges affect the daily operation of my small business in Susquehanna County. What governments and large corporations do at a distance has a direct impact upon our local day to day processes.

The Progress Authority, acting as Susquehanna County's Economic Development Board, continues to connect local businesses with government services and keep government connected to those that it serves.

The Economic Development Board's agenda items are varied and wide-reaching. The revolving loan fund is, in my opinion, the most important item as it can reach startup businesses that have need of money to buy a piece of equipment or make an improvement. The Board is always looking for new loan recipients. The application process is easy and straight forward. Please keep this underutilized source of funding in mind when attempting to help new entrepreneurs.

In addition to the revolving loan fund, the Broadband/ Dark Fiber project – which will provide high-speed internet access throughout the county - continues to move toward becoming a reality. After initial support from the County Commissioners, the project has gained new momentum with the pledge by Claverack Electric Cooperative to build out connections for their customers. This project will have a strong impact on our local economic growth.

Some of the other projects that are monitored by the board include: deploying CHIRP funds, submitting funding applications for the Public Safety building, pursuing solar development issues, monitoring new business projects, developing a plan to create a laboratory for rural education, and more that you will read about in this report. Individually all of these projects are important. Collectively the achievement is notable.

The Economic Development Advisory Board meets monthly to monitor and make suggestions to the Progress Authority. Our meetings are open to anyone with an interest in the success of Susquehanna County. A shout out 'Thank You' goes to those Board members, County Commissioners, and county agency representatives who faithfully attend and offer constructive suggestions to further the work of the Board. New participants are always welcome. Help us shape the future. Speak with a board member. Together we can make the future truly the best of times.

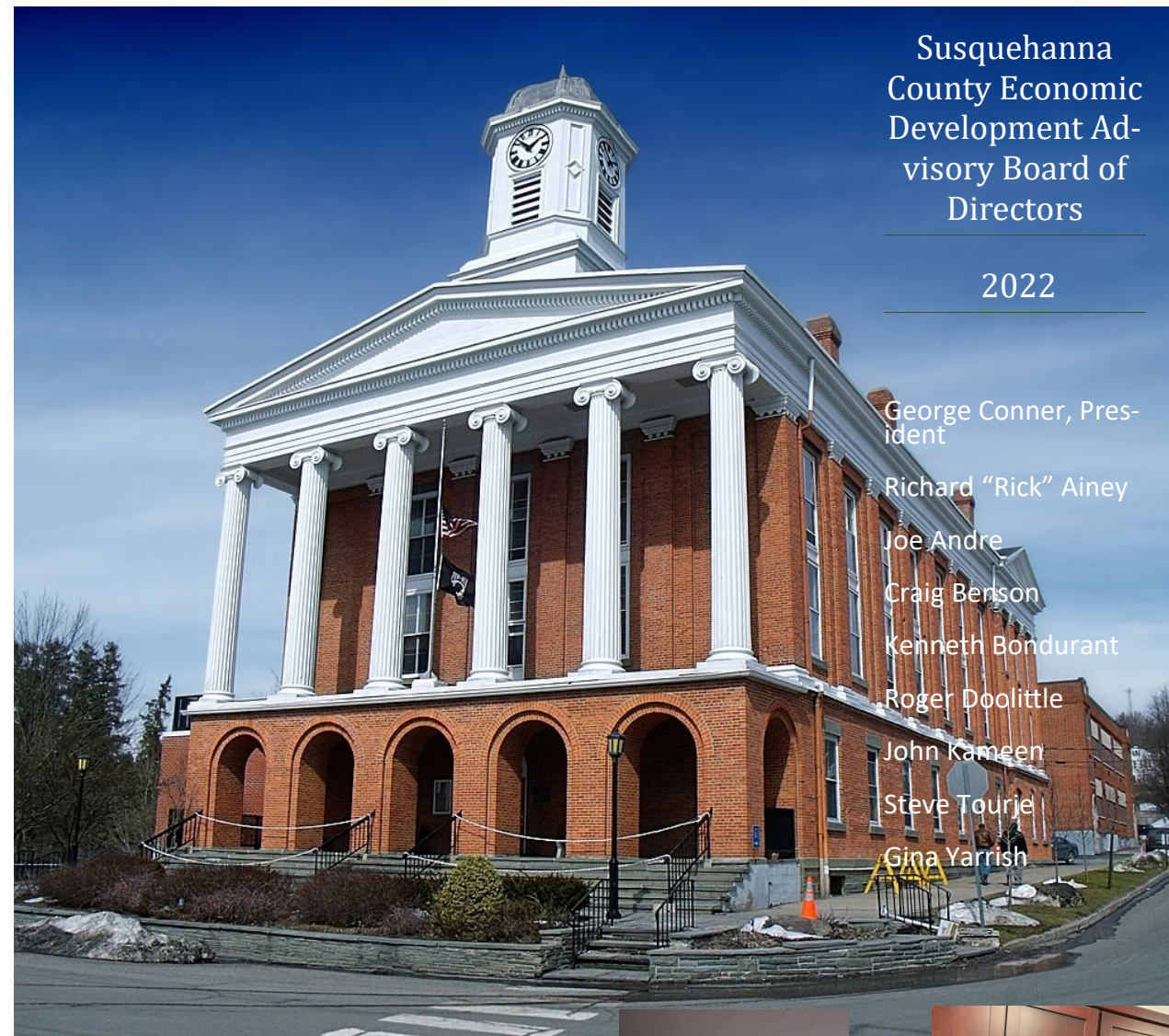
## Director' Message **Anthony J. Ventello, Executive Director**

The last several years have been an absolute game changer for all of us. But with this challenge every one of us have a new perspective on our capabilities and capacity to handle change. I am extremely impressed with our elected officials and the Progress Authority staff to redirect all efforts to best meet the immediate needs of our communities. Emergency assistance was distributed at an unprecedented pace that exceeded urban systems to help our rural businesses and residents. Extensive gratitude was expressed by numerous recipients and was critical to preserving their businesses and livelihoods.



As we slowly return to the "new normal" the emphasis of rural broadband continues to be the Number One priority. Our efforts to plan, engineer and deploy a dark fiber middle-mile is now urgent and the strides made are a true advantage. Middle mile funding is the biggest challenge, as numerous sources of last-mile funds exist.

I look forward to continued focus on Susquehanna County's economic prosperity and wish everyone a happy and healthy path forward.



## Susquehanna County Economic Development Ad- visory Board of Directors

2022

George Conner, Pres-  
ident

Richard "Rick" Ainey

Joe Andre

Craig Benson

Kenneth Bondurant

Roger Doolittle

John Kameen

Steve Tourje

Gina Yarrish

## Progress Authority Staff

Anthony J. Ventello, Executive Director

Christopher Brown, Vice President,  
Community Development

T. Thompson, Vice President, Economic  
Development

Kim Fairchild, Executive Assistant



Anthony Ventello



Chris Brown



T. Thompson



Kim Fairchild

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### Economic Advisory Board Tours Solar Farm

With renewed interest in solar power development via both potential legislative changes and landowner concerns, the Susquehanna County Economic Development Advisory Board toured a solar energy farm conversion currently under construction in New York State.

Electrical engineer Matt Tripoli of CS Engineering hosted our group on a tour of this new 110-acre solar generation facility. As we walked through the construction site, he explained the acquisition, construction and transmission of this 20-megawatt, \$25 million facility. Matt was previously employed by IMG, who constructed several 20-megawatt gas-fired generation stations in Susquehanna County and throughout our region. The discussion was lively with interest in the renewable energy, carbon free sector.

However, our conversation continued with the challenge of the ability to store solar power and current battery technology, the

construction costs exceeding the natural gas sector, green field utilization, and that every solar panel was constructed in China, and the fact that there is no place to recycle the panels. Among all of these challenges inclusive of our weather patterns it was very difficult to identify this type of solar development as a clear advantage to other forms of energy generation such as natural gas, nuclear, wind, and other fuels.

As our demand for electrical power with beneficial electricity grows, it appears that the answer is clearly in diverse generation sources to balance our need, cost effective-



### Electric Charging Stations a Possibility

As we try to anticipate what the future holds for Susquehanna County, The Progress Authority, in cooperation with the County Commissioners and The Susquehanna Economic Development Board, has joined a group of citizens to explore the potential of installing EV Charging Stations in Susquehanna Depot. There is a growing Electronic Vehicle market nationwide thereby necessitating more charging stations on major travel routes. With its close proximity to Route 80 and the wonderful D&H Rail-Trail, Susquehanna Depot seems to be an ideal location for a potential EV charging station. There are a handful of different charging station models on the market and the models that offer the most charging capacity at the quickest charging times are being prioritized. Potential grant funding opportunities are being explored as the national transit professionals are setting the goal of having a charging station located every 50 miles along major national travel routes like interstate 80. Local power supplier Penelec, has been contacted and a plan is being formulated to be ready to submit when the grant funding opens. As the changing technology continues to advance and funding becomes available, The Progress Authority is prepared to assist with the project.



### Progress Authority Provides Assistance During COVID

Whether it be the CARES (Coronavirus Aid Relief & Economic Security) Act, CWCA (Covid-19 Working Capital Access) Program, PPP (Payroll Protection Program), EIDL (Economic Industry Disaster Loan), CHIRP (Covid-19 Hospitality Industry Recovery Plan), ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) or the local Small Business Fund, the Progress Authority was at the forefront of the implementation of these programs, locally. Specifically, the CBPA in conjunction with the Susquehanna County Commissioners, was able to facilitate the deployment of over \$456,000 in grant funding through the CHIRP program. These grants were specific to the hospitality industry, with assistance provided to 22 businesses throughout the County. Additionally, we also served as an informational hub for small businesses in their handling of the PPP, EIDL and ARPA programs. As the enduring effects from the pandemic become realized, the CBPA will continue to be an ardent supporter of small-business operators through any means necessary.

Most specifically, the CBPA in conjunction with the Susquehanna County Commissioners, was able to facilitate the deployment of over \$456,000 in grant funding through the CHIRP program. These grants were specific to the hospitality industry within the Accommodation Subsector or the Food Services and Drinking Places Subsection. The CBPA provided assistance to 23 Susquehanna County businesses, who were in turn able to utilize these funds to offset various operating expenses. Additionally, we also served as an informational hub for small businesses in their handling of the PPP, EIDL and ARPA programs. As the enduring effects from the pandemic become realized, the CBPA will continue to be an ardent supporter of small-business operators through any means necessary.

### Revolving Loan Fund

The Progress Authority's Revolving Loan Fund was set up as an economic development tool to assist businesses with their financing needs. The intention of the fund is to strengthen a financing package while taking a subordinate lien position behind a primary lending institution. Special consideration is given to projects that have more job creation. The rate is usually advantageous and the term is dependent on the type of collateral. The Progress Authority is a certified Area Lending Organization (ALO) as an Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), Industrial Development Authority (IDA) and General-Purpose Authority. We have a 20 member board who were appointed by our member municipalities and wear 3 hats representing the 3 separate entities. Our board is the same for the IDC, IDA and General-Purpose Authority.

#### General Guidelines

Loan Size:	\$25,000 to \$100,000 (Special consideration is given to projects with larger job creation)
Collateral:	Subordinate Lien Position on Real Estate, Equipment, Personal Guaranty is customary.
Term:	Equipment- up to 5 years Real Estate- up to 10 years
Rate:	Based on collateral and term.

The Loan Committee underwrites each loan request and makes a recommendation to the Executive Committee and Full Board of Directors for a final vote. If the loan is approved, the borrower's legal counsel coordinates closing with the authority's legal counsel when all closing requirements have been met. Loan payments are subsequently made to a local bank that administers the Authority's loan fund. Applications are available online at [www.cbprogress.org](http://www.cbprogress.org).

#### 2021 In Review

Although 2021 was a challenging year on many different levels, the Progress Authority's Revolving Loan Fund continued to provide Susquehanna County businesses with much need capital to move forward with a variety of projects. In total, \$360,000.00 was lent to private businesses throughout Susquehanna County, which helped leverage nearly \$1,300,000.00 in private investment. This investment assisted in created or retaining 31 jobs. The mix of not only industries, but also companies that benefited from these loan funds was widely diverse. From commercial office space to a hometown pharmacy, to the continued expansion of Main St., in Forest City, as well as a USDA certified meat provider, the Progress Authority was able to assist in funding all of these opportunities.

## State-of-the-Art Emergency Management Center Opens

*Commissioner Alan Hall*

Although 2021 was a challenging year with the pandemic, the County Commissioners were pleased that the new Public Safety Complex was headed for completion. This complex is approximately 42,000 square feet within three buildings covering 17 acres of land.

### When did it start?

In 2012 the County was under an audit from PEMA and FEMA for the operations and facilities used for 911 and Emergency Management Operations. In this audit it was noted that Susquehanna

County was out of compliance in equipment, facilities, and operations. Our 911 equipment was past end of life and replacement parts were not readily available. Our EMA operations also failed as we used 40 Tupperware boxes in a closet that would require about a two-hour process to set up in a conference room. This exposed the County to two huge financial situations. One the County was warned that they would be losing funding for being out of compliance which would mean millions of lost funding. Second because we were out of compliance it placed the County in a high-risk situation of law suits which would also be in the millions. So, in 2012 the County hired two separate companies to complete a needs assessment on its facilities and on the operations including equipment. Both findings agreed with the previous that we were out of compliance and needed to address the entire program. It should also be noted that Susquehanna County was one of the last Counties in the State to upgrade their 911 and EMA facilities.

### Development

This has taken ten years of research to develop a complex that meets the needs of today and tomorrow. Most projects will meet the needs of today and usually do not meet future requirements making them non-efficient upon completion. The Commissioners were committed on making sure the project was done right and protected our communities not only for today but for the next 50 years. This facility needed to not only

meet standard building codes but needed to also meet requirements from AOPC, FEMA, PEMA, FAA, FCC, Center of Public Safety, and State requirements for continuing operation of Government.

### Location

Why the location? Two reasons - one we had to meet the regulations by being close to the interstate. During any major emergency the operations of the Interstate are the first priority allowing access. The second is that for the requirement of continued operation of government the facility needed to be a required distance from the main courthouse. Finally, the Commissioners were able to get a local business man, Andy Aulakh to donate the 17 acres of land that the complex sits on

to the County. This property was appraised over 1.7 million dollars which the County received for free and it will serve everyone from cradle to grave.

### Construction

The construction of this facility did not come easily with the pandemic. Many supply chain issues from ballistic glass to contractors being unable to provide an adequate

workforce delayed the project. Add on top of that the winter of 2020-2021 was a monster for construction. Not only the mud but the contractors had to remove over 65,000 pounds of snow from the roofs of the buildings. In 2021 the Commissioners received the PACA (Pennsylvania Aggregates & Concrete Association) award for excellence for the leading commercial building construction in Pennsylvania, submitted by Masters Concrete. As we have had many State and Federal agencies at the site, all have acknowledged that the construction and layout are truly state of the art and will serve our public well.

### Funding

When the project was in design the Commissioners made a commitment not to use local tax dollars for this project. We have been fortunate to have the ACT 13 gas money in this County. The majority of the project is being paid by the Act 13 funding. Other funding is coming from Federal ARPA infrastructure funds. We also have been able with the support of our legislators to receive \$1.5 million in RACP grants from the State. The Commissioners also were able to receive a grant during the pandemic to pay for the addition of the PPE building. As we stated earlier no local tax dollars were used in this project.

### The Facilities

The first thing you will notice is that the complex is not what you would think a new facility should look like. There is high fencing and high security combined with the appearance of a facility that looks like a jail. What most will need to know is that there are many requirements that drive the design of the facility. Those requirements are from many organizations like AOPC, PEMA, FEMA, and Homeland Security to mention a few. In addition, the building must be able to withstand a major event. The building has many features that unfortunately due to security and safety we cannot mention them. Another key component was to have the building and property as maintenance free as possible.

One building is a 40 x 60 climate-controlled PPE storage facility. The building known as the PPE building will hold over 125 skids of PPE material. This will allow the County to be a supplier to our first responders and has the possibility to be a location for the Northeast Task Force for a distribution center. The entire building was paid for by a grant, the shelving and fork lift were donated by LEPC.

Building B will be the home for the County Coroner with expanded offices. The coroner's previous facility was inadequate and not accommodating to grieving families. It has a private viewing room and waiting room as well as additional capacity. Building B also has room for the undercover detectives and a laser training room. The laser training room allows for all individuals in County Government that use a firearm to use the training facility as one of the two qualifiers for practice. The savings alone on ammunition will pay for the room in the first year. We also have had several inquiries for outside agencies to use the facility which will create an additional revenue stream to the County. Building B will also have a live scan fingerprint machine that will allow for improved efficiency and cost savings on processing fingerprinting. Finally in B there are garages for the Emergency Operations, 911, and maintenance equipment to ensure operations in winter months and to protect the County's assets.

Building A which is the larger of the three will house several departments. The District Magistrate will move from New Milford to the new location. The facility it previously was in did not meet the AOPC standards. In addition, it was a safety issue for employees and was very inefficient in the layout. The old space was also rented by the County, so there will be a savings on rent and utilities. This space is over double the size of the current location which offers the use as a

Central Court and the backup facility for the main Courthouse. With the central court there will be a cost savings to the County. There is a large instructional area that can seat up to 150 people in a classroom setting. Many training events will be scheduled for employees and the public for seminars on everything from mental health to EMS and firefighting. As we all know there is a big shortage of firefighters and EMT's in our County. This area also gives the public access to a shelter in time of a disaster. Building A is the location of our 911 center which is completely updated to meet all the new regulations and requirements. The old 911 offices will now be used for election security. The Emergency Operations Center is also located here with state-of-the-art technology to make sure we are prepared for any disaster. Remember the 2006 and 2011 flood we struggled with the EMA operation, now we are prepared to meet the needs.

Also at this site is a new 250-foot tower which was built. We also put a new 180-foot tower up at Elk Mountain. In 2022 we will also be putting up two more towers. These towers are critical infrastructure for communications with emergency services. For many years we have been plagued with poor communications with emergency responders. Latest technology allows us redundancy with the towers to ensure we can communicate.

This is a quick overview of the facility. There are many details of the building we wish we could share but unfortunately due to security and Homeland Security concerns we cannot. Unfortunately, the County had no choice in this project as we were cited for our systems being out of date and antiquated. We were going to lose funding and be at a high risk of law suits. The most important reason was the County was not prepared to serve its citizens in the time of need. We are pleased that with the completion of this project there were NO TAX INCREASES OR DEBT CREATION FOR THE PUBLIC. We as commissioners hope that you will never be in a position to need the services at this facility. But if you ever do, we are confident that we can provide the services that you require. We thank everyone involved in this much needed project for our communities.

