

SUSSEX ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION COMMITTEE



[www.sedac-de.org](http://www.sedac-de.org)

# 2023 Annual Report

**SEDAC Mission Statement:**

To leverage the experience, intellect, and creativity of the Sussex County community to inform, develop, recommend, and communicate strategies for creating sustainable economic prosperity.



## Report from the Chair – Joe Conaway

---



January 2024

SEDAC continues to attract new members as we focus on the future for the people of Sussex County by cooperating with the powers that be to fix our housing, jobs and public health problems. SEDAC has been working with two levels of government to assist them in addressing Sussex County's needs in these areas. Thanks to the County Council, there is a growing effort to provide relief for the housing problems in our County. The County has adopted a new ordinance that begins to address the workforce housing problem and is presently working on developing an ordinance that will provide relief from the expense of buying a new home. SEDAC has focused on creating new job opportunities for the people of Sussex by supporting efforts by the private sector to create those jobs. We have supported the University of Delaware as it attempts to expand the oyster industry by working to correct the barriers created by the regulatory agencies that have kept this industry from being as successful as it could be. SEDAC has endorsed a number of projects that will continue to support our construction industry as well as helping with the construction industry to create workforce housing. Over the years we have supported Governor Carney's Private Partnership Program that has led to more Delaware jobs. We have made it clear that those jobs should be not just in New Castle County and PPP has responded.

We will shortly be releasing our report on the feasibility of a medical school in Sussex County. We raised over \$100,000 in less than two months to have an internationally known consultant, Tripp Umbach, to do this study that is possibly a final solution to solving our medical personnel problems here. WE want to thank those who stood with SEDAC to raise the funds needed to get this first step done. They include the Sussex County Council, Highmark, the Hudson Foundation, the Freeman Foundation, Bayhealth, Tidal Health, Beebe, Chesapeake Utilities, Fulton Bank, Delaware Electric Coop and SEDAC. This study will tell us, once and for all, if a medical school is doable, how much it will cost, and how to raise the funds.

Elsewhere in the report you will find the list of speakers that came to SEDAC this year. We thank them for their time and expertise – and their honesty. They answered questions, suggested solutions, and indicated their support to improve the situation in Sussex.

We met with Chris Rausch, publisher of the Cape Gazette. SEDAC has felt that the positions taken by the Gazette were slanted and needed to be more balanced. He agreed to review their positions.

We met with Dave Rinner and Bob Herrera, the developers of the project in the City of Seaford where the Nylon Capital Shopping Center once existed. Their project will affect all of Sussex, but especially Western Sussex.

I am especially proud to say that we also met with a number of Sussex Tech students to discuss what they thought about the county and ask if they were planning to stay and work here when they graduate from high school. We still have a great deal of work in this area. Just to let you know what they saw as problems for them in Sussex County, let me list what they offered as problems. Transportation is difficult at best; we need more DART busses and a better schedule. There are not a lot of job opportunities; pay is not competitive, it is expensive to live in Sussex; governments regulations, surprise, limit their ability to move into jobs that are available. SEDAC is proud of our young people, but we need to solve these problems.

One of the major problems that SEDAC has focused on for the last three years is housing. With the cooperation of Delaware Tech, this past year's Today and Tomorrow Conference focused on housing. It is clear that we need MORE housing, not LESS and that we need housing for our workforce, and it has to be close to where they work. Those houses need to be less expensive but not less desirable. For this to happen, changes to our zoning code and government regulations that increase cost and provide little or no protection for our environment must be reversed. Towards that end, SEDAC has created a Workforce Housing Committee led by Preston Schell as chairman, to formulate changes in how we do things here. We agreed with Lieutenant Governor Bethany Hall Long when she spoke to our group, that we need a state strategy that supports intelligent, good growth with infrastructure to support it. The state bureaucrats and upstate legislators must change their ways. Sponsoring bills like HB246, which, if it becomes law, would eliminate any hope to develop workforce housing projects and not improve the environment at all. Permitting processes must be thorough, but not waste months of time because of the whim of a bureaucrat in some Dover office. Infrastructure funds should be distributed in a fair manner, not take 50 years to arrive in Sussex but only months to arrive in New Castle County. And, yes, density must increase, not decrease, if we are to provide housing for companies that

choose to locate here. And once again, I must say that salaries in Sussex should not be referred to as “good for Sussex” but should be good for “anywhere.” If we want workers in our existing healthcare and hospitality industries, we must make it possible to find a home to live in and a salary that allows them that opportunity.

2023 was a good year for SEDAC – and 2024 will be even better.

Once again, I want to thank Linda Price, our secretary, for all of her efforts on behalf of SEDAC. Keep in mind that she does all of this work while serving as President of the Greater Georgetown Chamber of Commerce. I also want to take this opportunity to thank our membership for their efforts to make SEDAC successful. We are all volunteers, and, without their help and advice, nothing would be possible. Membership in SEDAC is open to all business interests in Sussex County. If you are interested in becoming a member, please contact any of our present members or reach out to me at [jconaway@hotmail.com](mailto:jconaway@hotmail.com) or visit our website at [www.sedac.de.org](http://www.sedac.de.org) Please join us as we all look forward to the day when our children and grandchildren will not have long drives home during the holidays because the good paying jobs that they presently hold elsewhere are available right here in Sussex County.

Thank you,  
Joe Conaway, President, SEDAC

## SEDAC Board Members

---

### 2023 Executive Committee & Directors

Joe Conaway, Chair/Conaway & Assoc  
Scott Thomas, Vice Chair/Southern Delaware Tourism  
Lillian Harrison/Elevated LLC  
Rich Hartnett, Treasurer/County Bank  
Linda Price, Secretary/GT Chamber  
Bob Ruggio/Ruggio & Assoc

### Board Members

Joe Conaway  
Linda Price  
Kevin Yingling

Doug Liberman/Larson Engineering  
Chris Baker/George & Lynch  
Rob Tunnell/Tunnell Companies

Tom Thunstrom/SBDC	Ray Sander/DE Botanical Gardens
Scott Thomas/SDT	Cathy Bassett/Zach Evans/Mountaire
Ernie Felici/Beacon Hospitality	Jessica Mumbulo – Willow Construction
Bob Ruggio/Ruggio & Assoc	Jamie Burk/Town of Millsboro
Chris Weeks/Becker Morgan	Kim Lewis/Fulton Bank
Ed Lewandowski/UD	Brian Shannon/Laurel Redevelopment
Pete Keenan/IBEW	Seth Collett/LNWA
Walt Bryan	Lillian Harrison
Trisha Newcomer/City of Seaford	Jamie Smith – Town of Laurel
Jerry Esposito/Esposito LLC	Mike Vanderslice/Environmental Alliance
Charlie Timmons/ABC	Bobbi Barends/DTCC
Sandra Ware/Berkshire Hathaway	Karen Falk – Milton COC
Stephanie Moody/SCAOR	Kati Brown/Solutions IPEM
Mark Davidson/Pennoni	Lauren Weaver – BFACC
Preston Schell/OA Properties	George Beckerman/HoartBeckerman
Derek Southard/NCALL	Gus Mergenthaler/Tetrattech
Shelby Gillis – NAI Coastal	Josh Mastrangelo/Freeman Companies
Jack Riddle/Community Bank	Eric Doroshow
Jared Shelton/Chesapeake	Joe Ashton/Ashton Pools
David Rinnier – 9SDC	Adam DiSabatino - EDIS
Jerry Denney/Corrado Const	John Jones/GreenLea
Bruce Patrick/Tidewater	Sarah Gilmour/Pathways to Success
Sunny Gyani/Affordable Housing	Jo Schmeiser – COC of Greater Milford
Matt Robinson/UD – Slam Dunk to the Beach	
Jerry Denney/Corrado Construction	
Chad Robinson/Food Bank of DE	Joe Reed/Capstone Homes
Katie Brittingham/CFS Financial	Anne Angel/Millsboro COC
Michael Glick/Lighthouse Construction	Guy Marcozzi/Verdantes
Mike Nally/Nally Ventures	Mary Dupont/La Plaza Delaware
Craig Beebe/Next Day Tomorrow	Joe Sabelhaus/Sabelhaus Team
David Tam/Beebe Healthcare	Terry Murphy/BayHealth
Enrique Nunez/Splash Laundromat	Shelby Gillis/NAI Coastal
Sarah Bronson	Penny Short/Tidal Health

**Ex-Officio Members**

Sussex County Association of Towns (SCAT)

Bill Pfaff, Sussex County Economic Development

Lauren Swain – Delaware Division of Small Business

Small Business Administration

Sussex County Legislators

## SEDAC'S Continued Strategic Doing

---

2023 efforts were made on the following strategic doing initiatives

- Establishing an Advocacy Committee – focused on providing support for Sussex County Projects that continue to help foster the growth of the County; as well as addressing challenges to that growth
- Establishing a Housing Committee – focused on the challenges of workforce/affordable housing
- Support job creation and retention
- Every job is worthy and thoughtful of consideration
- Focus on communicating the role of SEDAC
- Continued to bring on board key stakeholders to build a coalition
- How we got there ○ Op Eds ○ Social Media ○ Direct Action ○ Endorse Economic Development Projects ○ Monthly agenda discussions
- 4 Op Eds were completed by Chairman, Joe Conaway and circulated through local print media
- SEDAC continues to move forward by furthering our initial strategic doing areas which include continuing to bring on key stakeholders to further our message. Establishing committees to address challenges and barricades to economic growth
- Social Media initiatives – SEDAC continues to see increased traffic to our social media pages, FB and LinkedIn. With better and more consistent postings, we have furthered our reach to those interested in the Economic Development of Sussex County

### **SEDAC Reaches Across and Beyond the County**

To support our mission of economic development in Sussex County, our members participate with a number of local and regional initiatives that help develop businesses, entrepreneurs, and the region overall.

### **Sussex County Council**

SEDAC regularly updates Sussex County Council on our progress. We meet with Council members when economic development issues arise. SEDAC is committed to keeping County Council up to date on our progress and success stories. SEDAC continues to stay involved in happenings within the County as the partnership grows.

### **Sussex County Today & Tomorrow Conference**

SEDAC was a key stakeholder in the 2023 Conference which revolved around housing. SEDAC will also be the facilitator of the actionable items that came out of the working

portion of the Conference. To further facilitate those items, SEDAC established a Housing Committee with Preston Schell as its Chair.

In SEDAC Committees address a variety of key issues:

- **Healthcare Committee** – The committee has worked over the 2023 year to facilitate a medical school feasibility study with Tripp Umbach. Many key stakeholders were interviewed in this process with a draft being provided to the committee at the end of 2023. The committee looks to first share the draft with the Hospitals, then our key stakeholders (financial backers), with the final report rolled out publicly in early 2024
- **Advocacy Committee** – Over the 2023 year, the advocacy committee and SEDAC increased its position as a leader in the ED world with several projects being presented to them. These presentations led to almost all being presented to the membership to vote for a letter of support issued on their behalf.
  - Through the advocacy committee, a subcommittee was established, headed up by Charlie Timmons to work with DelDot to address many of the challenges faced in Sussex County. A number of meetings were held, ending 2023 with a shared cooperation to work better together in the future
- **Infrastructure Committee** – key initiatives included the Oyster/Aquaculture Industry; Offshore Wind

Each month SEDAC also hears from the following:

- Town of Millsboro
- City of Seaford
- Town of Laurel
- GGTC - Georgetown Chamber of Commerce
- BFACC
- Greater Milford Chamber of Commerce
- Milton Chamber of Commerce
- Greater Millsboro Chamber of Commerce
- Sussex County Economic Development
- Laurel Redevelopment Corporation
- Small Business Development Center
- Delaware Division of Small Business
- Infrastructure Committee
- Southern Delaware Tourism

## Organizations that have presented to SEDAC

---

SEDAC recognizes the importance of keeping up to date on major activities in Sussex County and the surrounding region. These guest speakers have made presentations to SEDAC in 2023.....

- Governor John Carney
- Jay Baxter
- Scott Kidner
- Lt Governor Bethany Hall Long
- Dave Rinnier & Rob Herrera from 9SDC
- Sussex County – Todd Lawson & Mike Vincent
- Student Panel from Sussex Tech
- Southern DE Golf Club
- Chesapeake Utilities
- Mayor Members from SCAT

The SEDAC Website – [www.sedac-de.org](http://www.sedac-de.org) provides many resources and more information about our mission and members. It also contains FAQ's (updated regularly) on the Medical School Feasibility Study.

SEDAC is organized for charitable and educational purposes including, for such purposes, the making of distributions to organizations that qualify as exempt organizations under section 501c3 of the Internal Revenue Code.