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Q&A with Aaron Pitts, Chief Commercial Officer at the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development

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In this edition of *Development Incentives Quarterly*, we welcome Aaron Pitts, chief commercial officer at the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (PCED), leading initiatives to attract new businesses to Pennsylvania and supporting the growth of existing companies, fostering proactive and efficient engagement with corporate and industry stakeholders. Aaron was also on the founding leadership team at JobsOhio.

Please tell us about the status of economic development in Pennsylvania

In short, we have a ton of momentum. This year, Pennsylvania passed an ambitious bipartisan budget that includes investments to fuel the commonwealth's first economic development strategy in decades. This is important, as that strategy outlines a set of priorities and ambitious 10-year goals. And we're now backing it up with action.

The Shapiro Administration has sped up government, eliminated backlogs and slashed red tape. Governor Shapiro and the legislature are investing to make Pennsylvania's already strong business environment amongst the most competitive in the nation.

Examples include cutting the corporate net income tax rate in half, investing \$400 million in a PA SITES program — which provides funding to develop competitive sites for businesses to relocate or expand within the commonwealth — and we're investing in our team, BusinessPA and our statewide partners, to more efficiently and effectively deliver our service to businesses.

In what was a turbulent 2025, where national deal flow was down an estimated 30–40%, BusinessPA will have nearly tripled the number of projects and jobs commitments and are up 20-times in capital expenditures. We are ruthlessly focusing on incumbent employers,

earning their next investments, and owing to Shapiro administration GSD commitment, we are now competing for and winning national attraction deals at an elite level.

Why should companies consider the state for its next relocation or expansion?

You're welcome here. We value those who are operating here already and if you're looking for an additional home, we think we have a special offering.

Pennsylvania is a terrific place. As one of the original, and still the fifth-most populous state in the nation, we have all the ingredients to help a business compete and win.

Pennsylvania has a workforce and environment that values education, with one of the highest education attainment levels in the country, kindergarten through post-graduate. We have natural resources, including abundant underground resources (oil, gas) and water. The state has diverse locations, ranging from major league cities, to suburbs, exurb and rural locations. Finally, we have scale and location benefits, located in the heart of America's east coast, proximate to maybe 25% of U.S. population.

You have a diverse background in M&A advisory services and health care investment. How have these experiences influenced your approach to economic development and business attraction?

My professional background was in consulting and corporate leadership. I've found both to be directly translatable to this economic development role. Fundamentally, with our clients, it's about developing a relationship, listening, problem solving, mutual gains dealmaking. And internally, leading our team, I try to cast a clear vision and ambition, performance manage to goals and inspire the team to compete and win as a team...and individually!

How do you plan to leverage your experience from JobsOhio?

The great news is that the Shapiro administration developed and launched a plan with outlined ambitions. So, I view my job as mobilizing our team and environment to deliver on that plan. It begins with earning the next investment from incumbent employers in our key industries — agriculture, energy, life sciences, manufacturing and robotics and tech. With our business advocates, we will be able to more effectively compete for attraction wins. I am bringing a similar partnership focus on building a competitive, innovation-driven, growth economy.

Can you share a success story where the BusinessPA's efforts significantly impacted a company's decision to establish or expand in Pennsylvania?

I'll share two current situations, both in Philadelphia, America's birthplace 250 year ago.

The Philadelphia Navy Ship Yard turned over to the state in the late 1980's with a BRAC realignment. Forty years later, the operator, PIDC, has partnered with the state, city and businesses and it is a nearly fully-occupied, diverse micro-economy employing 15,000-plus across pharma, technology, R&D, retail headquarters and shipbuilding. Names like URBN, Rhoads Industries, Hanwha Ocean, Axalta, Iovance Biotherapeutics and the U.S. Navy. It's an amazing success story.

Bellwether District, the largest refinery on the east coast, closed in 2019. It sits less than 1.5 miles south of central Philadelphia — adjacent to UPenn and CHOP. Today, the operator, HRP Group, has collaborated with the state and city to completely revitalize the 1,300-acre site. And no surprise, this real estate that's proximate to one of America's great major cities, an international airport and shipping hub is garnering interest from a diverse range of potential tenants. This is another terrific example of Governor Shapiro's GSD credo.

Looking ahead, what are your long-term visions for Pennsylvania's economic landscape? How do you see the state evolving as a business hub?

Again, I'd point you to our strategic plan as our "north star." It calls for the commonwealth to be recognized as a top state to do business in. We'll proactively share company success stories touting how Pennsylvania's strategic location, diverse economy and highly skilled workforce have propelled their successes. In doing so, it will raise our profile as a great place for business and we'll create a virtuous growth cycle!

