

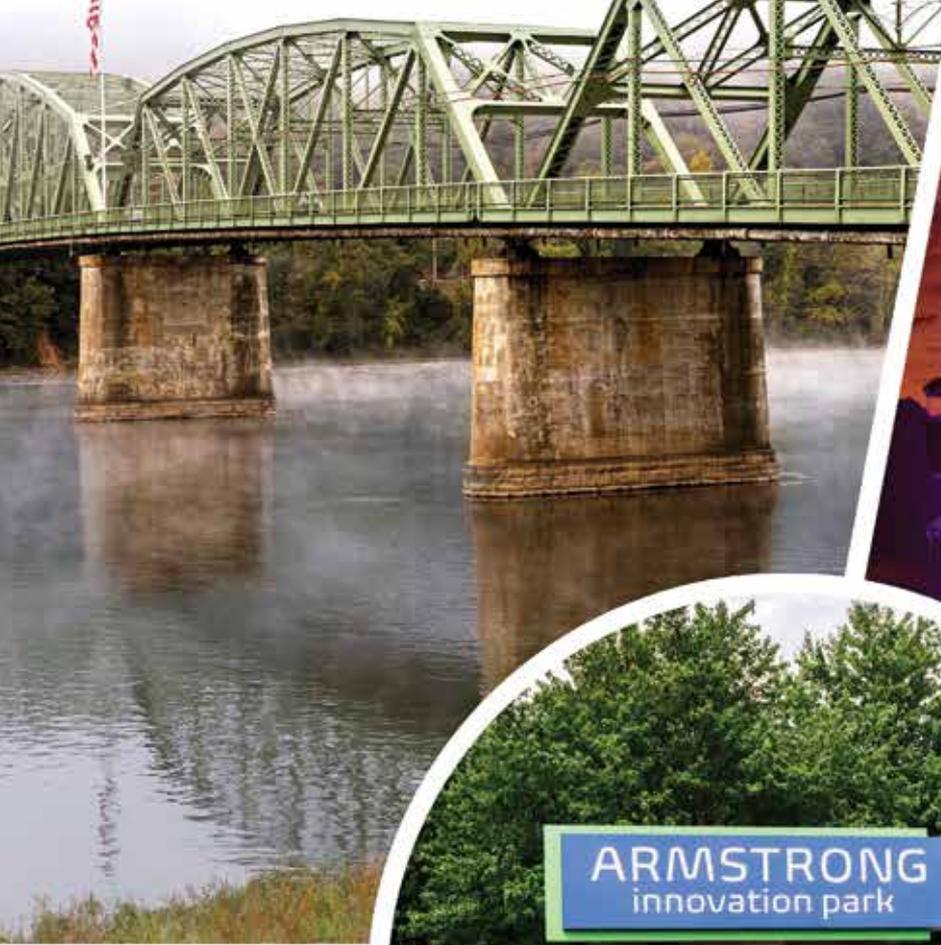
Invest: 3rd EDITION

Pittsburgh

An in-depth review of the key issues facing **Pittsburgh's** economy, featuring the exclusive insights of prominent business and regional leaders.



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> Armstrong County:

Industrial reinvestment, housing development, and trail-driven placemaking are positioning Armstrong County for long-term growth. Ensuring site readiness for potential businesses is among the key priorities for county leadership in a competitive region.

> Standing strong:

Aligning industry, housing, outdoor assets for growth



Armstrong County has long played a quiet but consequential role in Western Pennsylvania's economy. Shaped by the Allegheny River and generations of skilled labor, its roots in coal, steel, energy, and manufacturing remain visible today.

What has changed is the strategy. Rather than chasing rapid growth or competing directly with larger urban markets, the county is leaning into a more deliberate model, one built around industrial reinvestment, housing availability, and quality-of-life infrastructure.

After decades of gradual population decline, Armstrong County is beginning to stabilize, supported by site-ready industrial land, renewed residential activity, and a growing emphasis on trails, riverfront access, and placemaking. For employers, developers,

and residents seeking affordability and access within reach of Pittsburgh, the approach is increasingly resonant.

■ Landscape

Located roughly 50 miles northeast of Pittsburgh, Armstrong County sits along a critical stretch of the Allegheny River corridor, connecting rural communities to regional and national markets. The county's population stands at nearly 64,000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, reflecting relative stability compared to sharper declines seen in previous decades.

Armstrong County supports roughly 14,000 jobs across nearly 1,300 employer establishments, spanning manufacturing, healthcare, energy, agriculture and services. Median household income reached \$64,295 in 2023, while housing affordability remains one of the county's strongest competitive advantages. Median home sale prices are estimated near \$146,300, well below regional and national averages.

Labor force participation remains lower than statewide averages — a common challenge among rural counties — but unemployment has remained relatively low. As of September 2025, the county's unemployment rate stood at approximately 4.1%, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis.

Armstrong County's transportation network underpins its economic role. State Route 28, the Allegheny Valley Expressway, serves as the county's primary artery, linking communities directly to Pittsburgh. Additional routes, including Routes 66, 422 and 85, support east-west and north-south connectivity, while river access provides freight and recreational opportunities.

■ Economic development

Efforts are increasingly centered on one constraint: readiness. Through the Armstrong County Industrial Development Council (ACIDC), local leaders are aligning industrial land, housing supply, and infrastructure to reduce friction for investment. (...)



'Incredible natural beauty'

New mobility options also strengthen ties to Pittsburgh market

John Strate

*Commissioner Chairman
Armstrong County*

What makes Armstrong County a compelling destination?

Armstrong is a rural county with incredible natural beauty. The Allegheny River runs through it, and we have over 55 miles of trails. We recently opened up the Kiski Bridge and The Brady Tunnel connecting us to more locations to the North and Freeport to the South, which strengthens our ties to the Pittsburgh market. The county seat, Kittanning, serves as a hub that connects multiple trail systems, including the Pittsburgh-to-Erie Trail and the Butler-Freeport Community Trail.

Our trail network and riverfront spaces make Armstrong an ideal spot for recreation and tourism. We have prime riverfront property to develop. Anyone looking to build riverfront eateries? We have a place for you. We're also building more housing, so if you're looking to move out of a crowded urban area, we're a great place to consider.

What are the economic drivers in Armstrong County?

I sit on the board for the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission and the Allegheny Conference, and we travel to Harrisburg and D.C. to advocate for county needs. Right now, data centers are showing strong interest in our area because we have ample power, water from the river, and natural gas. These are key infrastructure assets that they need. We currently have about four data centers considering moving here, which would help grow our tax base.

Additionally, while we've lost some industry over time, our trail systems have helped us become a tourist destination. Armstrong is great for a day trip or weekend getaway from Pittsburgh.

How is the county preparing the workforce to meet the needs of incoming businesses like data centers?

We're working closely with Lenape Tech, our vocational school, and Butler County Community College (BC3), both of which are ready to adapt to the needs of incoming industries like data centers, which are tech-driven. These

schools are poised to provide training once we know the exact workforce requirements.

Beyond technology, we have a workforce with a strong work ethic — many from coal and power industries. Truck driving is another area of strength here. Businesses from Pittsburgh have shown interest in moving here because they know they can find skilled, hardworking people.

How are you balancing development with preserving Armstrong County's rural character?

The bulk of development will happen in the southern part of the county, from Kittanning south. I live about 20 miles north in an Amish community, where I don't expect much development. Areas further north are even more rural, so we're confident Armstrong will maintain its rural roots while allowing growth around our small towns. In my area, Dayton, you will find an 18-hole golf course, White Oak, which hosts beautiful views of the farmlands. Mahoning Creek Lake, and Keystone lake offer fishing and kayak opportunities. You can launch in Mahoning Creek and kayak to the Allegheny River experiencing the wilds of our County by seeing deer, bears, and eagles along the way.

We're also investing in the Allegheny River through a partnership with the Allegheny River Development Corporation to keep our locks operational, encouraging recreational boating further north.

How is the county working to build economic resilience amid challenges?

I believe there's a danger in becoming too comfortable with the status quo. Armstrong has a rich history, but we need to focus on future growth. Our goal as commissioners is to revitalize the county. We need residents to get involved. If someone knows a potential business owner or developer, we want to hear from them. We have land available at competitive prices, and we're eager to work with anyone looking to invest in Armstrong. ■



Anthony Shea

Vice-Chairman
Armstrong County

What recent decisions or policy shifts have most directly positioned Armstrong County for growth?

The top priority for me has been stabilizing the county's budget on the heels of the exhausted pandemic funding stream that has carried the county through the previous few years. This past year the county has focused hard on holding the line on taxes through operational efficiency initiatives such as competing healthcare options and manpower adjustments and optimization efforts. At the same time, the county has aggressively pursued infrastructure growth initiatives such as expanded power access, broadband expansion and funding for road and bridge improvements. Additionally, the county has engaged in growing out its tourism industry through promoting its trails, its rich history, and events such as fairs and festivals, as well as showcasing niche venues such as the Horse Center.

How is the county ensuring growth is sustainable and fiscally responsible?

The County leadership is constantly shifting and adjusting its priority schema to adapt to the ever changing business climate. This moving target has required the County to take an agile stance in how it conducts its planning to accommodate fast moving initiatives such new housing developments, business growth and Datacenter expansions efforts; Armstrong County is in a good location with Pittsburgh just down the road and it being the epicenter for the AI revolution.

What does the county look for in partners to ensure these projects deliver lasting community value?

Armstrong County through its Industrial Development Authority / Industrial Development Council (IDA/IDC) has partnered with the Regional Industrial Development Corporation (RIDC) to expand the promotion of the county's properties. Attracting new industries such as datacenters and other manufacturing opportunities is nuanced by a multitude of complexities. The county's partnership with the RIDC allows us to capitalize on a much broader expertise pool, as well as expanded exposure. The county is already seeing results through its partnerships with the IDA/IDC and RIDC. Over the past year, two datacenters have doubled their footprints within the County, and a new housing development is slated for groundbreaking in the springtime of 2026. Interest in both the county's commercial and potential home building real estate has piqued over the last six months. ■



The county has drawn interest from a diverse industry mix.

(...) One of the county's flagship assets is the RIDC Armstrong Innovation Park in South Buffalo Township. Formerly known as Northpointe Industrial Park, the site encompasses hundreds of acres of developable land and remains a Keystone Opportunity Zone, offering tax advantages for qualifying businesses. Continued investment has improved infrastructure, expanded flexibility for tenants and positioned the park to attract a broader mix of industrial users.

Momentum is also building around housing development tied to employment centers. Long-planned residential projects are beginning to move forward, addressing a critical constraint for workforce attraction and retention. County leaders have identified housing supply as a prerequisite for sustained growth, particularly as interest from new industries increases.

Armstrong County's leadership is also leveraging regional partnerships through organizations such as the Allegheny Conference on Community Development and the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission, ensuring the county's priorities are represented in Harrisburg and Washington, D.C.

■ Manufacturing

As the backbone of Armstrong County's economy, manufacturing is supported by a workforce shaped by generations of industrial experience. While the sector has evolved significantly from its coal and steel origins, precision machining, metal fabrication, specialty components and industrial services continue to anchor local employment, accounting for 9.8% of total employment.



Major employers include manufacturers tied to mining equipment and advanced materials, led by firms such as Komatsu, formerly Joy Global, and SinterMet. These operations benefit from proximity to suppliers, access to regional transportation corridors and a labor force experienced in technical, safety-intensive manufacturing.

Automation and modernization are increasingly shaping the county's manufacturing profile. Rather than displacing workers, investments in automation are enabling companies to expand capacity, improve consistency, and compete in national and global markets. According to a 2025 Deloitte survey, U.S. manufacturers reported automation and smart-manufacturing initiatives raised production output by roughly 10-20%, while also improving employee productivity – evidence that technology upgrades can complement rather than replace skilled labor. This shift has reinforced demand for skilled trades, including machinists, welders, maintenance technicians, and industrial electricians.

Armstrong County's manufacturing sector is also closely tied to energy and logistics, with river access and highway connectivity supporting heavy and oversized equipment movement. This integration positions the county as a valuable link within broader regional supply chains.

■ Energy and natural resources

The role of energy in Armstrong County is evolving, though it remains a defining influence on the local economy. Natural gas production tied to the Marcellus and Utica shale formations remains a regional asset,

complemented by legacy power generation and pipeline infrastructure.

More recently, the county has drawn interest from energy-intensive users, including data centers, attracted by available power capacity, water access from the Allegheny River, and relatively unconstrained land. While still early, these discussions highlight Armstrong County's potential to support next-generation industrial uses alongside traditional sectors.

Agriculture also remains a meaningful contributor, with dairy, grain and livestock operations supporting local employment and reinforcing the county's rural character. Farm-to-market networks and food processing add resilience to the local economy, while preserving open space and working landscapes.

■ Workforce and education pipeline

A defining strength of Armstrong County is its workforce pipeline, anchored by a strong career and technical education ecosystem aligned with regional employer needs.

Lenape Technical School serves as a flagship institution, offering programs in welding, machining, industrial maintenance, automation, construction trades, health assistance and culinary arts. The school's curriculum emphasizes hands-on instruction and industry-recognized credentials, helping graduates transition directly into manufacturing, healthcare, and skilled-trades roles.

Nationally, the stakes are rising. Deloitte and the Manufacturing Institute estimate the U.S. manufacturing sector could face a shortage of up to 2.1 million skilled workers by 2030, underscoring the growing importance of local training pipelines that align education directly with employer demand.

Workforce coordination is further supported by the Tri-County Workforce Investment Board, which serves Armstrong, Butler and Indiana counties and connects employers, educators and job seekers through training programs, career pathways and federal workforce initiatives.

Postsecondary access strengthens the county's talent pipeline by providing local options for degree completion and continuing education. Armstrong County residents benefit from proximity to Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Penn State New Kensington, and BC3 @ Armstrong, allowing students to pursue associate and bachelor's degrees without relocating. These institutions support workforce retention by enabling residents to upskill while remaining connected to local employers.

As new industries explore opportunities in Armstrong County, educational partners have demonstrated flexibility in adapting curricula to emerging needs.

Training programs increasingly emphasize automation, advanced manufacturing processes, data literacy and technology-enabled operations, ensuring the workforce remains competitive as employers modernize and diversify. This coordinated education-to-employment pipeline positions Armstrong County to support both legacy industries and future-oriented investment while maintaining a dependable, locally rooted labor force.

■ Healthcare

The healthcare sector serves as both a stabilizing employer and a quality-of-life anchor in Armstrong County. The Armstrong County Memorial Hospital (ACMH) remains the county's primary healthcare provider, delivering emergency services, primary care, and specialty treatment.

Recent integration into the Pennsylvania Mountains Care Network has strengthened ACMH's ability to recruit providers, share resources, and expand rural healthcare access across Armstrong, Indiana, and surrounding counties.

Healthcare investment continues to focus on outpatient services, emergency capacity and community health needs, including mental health, substance use recovery and senior services. These efforts are increasingly tied to workforce and population retention, particularly as rural healthcare access becomes a national concern.

■ Infrastructure and connectivity

Investment in infrastructure remains a priority as Armstrong County positions itself for long-term growth and competitiveness. One of the most significant projects underway is the Kittanning Citizens Bridge replacement, a PennDOT-led initiative designed to improve safety, reliability and connectivity across the Allegheny River. The project will modernize a critical river crossing that links Kittanning to surrounding communities, supporting daily commuting, freight movement, and access to downtown businesses.

Beyond this marquee project, the county continues to pursue roadway improvements, signage upgrades and targeted interchange enhancements aimed at improving access to industrial parks, employment centers, and commercial corridors. These incremental investments are designed to reduce travel times, improve wayfinding, and enhance the county's overall appeal to investors, visitors, and logistics-dependent industries.

Infrastructure investment in Armstrong County increasingly extends beyond traditional transportation assets. Trail and riverfront infrastructure have become central components of the county's economic and placemaking strategy. More than 50 miles of trails, anchored by the Armstrong Trails network, form a



Armstrong County's park and lake system draw visitors year-round.

continuous corridor connecting boroughs along the Allegheny and Kiskiminetas rivers. These trails support recreation, tourism and active transportation while creating direct links between downtowns, parks and river access points.

Trail development is increasingly viewed as economic infrastructure, not just a recreational amenity. Research by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy shows that trail systems drive visitor spending, support small businesses, and contribute to overnight stays, particularly in communities with direct trail access. In Armstrong County, trail-adjacent boroughs have seen increased foot traffic, stronger demand for food and beverage offerings, and renewed interest in historic properties, reinforcing trails as a catalyst for community revitalization and private reinvestment.

■ Tourism

A steadily growing contributor to Armstrong County's economy, tourism is anchored by outdoor recreation, heritage-based events, and expanding riverfront access. The Allegheny River remains the county's defining natural asset, supporting boating, kayaking, and fishing while serving as the backbone for riverfront festivals, paddler access points, and trail connections. Public launches and riverfront parks in communities such as Kittanning, Ford City, and Freeport have expanded recreational use while improving visibility for downtown businesses.

Beyond the river corridor, Armstrong County's park and lake system draws visitors year-round. Crooked Creek Lake serves as a regional destination for fishing

tournaments, camping, hiking, and wildlife viewing, while county and state parks support picnicking, seasonal events, and family recreation. These assets position Armstrong County as an accessible outdoor alternative for visitors from the Pittsburgh metropolitan area seeking low-cost, low-congestion recreation.

Events play a central role in converting recreational traffic into economic activity. The Fort Armstrong Folk Festival, held annually along the Kittanning riverfront, is one of the county's largest and longest-running events, featuring live music, arts and crafts vendors, food concessions, and family programming. The festival attracts thousands of visitors each summer and serves as a catalyst for downtown foot traffic, lodging demand, and regional visibility.

Seasonal riverfront celebrations, agricultural fairs, and community festivals further reinforce Armstrong County's tourism identity while spreading visitor activity across the calendar. These events often coincide with peak trail and river use, amplifying their economic impact. Trail users, in particular, have proven to be a high-value audience, with cyclists, hikers, and paddlers supporting restaurants, coffee shops, lodging, and retail in trail-adjacent boroughs. Studies from the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy consistently show that trail systems drive repeat visitation and local spending — a trend increasingly evident along the Armstrong Trails network.

Downtown revitalization initiatives are strengthening Armstrong County's appeal as a weekend and day-trip destination. Streetscape improvements, façade investments and expanded river access are encouraging the reuse of historic buildings for dining, retail, and mixed-use development. These efforts are helping reposition traditional borough centers as active gateways to recreation, events and cultural heritage, reinforcing tourism as a complementary driver of small-business growth and community reinvestment.

■ Quality of life

Housing affordability and market dynamics remain among Armstrong County's most compelling quality-of-life advantages. According to Zillow data, the typical home value in Armstrong County is around \$156,968, with median sale prices clustering near \$152,750–\$161,648 and homes going pending in roughly 16 days — a reflection of steady but accessible market activity. Similarly, Realtor.com data shows a median sale price near \$141,710, with a balanced number of listings and a modest pace of sales that underscores local affordability relative to nearby regional markets. This mix of attainable pricing and diverse inventory supports first-time buyers, retirees, and workers priced out of higher-cost urban centers.



Cathy Strate

Executive Director

Experience Armstrong

How is Experience Armstrong supporting countywide economic development through tourism?

Experience Armstrong is positioning the county primarily around outdoor recreation and quality-of-life assets. We often describe Armstrong County as “Pittsburgh is your house — we’re your backyard.” The county retains a genuine small-town atmosphere that is increasingly rare and offers boating, fishing, kayaking, and trail access anchored by three major lakes and an extensive network of rivers and streams.

Outdoor recreation is a core differentiator. Our trail system is among the strongest in the region, and when the Kiski Junction flyover trail is completed, it will become part of the fourth-largest trail system in the United States, running directly through the county. That project alone is expected to significantly increase visitation.

We are already planning programming to support that momentum, including concerts along the trail and the annual Fort Armstrong Folk Festival, which draws visitors from across the region. Combined with our small-town charm and accessible downtowns, Armstrong County offers a calm, authentic alternative to urban stress — a place people come to relax, reconnect, and explore.

Which recent projects have most effectively increased visitation and local spending?

We are focusing on curated, experience-driven initiatives that encourage visitors to explore multiple communities. One example is our February Coffee Crawl, which highlights 14 locally owned coffee shops across the county. Participants use a passport-style guide and are encouraged to visit at least 10 locations, creating sustained traffic and spending throughout the month.

We are also developing an Antiques and Artisans Tour that showcases specialty shops, high-end antiques, local artists, and independent restaurants. Many of these businesses are privately owned and uniquely positioned, but they often require intentional discovery. Our goal is to make those experiences more visible and accessible through coordinated marketing.

Seasonally, we are expanding these efforts to include campground-focused initiatives, an ice cream trail, and a comprehensive map of kayak and boat launches throughout the county. Collectively, these projects are designed to increase dwell time, spread visitation across communities, and support small businesses year-round. ■



Pat Fabian

Secretary
Armstrong County

What improvements have helped Armstrong County move projects from planning into execution?

From an operational and administrative perspective, priorities include advancing broadband expansion; improving water and sewer infrastructure; increasing the county's housing stock; maintaining current levels of state and federal transportation and infrastructure funding; and expanding trail networks.

A project and priority that I have worked on for several years was securing BEAD funding, Armstrong County was awarded \$18.2 million in Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Program (BEAD) funding to bring heightened internet connectivity to more far-flung areas of the county. This funding will allow increasing connectivity to 99% of our county residents with the hopes to attract new folks that want to work from home in our rural community. In addition, a \$40 million housing project at RIDC Armstrong Innovation Park in South Buffalo Township, 64 homes will commence in the spring of 2026 which will bring new folks and an increased tax base to our county. Attracting new companies is a priority for growth but paying attention to our existing companies is just as important, we have 10 county-based companies that are growing with plans for continued expansion 2026, investing millions of dollars which equals new jobs here in the county. In 2026, we are seeing nationally recognized brands filling up empty spaces at the Franklin Village Mall in East Franklin township, which is exciting for our residents. We continue to advocate for state and federal transportation dollars to improve our current infrastructure but support new initiatives, which average around \$75 million in projects yearly. In previous years, the county has invested roughly \$20 million dollars into the trail system, which has increased the number of new visitors and folks that stay in our Air B&B's to ride our trail system, which has benefited our small business community.

How is the county ensuring local municipalities and townships are aligned as development accelerates?

It is a challenge given Armstrong County's size and rural diversity, the county prioritizes coordination with municipalities and townships through consistent communication, regional planning initiatives, and shared infrastructure planning. By aligning comprehensive plans, leveraging intergovernmental agreements, and offering technical and administrative support, the county helps ensure development is thoughtful, balanced, and responsive to local needs. Even when everything is aligned, funding projects is a major obstacle for the county and many municipalities which have limited budgets. ■

Closely tracking housing access, the county's listings span a broad range of price points and styles — from more modest homes in smaller boroughs to larger properties near rural and riverfront settings — indicating options for a range of household types and budgets.

Outdoor recreation and natural amenities anchor daily life in Armstrong County. The area promotes 200-plus miles of trails, including extended systems like the Armstrong Trails, which connect multiple towns along the Allegheny and Kiskiminetas rivers and are popular for hiking, biking, running and casual trail use. The historic Baker Trail, stretching through rural landscapes and woodlands, offers long-distance hiking opportunities and access to scenic creek and forest terrain that enriches outdoor lifestyles.

Waterways are a defining recreational asset as well. The Allegheny River and its tributaries provide year-round fishing, boating, and paddling experiences, while community parks and lakes create hubs for picnicking, nature watching, and family outings. Local activity guides highlight opportunities for wildlife observation, kayaking, and community sporting activities, reinforcing outdoor access as a daily lifestyle draw.

■ Looking ahead

Over the next half of this decade, Armstrong County's growth will be shaped by several converging factors: continued manufacturing reinvestment, housing development, infrastructure modernization, and deeper integration with the Pittsburgh regional economy.

Industrial parks and site-ready land position the county to capture investment that may be constrained elsewhere, while trail and riverfront development support tourism and placemaking. Workforce assets, anchored by Lenape Technical School and regional partners, provide a foundation for both traditional industries and emerging opportunities.

Perhaps most importantly, Armstrong County is approaching growth with intention: balancing development with preservation, and modernization with community values. For businesses and residents seeking affordability, access, and opportunity, Armstrong County is increasingly standing strong as a place to invest, work, and live. ■



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