



Lehigh Valley Planning Commission

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Executive Director

LEHIGH VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION Minutes from the Thursday September 28, 2023, Meeting

The LVPC held a virtual public meeting on Thursday, September 28, 2023. The meeting was advertised in the Lehigh Valley Press on December 28, 2022.

Vice Chair Christopher Amato chaired the meeting.

Mr. Steve Neratko took Roll Call.

Members in Attendance:

Lehigh County

Michael Drabenstott, Bob Elbich, Philip Ginder, Jennifer Gomez, Kent Herman, Rick Molchany, Joyce Moore, Santo Napoli, Kathy Rader, Stephen Repasch, and Kevin Schmidt.

Northampton County

Christopher Amato, John Gallagher, Judy Haldeman, Rachel Leon, John McGorry, Stephen Melnick, Scott Minnich, Armando Moritz-Chapelliquen, Taiba Sultana, and Tara Zrinski.

Members Absent:

Lehigh County

Phillips Armstrong, Geoff Brace, Percy Dougherty, Steven Glickman, Jamie Johnson, Dennis Klusaritz, Christina Morgan, Owen O'Neil, and Matthew Tuerk.

Northampton County

Jessica Cope, Andrew Elliott, Charles Elliott, Dan Engle, Darlene Heller, Carl Manges, Lamont McClure, William McGee, Edward Nelson, Salvatore Panto, William Reynolds, and Tina Smith.

Staff Present: Steve Neratko, Mackenzie Geisner, Matt Assad, Sue Rockwell, and Becky Bradley

Public Present: Charles Volk, Liesel Gross, Kurt Bresswein, Jeff Ward, "Jason N, LVN"

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR

Commissioner Melnick requested that changes be noted between the draft and final packets that are sent out by LVPC staff. If there are comments that are made at the committee meetings earlier in the week that those alterations are highlighted in the final packet for the full committee meeting.

No members of the public spoke.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Vice Chair Amato recapped the Pennsylvania House of Representatives Local Government Committee Hearing on House Bill 782 at the LVPC office on September 6, 2023. Chair Glickman and Ms. Bradley gave testimony supportive of HB 782 along with various other individuals that were invited to testify.

Vice Chair Amato also notified the Commission that LVPC Executive Committee passed a proclamation to again declare October as National Community Planning Month.

MINUTES

Commissioner Amato stated that the minutes of the Thursday, August 24, 2023, LVPC meeting are attached, and Ms. Geisner presented the previously voted on agenda items.

Treasurer Schmidt stepped in for Vice Chair Amato who was experiencing technical difficulties and then asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Commissioner Minnich made a motion to approve the minutes and Commissioner Rader seconded the motion. Treasurer Schmidt asked for any comments or questions.

[*Note: the vote on the minutes occurred after the review of 960 West Hamilton St. Land Use of Regional Significance – City of Allentown agenda item. Please see this section of the meeting minutes for further detail*]

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Comprehensive Planning Committee:

ACTION ITEM: 960 West Hamilton St. Land Use of Regional Significance – City of Allentown

Mr. Neratko presented the subject application which is considered a Land Use of Regional Significance under *FutureLV: The Regional Plan* in the Mixed-Use Developments category and proposes construction of a mixed-use development with retail and office space, 189 market-rate apartments, several restaurants, a fitness center, and educational facilities at 960, 962 and 966 W. Hamilton Street. The proposed development fulfills the intent of *FutureLV: The Regional Plan* to 'encourage reuse and redevelopment within urban areas' (Policy 1.1). The proposal supports a core strategy of *FutureLV* to increase density in urban areas (Density Special Section, page 71).

The proposal is within a Multimodal Accessibility Buffer. The Lehigh and Northampton Transit Authority (LANTA) offers service on the main road in front of the proposed site, and there is a recently improved stop at Hamilton Boulevard and Fountain Street, just east of the project site.

This proposal would be replacing at least three active businesses that are currently in operation. The plans designate space within the proposal for commercial use, however the change from older, historic buildings to a newly constructed building will likely cater to businesses that can afford higher rents, which smaller, locally owned establishments may not be able to afford.

The LVPC recommends that the impact that this may have on smaller, established local businesses be considered and that opportunities be explored to maintain smaller businesses in this area, while bringing in new opportunities. An example would be providing a variety of attainable commercial rents to maximize economic opportunities (Goal 4.5). Policy 4.2 of the *FutureLV* is to 'continue diversification of the regional economy to strengthen economic resilience' which is done by both adapting to the contemporary economy while expanding small businesses.

This proposal would require demolition of three historical buildings in downtown Allentown. The LVPC recommends that the developer work with the Allentown Preservation League to remove anything of historic value prior to demolition that can be repurposed in historic preservation within Allentown.

The LVPC commends the applicant for the bicycle parking proposed inside of the building. To create a safe, healthy, inclusive, and livable community (Goal 5, *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*), the LVPC recommends the inclusion of bicycle racks outside the building for employees, or anyone who may need short-term bicycle parking, in addition to inside parking for residents. (of Policy 5.3).

The plans depict a loading dock at the back of the building located on W. Maple Street. The LVPC strongly recommends a parking management plan to ensure that tractor-trailer deliveries do not block the street that could potentially block or congest W. Maple Street, and potentially restrict the ability of emergency vehicles to pass through. S. 10th Street has a dedicated left turn lane. Any trucks that may part along this road would force traffic to use the dedicated left turn.

This proposal has no dedicated parking for the building. If future residents would be expected to use nearby parking decks and garages or if there is another parking plan in place this should be clarified. Street parking downtown is limited and the potential to create a need for significantly more parking should be addressed by the developer.

Mr. Neratko noted the proposed building includes 189 residential units. To support 'attainable housing in locations that maximize social and economic opportunities' (Policy 4.5) the LVPC recommends that the cost of affordable housing for this area be considered. The proposal is within Census Tract 97, which encapsulates much of the Downtown Allentown neighborhood. According to the 5-Year American Community Survey, residents in this area earn a median yearly income of \$26,369 and pay a median rent of \$830 before utilities. An estimated 60 percent of renter households in this neighborhood are cost burdened. The LVPC recommends that the developers consider the affordable housing needs of the surrounding community when determining rents.

Policy 5.4 of FutureLV: The Regional Plan is to promote development that complements the unique history, environment and needs of the Lehigh Valley. The proposed development is for a 12-story building in an area where the surrounding other buildings are three to five stories, with the exception of the 24-story PPL building also located on Hamilton Street. The LVPC recommends that the developer work with the City of Allentown to ensure that the proposal will promote development while maintaining the character of traditional neighborhoods which would support Policy 4.1 to 'Enhance the character and economic viability of cultural and historic assets.'

The LVPC encourages the developer to consider opportunities for incorporating sustainable energy systems that reduce overhead operational costs and 'minimize environmental impacts of development' (Policy 3.1). Mr. Neratko added that the comments that were brought forward during the Comprehensive Planning Committee were valued but they were not explicitly added to the letter due to the absence of mention of the topics in the Municipal Planning Code (MPC).

Vice Chair Amato called for a motion to accept the staff comments. Commissioner Repasch made the motion, Commissioner Repasch seconded the motion. Vice Chair Amato asked for any comments or questions.

Commissioner Melnick suggested language be added for the developer to reach out to Allentown Economic Development Corporation regarding the three displaced businesses. Vice Chair Amato agreed with Commissioner Melnick's suggestion.

Vice Chair Amato called for a motion to amend the letter with Commissioner Melnick's requested changes. Commissioner Melnick made the motion and Commissioner Zrinski seconded. Vice Chair Amato asked for any comments or questions.

Commissioner Napoli mentioned that there was an Allentown Parking Authority (APA) meeting, and the developer of the proposed project is in talks with APA to ensure sufficient parking. Commissioner Moritz-Chapelliquen asked what the optimal step would be for someone concerned about affordable housing. Ms. Bradley deferred to the City of Allentown and Allentown Planning Director and LVPC Commissioner Ms. Jennifer Gomez responded that she is available for questions.

Vice Chair Amato called for a vote to accept the amended letter with staff comments. The motion passed.

Ms. Bradley noted that a vote to confirm meeting minutes was missed earlier and asked Treasurer Schmidt to step in for Vice Chair Amato who was experiencing technical issues.

Commissioner Repasch forwarded his initial motion and Commissioner Rader seconded. The to accept the meetings from the previous meeting passed.

ACTION ITEM: Lafayette College (Lacrosse Center) Land Use of Regional Significance – City of Easton

Mr. Neratko presented the subject application which is considered a Land Use of Regional Significance under *FutureLV: The Regional Plan* in the Educational Facility category. The proposed development is of an existing athletic field to add a turf field, a 21,900 square-foot field house, sidewalk and associated improvements at 3412 Sullivan Trail.

Mr. Neratko read that the LVPC applauds the proposed concrete connection from the parking lot and suggests considering the addition of a bicycle rack in the development plans.

The project site is located on a **acc**corridor, and within a multimodal accessibility buffer. The LVPC recommends a new sidewalk along the property frontage of Sullivan Trail, with an additional 5-foot concrete pad in between the requested sidewalk and existing curb for a new bus stop landing pad for proper boarding and alighting. The LVPC also suggests the addition of a pedestrian path from the existing bus stop location to the main entrance of the new facility. These recommendations would 'enhance public transit service facilities' (of Policy 2.3).

The LVPC advises the applicant to ensure proper geotechnical testing prior to any development, to 'minimize environmental impacts of development to protect the health, safety and welfare of the public' (Policy 3.2).

Treasurer Schmidt called for a motion to accept the staff comments. Commissioner Minnich made the motion, Commissioner Gallagher seconded the motion. Treasurer Schmidt asked for any comments or questions. There were none.

Treasurer Schmidt called for a vote to accept the staff comments and the motion passed.

ACTION ITEM: Project Review Summary Sheet

Comprehensive Planning Committee:

Commissioner Melnick presented the Comprehensive Planning Committee summary sheet that included one in Wilson Borough establishing a redevelopment overlay district and applicable standards, one in Upper Saucon Township regarding Medical Facilities, and one in Lehigh Township regarding Solar Energy Systems. There were two more Zoning Ordinance Amendments in Lehigh Township, one for Communication Facilities and medical marijuana facilities, as well as one in Lynn Township regarding Solar Energy Systems and one in Wind Gap Borough regarding signage.

Vice Chair Amato called for a motion to accept the staff comments. Commissioner Moore made the motion, Commissioner Zrinski seconded the motion. Vice Chair Amato asked for any comments or questions.

Commissioner Moritz-Chapelliquen asked if there was more information for the redevelopment overlay district in Wilson Borough. Mr. Neratko gave a brief overview.

Vice Chair Amato called for a vote and the motion passed.

Environment Committee:

Commissioner Repasch discussed the Carbon Pollution Reduction Priority Climate Action Plan, and upcoming Commonwealth Sustainability Week, from October 2nd-6th. Commissioner Repasch reviewed the Lehigh County Authority Preliminary Capital Plan Allentown Division. There were five water projects and six wastewater projects on the summary sheet. He also reviewed the Lehigh County Authority Preliminary Capital Plan Suburban Division, which included one water project and four wastewater projects.

Commissioner Ginder moved to accept the staff comments and Commissioner Repasch seconded the motion. Vice Chair Amato asked for any comments or questions. Commissioner Herman abstained. The motion passed.

Transportation Committee:

Commissioner Herman summarized the Transportation Committee meeting which included holding a public meeting for the Long-Range Transportation Plan component updates for FutureLV. Commissioner Herman noted two street vacation requests in the City of Allentown.

Commissioner Repasch moved to accept the staff comments and Commissioner Rader seconded the motion. Vice Chair Amato asked for any comments or questions. The motion passed.

Old Business:

INFORMATION ITEMS: Activity Reports

Monthly Subdivision, Land Development, Stormwater and Municipal Ordinance/Plans Report

Mr. Neratko presented the plan and review activity for August which there was 11 Subdivisions, 38 Development proposals, 13 reviews for Stormwater Management, and 10 Municipal Ordinances and Maps for a total of 72 reviews on 522.3 acres. 27 of the reviews were in Lehigh County and 45 in Northampton.

Residential units were back up this month, with 62 single-family detached units, 147 townhouses and 122 apartment units proposed for a total of 331 units, a 69% increase over the previous month. Non-residential square footage increased across the board as well. We reviewed 3,390,576 total square feet, nearly double the previous month (93%). That included 348,233 square feet commercial, 15,792 SF retail, 475,822 square feet public/quasi-public, 33,774 square feet office and 2.5 million square feet of industrial, of which 2.4 million square feet is warehousing.

Vice Chair Amato asked for any comments or questions. There were none.

Highway Traffic Monitoring

Ms. Geisner presented the Monthly Traffic Count report which summarized 108,883 vehicles on Route 22 between Airport Road and the Lehigh River Bridge, ending August.

Interstate 78 located just east of Route 309 recorded 70,006 vehicles. Route 309 near Coopersburg, the LVPC's oldest continuous traffic counter, registered 40,444 vehicles.

Ms. Geisner reported that Interstate 78, east of 309, recorded 21,027 commercial trucks at the end of August. On Route 22, just east of the Lehigh River Bridge, there were 14,100 commercial trucks.

Vice Chair Amato asked for any comments or questions.

Commissioner Melnick asked if there were any plans to put a traffic counter on Route 33. Ms. Bradley responded that there used to be a counter there but due to repaving it has not been in use. There will be discussion with PennDOT to start that counter again in the future. Ms. Bradley added that traffic volume goes Route 22, Route 33, and then Interstate 78.

New Business:

Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code Training

Ms. Bradley continued a multi-part series for LVPC Commissioners and the public for training in four parts about county planning in the region. The series will cover four parts spread over the next four months to explain the Municipal Planning Code (MPC), what the MPC means for county planning, what the LVPC is able to do, and what the future work program looks like. Ms. Bradley explained the second part of the series and presented an overview of what the MPC means for county planning and the responsibilities within it.

Vice Chair Amato asked for any comments or questions. There were none.

Executive Director's Report:

Ms. Bradley presented that WorkshopLV will cover Environment/Transportation Decarbonization and will be held on October 18th at noon at the LVPC office. Ms. Bradley also noted that the Long Range Transportation Plan public comment period is open through October 6th.

Communications and Public Engagement:

INFORMATION ITEM: Thriving Communities Program Assistance

Mr. Assad notified that the US Department of Transportation's Thriving Communities Program is now taking Letters of Interest from communities interested in taking advantage of technical assistance, planning and capacity-building help to advance transportation and community revitalization activities that increase mobility, reduce pollution, expand affordable transportation and housing options, improve health outcomes, facilitate efficient land use, preserve or expand jobs, and enhance connections to health care, education, and food security to benefit disadvantaged populations and communities.

INFORMATION ITEM: Morning Call Business Cycle Column

Mr. Assad spoke about the most recent Morning Call column called "\$4.39 billion for the underdogs." The next column is going to focus on how our growing place in the global e-commerce economy is shaping the region.

INFORMATION ITEM: Plan Lehigh Valley radio show on WDIY NPR 88.1FM

Mr. Assad summarized the most recent Plan Lehigh Valley 30-minute radio show that aired on September 4th on WDIY and focused on the busy first half of the development year, with a focus on industrial development. Ms. Bradley was joined by LVPC Editor Matt Assad and LVPC Regional Planner Joey Dotta to talk about of the Lehigh Valley's industrial development market, including the fact that the Valley's more than 116 million square feet of warehouse and distribution space has less than a 5% vacancy rate, and it has easily the highest lease rates of any region along the I-78/81 corridor.

Mr. Assad noted the next show will air October 2nd at 6:30 pm and will focus on the Long Range Transportation Plan.

INFORMATION ITEM: In-Person 2023 PMPEI Classes

Mr. Assad shared that PMPEI classes will be wrapping at the LVPC Office Conference Room this fall. Community Planning will be held for three consecutive Mondays beginning Oct. 9th. All classes run from 5:30 pm-9pm and go towards earning the designation as Certified Citizen Planning.

INFORMATION ITEM: LVGA Local Technical Assistance Program

Mr. Assad shared a few virtual training opportunities. The two trainings are Drainage: The Key to Roads that Last is Oct. 3, followed by Pedestrians and Crosswalks on Oct. 6. There is one in-person class – Winter Maintenance Planning -- at the offices of the LVPC on October 11. PennDOT Connects have a virtual workshop on September 28 from 8 am to noon on active transportation.

ADJOURNMENT:

Vice Chair Amato stated that the next LVPC meeting is set to be virtual on October 26th at 7pm. Vice Chair Amato then asked if there was a motion to adjourn the meeting and Commissioner Moore made a motion to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned.

Submitted by:

Becky Bradley, AICP, Executive Director and Joey Dotta, Regional Planner