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JOB SEEKERS IN ALLENTEWON GET FIRST SHOT AT ARENA JOBS



Residents of Allentown, Pennsylvania will be given the chance to grab jobs at restaurants, hotels and arenas in the town, according to the Allentown Morning Call. Despite this, there will not be any public money used to raise the minimum wage in the arena zone.

The Allentown Neighborhood Improvement Zone Development Authority (ANIZDA) will review the plan in May. The plan will create a downtown job fair and training seminar for city residents only. The plan will be put in place months prior to the **arrival of 1,000 new jobs** later this year.

"Being from Allentown isn't going to get you a job, but it's going to get you a first look," said Nancy Dischinat, executive director of the Lehigh Valley Workforce Investment Board. "If you are qualified or are willing to get the training we offer, this will give you a foot in the door on all these new jobs."

In September, the PPL Center is due to open. It will house 8,500 seats. With the new arena, a new Renaissance Hotel will open and multiple new restaurants will also open. All of these buildings are being constructed right now in the 127-acre Neighborhood Improvement Zone. In this zone, all local and state taxes can be used by the property owners to start projects in order to create jobs and a tax base. Only real estate tax revenues cannot be used in this project.

More than \$500 million of development has been spurred by the tax incentive. This includes the \$177 million arena, which takes up a city block. In December, ANIZDA created a jobs task force to analyze how the jobs being created would help the struggling neighborhoods around the zone.

Nelson Diaz, the Task Force Chairman, said that all meetings of the task force are complete and a full plan will be presented to the ANIZDA board in May.

ANIZDA board member Alan Jennings wanted the task force to come up with a major plan. He thinks that this one is not good enough. He wanted businesses to pay a minimum wage of \$12 per hour in the arena zone by using some of the money generated in the special tax zone.

"I got a lot of push-back from the insiders and no support from the outsiders," Jennings said. "If there isn't support from the people who would benefit most, then there's no point pursuing it. This plan is more modest, but it's also more realistic. Still a very good thing."

The main part of the plan is a June job fair for all the residents of Allentown. It would be held downtown and residents would be given the first shot at applying for the jobs available at the hotel, arena and restaurants.

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