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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bethlehem Economic Development Corporation (BEDCO) Awarded Dual Grants from Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Main Street Matters Program, Announces Release of Business Improvement Grant Guidelines and SouthSide Arts District Planning RFP

BETHLEHEM, PA – July 1, 2025 - The Bethlehem Economic Development Corporation (BEDCO) is pleased to announce the receipt of two major grants from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, awarded through the Main Street Matters (MSM) program — a key initiative aimed at driving economic growth and revitalization in communities across the state. The awards include a **Planning Grant** to support comprehensive visioning for the **SouthSide Arts District** in South Bethlehem and a **Business Improvement Grant** pool to assist in direct enhancements to both Northside and South Bethlehem's commercial corridors. Together, these grants advance BEDCO's ongoing commitment to sustainable community and business development across Bethlehem.

"These awards represent a powerful vote of confidence from the Commonwealth of PA in our ongoing investments to our downtowns and adjacent neighborhoods," said **Bethlehem Mayor and BEDCO President J. William Reynolds**. "Under the leadership of Governor Shapiro through the Main Street Matters program, and with the support of our local legislators, our community is not just imagining a more vibrant, economic future that supports small business — we're building it."

The **SouthSide Arts District Planning Grant** will fund strategic planning efforts, including the creation of a Five-Year Strategy, aimed at enhancing the district's identity as a cultural and creative hub. This grant will also support SSAD in working toward application to the Commonwealth for official Main Street Designation. The process will incorporate extensive community engagement, evaluate long-term sustainability of SSAD, and help to advance appropriate business growth amidst ongoing revitalization in South Bethlehem.

"We are thrilled to receive this Main Street Matters Planning Grant—it's a transformational opportunity for the SouthSide Arts District. This funding allows us to build a bold, community-driven strategic plan that reflects who we are: a dynamic hub for arts, culture, and small business," highlighted **SouthSide Arts District Manager Erin Zebertavage**. "As we work toward official Main Street designation, this grant gives us the tools to shape a thriving future rooted in creativity, economic vitality, and community pride. We are incredibly grateful to BEDCO, Governor Shapiro, and Mayor Reynolds for believing in the power and potential of South Bethlehem."

The **Business Improvement Grant**, or BIG, Program will provide microgrants of up to \$5,000 to small businesses in the Northside Alive and SouthSide Arts District commercial corridors. Existing businesses will be able to use these grants for capital purchases; structural or interior improvements; hardware, software, and connectivity upgrades; or professional marketing and promotions activities. Notably, this project will stimulate private investment in properties by making improvements more financially accessible, thereby contributing to the unique, evolving identities of targeted neighborhoods while also increasing marketing reach to a growing local consumer base. "Main Street Matters is about connecting

vision to action,” said **BEDCO Executive Director Sean Ziller**. “Today, we’re announcing the release of the guidelines for the Business Improvement Grant pool and the request for proposals for the SouthSide Arts District Planning Grant. We’re thrilled to receive these funds, which will directly benefit our small businesses in ways that put their needs at the center.”

According to the Commonwealth of PA Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), the Main Street Matters program is designed to support our downtown cores and surrounding neighborhoods with tools to create healthy, vibrant, and welcoming communities. Funding is available to support revitalization efforts in planning, business support, aesthetic improvements, and the increase of safety and security. BEDCO, in collaboration with the SouthSide Arts District, the Downtown Bethlehem Association, Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce, Northside Alive, local businesses, community stakeholders, and municipal partners, will begin deploying the planning and improvement initiatives in late summer 2025.

For more information about these awards, please contact BEDCO at info@bedco-pa.org. For more information about the Commonwealth’s Main Street Matters program, visit dced.pa.gov/programs/main-street-matters/

To access the Business Improvement Grant guidelines or the SouthSide Arts District Planning RFP, please visit www.bedco-pa.org/main-street-matters.

BEDCO

The Bethlehem Economic Development Corporation (BEDCO) was established in 1982 for the purpose of facilitating economic development in the City of Bethlehem. BEDCO works closely with the City of Bethlehem’s Department of Community & Economic Development to ensure a unified economic development strategy. BEDCO manages the Southside Arts District, a commercial revitalization program; Southside Bethlehem Keystone Innovation Zone and Pi: Partnership for Innovation incubator; both of which are programs that benefit innovative start-up companies and entrepreneurs.

SouthSide Arts District

Located in the heart of Downtown Bethlehem, the Southside Arts District (SSAD) is a revitalization initiative of the Bethlehem Economic Development Corporation, created in partnership with Lehigh University. The SSAD is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that works to improve the economic conditions for businesses and institutions located in the core business district of South Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Formally organized in 2015 in partnership with Lehigh University and the Bethlehem Economic Development Corporation, the SouthSide Arts District follows the nationally recognized Main Street Four-Point Approach from the National Main Street Program, with volunteer-based committees focused on the Organization, Promotion, Design and Economic Vitality of South Bethlehem.

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