

Dr. Kevin Snider, chancellor at Penn State New Kensington
Written Testimony (to be read along corresponding slide presentation)

Slide 1:

Hello, and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I'm Dr. Kevin Snider, and I have had the pleasure of serving as chancellor of Penn State New Kensington for 13 years, and during that time, I have not only been engrained in the higher education landscape, but I have become an engaged partner with our local, Western Pennsylvania communities as a Chancellor, community member and resident.

Today, I am pleased to share with you a collaborative model that our campus has been leading within the city of New Kensington. The city, located about 17 miles from Pittsburgh, was founded upon innovation, creative thinking and collaboration. Like many other industrialized, Rust Belt areas, the city had a once strong and vibrant economy, but the loss of large-scale manufacturing caused declines in industry, employment opportunities, population and economic development. As you will see, our model is reaching back to founding components to create a future for New Kensington, and we believe this could be a transferable pathway to other towns in Pennsylvania, as well as communities throughout the Rust Belt.

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Before we dive into the model, I did want to briefly share information about our campus. Penn State New Kensington is one of 24 campuses that comprise Penn State University. Located on 72 acres Upper Burrell Township, our campus enrolls approximately 600 students who go on to earn Penn State degrees entirely at our campus, or spend the first two years of a variety of Penn State's 275-plus academic programs – helping to put a world-class Penn State degree within reach and driving distance to many Pennsylvanians in Westmoreland, Allegheny, Armstrong, Butler and Indiana Counties. Like our sister campuses, we are engaged in the communities around us – working with K-12 educators and community colleges; providing workforce training for business and industry; volunteering on community projects; and engaging our students in these activities. Finally, we not only help with economic revitalization, but serve as a regional economic driver ourselves, contributing more than 28-million dollars to the Pennsylvania economy and supporting nearly 400 Pennsylvania jobs directly and indirectly.

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The evolution and growth of our work stems from our University President Eric Barron. Dr. Barron believed Penn State's campuses are more than just important providers of access and affordability to higher education. He believes that campuses should be active partners in driving revitalization within our Pennsylvania communities. In 2015, Dr. Barron launched Invent Penn State to accelerate entrepreneurship and innovation programs in Pennsylvania to spur economic development, job creation and student career success.

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Invent Penn State gave Commonwealth Campuses a new tool to engage in their communities. We were one of the first five campuses to receive Invent Penn State seed grant funding to

create our own, unique innovation hub to meet the needs of our Alle-Kiski Valley region. Our first model was based on serving a variety of stakeholders, with entrepreneurship and small business and startup incubation at the foundation. We wanted to nurture entrepreneurs within our region to create opportunities and jobs, while also being a physical asset to drive economic development in the downtown area of New Kensington.

The Corner officially opened on 5th Avenue in 2017, thanks to the ongoing partnerships shown here. As one of the first hubs, we sought to use it to provide free and low-cost entrepreneurial and small business training and offer flexible and affordable office space, called coworking space, that encourages collaboration and innovation. Now, as part of 21 Penn State innovation hubs in Pennsylvania, we can bring resources to our region through Penn State's entrepreneurial ecosystem, as well as from Pittsburgh, including free legal advice, access to funding possibilities, training and networking.

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However, we knew that investing in a new space couldn't be a singular driver of development. We had to expand our help outside the building. During that same year, we were awarded \$100,000 from the Community Foundation of Westmoreland County to create a "corridor of innovation" between The Corner and Westmoreland County Community College's New Kensington center. With that funding, we helped with facade improvements, built new green spaces and held a celebratory arts and music festival downtown. The Corridor also became a living-learning laboratory to developing innovative solutions to challenges faced by small, Rust Belt towns. It also brought in private capital and attracted the attention of large companies such as Siemens, Arconic and Kennametal. It is this attention that has created the greatest opportunity for sustained economic revitalization in New Kensington.

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Meeting with these companies and others, we learned that our business and industry partners were working in a different environment and needed a technologically-aware workforce that possessed many of the traits of an entrepreneur. As an educational institution, we quickly realized that our students also needed skills to help them navigate a working life that will be dominated by technology and change, regardless of the industry or field.

The accompanying slide illustrates the environment in which companies are, or shortly will be, operating, as well as what they need from the workforce of the future in order to thrive in the digital age, known by some in manufacturing as the fourth industrial revolution.

Working with these partners and studying trends in the workplace, we focused on developing programming to prepare students for the digital age. This programming includes continuing to strengthen their innovative and entrepreneurial mindsets; building awareness and familiarity with emerging technologies; and honing essential skills that will contribute to life-long success.

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Although Penn State New Kensington students are our first priority, we've invested in making sure our region's K-12 districts are prepared for the future. Since 2014, we have been facilitating ABC CREATE, a collaboration with 14 service-area districts to help teachers access technology and become change agents through innovative education and curriculum development. In partnership with Carnegie Mellon's CREATE Lab, we've already begun preparing educators and giving them the tools to pass on future-ready skill sets to their students. This and the Westmoreland County Forum for Workforce Development provide platforms for honing the entrepreneurial mindset, introducing new technologies and applying essential skills in the digital environment.

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This slide identifies technologies that will most likely affect business and industry, and the professional and personal lives of all of us for the foreseeable future. The lowest bars show the essential skills that employers tell us are important. They are also skills students need so as to avoid being overtaken by technology. As we worked to identify the components and programming that will help K-16 students fill the needs of local companies, we realized that these same components – mindset, technology and essential skills – were key to our economic revitalization in the region and in New Kensington.

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This table gives an indication for why we felt so strongly that future-readiness is important to revitalization. This 2018 World Economic Forum survey shows that over half of companies surveyed from around the world were likely to adopt nine technologies by 2022 – many are the same technologies we had identified in the previous slide. At adoption rates of this magnitude, what happens to workers and companies that can't keep up? What happens to people in Rust Belt and rural America without access to the internet? It was hard to talk about this a year ago, but we have all seen what happens. Last year, in 6 days, Penn State and most of the country was thrust fully into the digital environment. Those with access to the internet, that could adapt, utilize technology, and find ways to connect survived, but many that could not were left behind.

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We realized that sustained, economic revitalization had to be built upon preparing all stakeholders in the region for the digital age, and our project went from creating jobs by seeding entrepreneurs, to building infrastructure, awareness and training to take the region from Rust Belt to Digital Belt.

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That is the story of how we came to Nextovation™. As you can see, it is the intersection of various stakeholders around future-readiness. Now, I'd like to show you how this is helping economic revitalization.

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First, it has brought educational research to bear on various issues related to Rust Belt transformation. Faculty and students from Penn State and Carnegie Mellon have explored solutions to roofing; marketing the Corridor; helping main street businesses with technology and business plans; examining health-related issues; and service engagement projects. One of our faculty members, Dr. Joe Cuiffi, led a team that included MIT in building a Factory 4.0 Simulator that was one of 10 national CESMII grant projects. This has led to additional resources and opportunities that will help bring large numbers of people into the downtown area to be trained and try out the technology.

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Our biggest and most recent announcement is the impending building of the Digital Foundry at New Kensington, which will be located on 5th Avenue just blocks from The Corner. This 15,000-plus square-foot facility is a partnership with the Economic Growth Connection and made possible with generous grant funds from the R.K. Mellon Foundation and a matching \$1 million gift from Penn State for an endowment. The Foundry will serve as an industry and educational learning space, targeting small to mid-size manufacturers in our region, to be a launching pad for training and access to modern software tools, equipment and more to develop future-ready skill sets, while also helping industries and the community remain competitive. It will also provide awareness to students, unemployed and underemployed individuals and community members.

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Nextovation™ and its related efforts have already shown early successes within New Kensington such as increased property acquisitions and facade improvements; an increasing number of small businesses opening along the Corridor; increased visitors and foot traffic; targeted new property development and investment downtown; hundreds being introduced to entrepreneurship; and perhaps most important, new hope and possibility for the future and New Kensington's newest, innovative chapter.

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak and to show a little of the work being done in New Kensington. Our goal is to create a successful model that can be shared with other communities across the Commonwealth and beyond so that no Pennsylvanian is without opportunities in the digital economy. With Penn State's tremendous reach and its commitment to communities and partners similar to those we have gained, the future truly looks promising for New Kensington and communities like it. Thank you again, and I look forward to any questions.