



Lehigh Valley Planning Commission

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Executive Director

LEHIGH VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION

Minutes from the Thursday January 25, 2024, Meeting

The LVPC held a virtual public meeting on Thursday, January 25, 2024. The meeting was advertised in the Lehigh Valley Press on January 10, 2024.

LVPC Chair Dr. Chris Amato chaired the meeting.

Mr. Joey Dotta took Roll Call.

Members in Attendance:

Lehigh County

Ron Beitler, Michael Drabenstott, Philip Ginder, Steve Glickman, Jennifer Gomez, Kent Herman, Dennis Klusaritz, Richard Molchany, Christina Morgan, Santo Napoli, Owen O'Neil, Stephen Repasch, and Kevin Schmidt

Northampton County

Christopher Amato, Jessica Cope, Charles Elliott, John Gallagher, Judith Haldeman, Darlene Heller, Ken Kraft, Carl Manges, Steve Melnick, Armando Moritz-Chapelliquen

Members Absent:

Lehigh County

Phillips Armstrong, Percy Dougherty, Bob Elbich, and Matthew Tuerk

Northampton County

Andrew Elliott, Rachel Leon, Lamont McClure, John McGorry, Scott Minnich, Edward Nelson, Salvatore Panto, Jr., J. William Reynolds, and Tina Smith

Staff Present: Joey Dotta, Steve Neratko, Becky Bradley, Matt Assad, Brian Hite, Susan Myerov, Patrick Osei, Denjam Khadka, Taylor Beasley, Hannah Milagio, and Bambi Griffin Rivera

Public Present: Jeff Ward, Sunny Ghai, John Inglis, Diane Kelly, Kristin Mullen, John (Guest), Jay Bradley, Kurt Bresswein, and SH (Guest)

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR

No members of the public spoke during courtesy of the floor.

CHAIR'S REPORT

Chair Amato welcomed four new commissioners of the LVPC Ron Beitler, Sunny Ghai, John Inglis and Diane Kelly. Each expressed that they are excited to join.

Chair Amato then congratulated the nine individuals that earned the LVPC Certified Citizen Planner Distinction by completing three of the four courses offered by the Lehigh Valley Government Academy. Chair Amato said that municipal officials come to gain a greater understanding of their leadership roles and the LVPC is honored to recognize the passion and commitment they've shown.

MINUTES

Chair Amato stated that the minutes of the Thursday, December 21, 2023, LVPC meeting are attached, and Mr. Dotta presented the previously voted on agenda items. Chair Amato then asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Commissioner Morgan made a motion to approve the minutes and Commissioner Glickman seconded the motion.

Chair Amato asked for any comments or questions. There were none. The motion passed. Commissioner Molchany and Commissioner Charles Elliott abstained.

ACTION ITEM: Lower Macungie Township – Land Use of Regional Significance - Krocks Road Mixed Use

Ms. Bambi Griffin Rivera presented a mixed-use land development including 19,800 square-feet of retail, 318 apartment units, and an 88,000-square-foot hotel at 617 North Krocks Road. Ms. Rivera reviewed that the LVPC recommends that the cost of affordable housing for this area be taken into consideration when determining rents. The LVPC commends the pavement marked crosswalks shown throughout this proposal which ‘promotes safe and secure community design’ (Policy 5.1). The LVPC recommends that additional crosswalks be added from the northwest and southwest corners of Building 10 to connect to the sidewalk network and suggests that a crosswalk be added from the southeastern corner of Building 2 to the dog park and recreation area to further meet accessibility needs supporting ‘universal design’ (of Policy 5.2).

Ms. Rivera noted that the primary entrance for the project is also the entrance to Resurrection Cemetery at Krocks Road. The LVPC recommends that the municipality discuss with both the cemetery and local law enforcement any impacts that could occur during peak hours of use with respect to congestion or stopped traffic due to funeral processions. The LVPC also recommends advance coordination around traffic control for these infrequent events to support ‘a safe, well-maintained transportation network’ (Policy 2.2).

Mr. Brian Hite added to the review that it is strongly recommended that, prior to approval, the Traffic Impact Study (TIS) plans be updated for consistency. The TIS will be used as a reference for future land developments in the vicinity and they should be consistent. Mr. Hite noted that there have been over 122 crashes in the past five years (2017-2022) with no Vulnerable Road User crashes which underscores the urgent need for improved safety measures at this intersection in coordination with the municipality and PennDOT. It was also recommended that the pedestrian timed crossing light be time extended and additional safety measures.

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

Mr. Ghai asked where the new commissioners that were introduced stood in the appointment process. Mr. Molchany replied that the official appointment for Lehigh County will be February 15th and urged the new commissioners, except Mr. Beitler who was formally appointed by Geoff Brace, to not vote during the January Full Commission meeting.

Mr. Molchany next asked about the pedestrian bridge option and how it may affect the LVPC’s transportation study. Ms. Bradley noted Mr. Beitler’s expertise in this subject and discussed that at the origin of Hamilton Crossings development there were initial plans for a pedestrian bridge. She noted that PennDOT was waiting for subsequent development, like the one that is the subject of discussion, will open that conversation again. Ms. Bradley said that it seems a grade-separated interchange may eventually be put in place, but it would not be under the role of the LVPC to implement.

Mr. Molchany asked if the recommendation for intersection improvements is appropriate for the LVPC to make and warned other commissioners to believe that because it is included that it will occur. Mr. Beitler added that he was not on the township board during the beginning stages but that the intersection improvements have always been a focus. It was noted that the improvements were submitted to be included on the LVPC Transportation Improvement Program, but it would require large amounts of private

funding. Mr. Beitler expressed that the improvements were necessary then and they are necessary now and hopes that the changes will eventually be made.

Mr. Melnick asked what a grade-separated interchange is. Ms. Bradley answered that it is an intersection like Route 22 and Route 512. Traffic from one roadway would go below or above traffic travelling in a perpendicular direction, enabling a higher capacity of traffic to pass. She thanked the commission and both counties in their willingness to have discussion about orderly growth and solutions like grade-separated interchanges. Mr. Beitler further explained some examples of grade-separated interchanges and different versions.

Mr. Gallagher commented that there is a two-way loop going around a basin while there are deep parking lots to get to the apartments.

Chair Amato called for affirmative votes to accept the staff comments. The motion passed.

ACTION ITEM: Project Review Summary Sheets

Comprehensive Planning Committee Summary Sheet:

Comprehensive Planning Committee Chair Steve Melnick presented a summary of the Committee meeting that occurred on Tuesday. The meeting included a zoning map amendment in the City of Bethlehem.

Chair Amato called for a motion to accept the staff comments. Commissioner Morgan made the motion, and Commissioner Repasch seconded the motion. Chair Amato asked for any comments or questions. There were none.

Chair Amato called for affirmative votes to accept the staff comments. The motion passed.

Environment Committee Summary Sheet:

Environment Committee Chair Steve Repasch presented a summary of the Committee meeting on Tuesday that saw five Delaware River Basin Commission reviews involving wastewater treatment plant and water withdrawal renewals.

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

Chair Amato called for affirmative votes to accept the staff comments. The motion passed. Commissioner Morgan abstained from Lynn Township item.

ACTION ITEM: Street Vacation, Portion of Walnut Street, City of Bethlehem Transportation Committee:

Committee meeting attendance was stressed by Transportation Committee Chair Herman. Mr. Hite presented a street vacation petition review for a portion of West Walnut Street in the City of Bethlehem, Northampton County. The petition was from the City of Bethlehem on behalf of James L. Broughal Esquire representing the petitioners which are the City of Bethlehem Parking Authority and West Broad Street Associates LLC. This street vacation is in certain sections adjacent to the 33 Walnut Street Parking Garage, which is slated to be redeveloped into a 590-space public parking garage, portions of the new garage will be built on the rights-of-way that are being petitioned to be vacated.

It was recommended that the City of Bethlehem ensure adequate, safe and efficient pedestrian access along the frontages of the building(s) for pedestrians of all abilities continued access as exists today along West Walnut Street with respect to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and providing access for users of all abilities (of Policy 5.2). The vacating of rights of way by the City of Bethlehem for the described portion of West Walnut Street would not negatively affect current traffic circulation.

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

Chair Amato called for affirmative votes to accept the staff comments. The motion passed.

INFORMATION ITEM: Transportation Committee Summary

Transportation Committee Chair Kent Herman summarized the Committee meeting that occurred hours before that included updates to the 2025-2028 Transportation Improvement Program and the Eastern PA Freight Alliance: Freight Infrastructure Plan.

Old Business:

INFORMATION ITEMS: Activity Reports

2023 Subdivision, Land Development, Stormwater and Municipal Ordinance/Plans Summary

Mr. Neratko summarized the plan and review activity for 2023 which included 209 Subdivisions, 386 Development proposals, 190 reviews for Stormwater Management, and 105 Municipal Ordinances and Maps for a total of 890 reviews on 7,183 acres. Of those reviews 405 were in Lehigh County and 485 in Northampton.

In 2023, the LVPC reviewed 4,916 total residential units proposed, consisting of 794 single-family detached, 1,170 twins and 2,472 apartments. On the non-residential side, we saw 17.9 million square feet industrial, 1.7 million square feet commercial, 1.1 million square feet public/quasi-public.

Chair Amato asked for any comments or questions. Chair Amato commented that it was a lot of development and that hopefully the developers listened to the LVPC's comments. Commissioner Gallagher thanked the LVPC staff for the amount of work they were able to accomplish.

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

Mr. Neratko presented the plan and review activity for December which included 11 Subdivisions, 17 Development proposals, 17 reviews for Stormwater Management, and seven Municipal Ordinances and Maps for a total of 52 reviews on 156.9 acres. Twenty-three of those reviews were in Lehigh County and 29 in Northampton.

In December, the LVPC reviewed 111 total residential units proposed, consisting of nine single-family detached, 18 townhouses and 84 apartments. On the non-residential side, we saw 181,906 square feet commercial, 52,248 square feet public/quasi-public, 101,821 square feet office.

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

Industrial Market Report

Mr. Dotta presented the quarterly Industrial Market Report that found over the last year the average lease rate across the Counties increased by \$4.83 square-foot per year. An additional 3.1 million square feet of leasable space was added to the region's inventory and the annual market value of all industrial square feet increased over an estimated \$579.5 million dollars equating to an increase of \$4.64 billion for an 8-year lease term.

Mr. Dotta noted that construction slowed while vacancies and average asking rent continued to rise. Overall, construction is expected to slow while vacancy rates are expected to hit their peak in mid-2024. Completed construction has steadily decreased since 2018 for warehouse developments and has generally fluctuated for industrial developments. Although, there are major projects in the development review pipeline, the largest of which in 2023 was River Pointe Logistics in Upper Mount Bethel Township that proposes to add 5.9 million square of warehouse development. 2023 remained a busy year with 17.9 million square feet of industrial, 16.7 million of that being warehousing, that was submitted and reviewed by the LVPC.

Chair Amato asked for any comments or questions. Commissioner Ghai asked if the rent in the Lehigh Valley was comparable to our Eastern neighbors like New Jersey. Mr. Dotta said that the Lehigh Valley has seen a recent increase to rival New Jersey and Ms. Bradley noted that the LVPC would present another report about the industrial market at the next Full Commission meeting.

Highway Traffic Monitoring

Mr. Hite summarized the monthly traffic report which included Route 22 between Airport Road and the Lehigh River Bridge ending November at 94,154 vehicles, Interstate 78 located just east of Route 309 recording 72,648, and Route 309 near Coopersburg showing 32,191 vehicles. Commercial truck traffic included Interstate 78 east of 309 with 17,893 commercial trucks and Route 22 just east of the Lehigh River Bridge seeing 10,933 commercial trucks.

Mr. Hite reviewed traffic counts for the past year. Mr. Hite noted that 2023 had the highest traffic volumes at our counters since March of 2020, the start of the pandemic. 2023 summer was a huge travelling and vacationing season and showed high volumes of traffic, June showed improved freight movement as supply chains helped manufacture more materials and finished goods, we still have supply chain issues, but the trucks roll as the trucks and trailers get loaded for destinations especially in the growing Lehigh Valley. Mr. Hite noted that we saw our highest traffic on Route 22 during the Thanksgiving holiday time period, as more people made the societal shift to visit friends and family by vehicle and those also traveling by air via Lehigh Valley International Airport which may have increased traffic on Route 22.

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

New Business:

INFORMATION ITEM: Priority Climate Action Plan Draft

Ms. Myerov presented an overview of what the Priority Climate Action Plan is and why we are creating one. This plan has been made possible through the US Environmental Protection Agency's Climate Pollution Reduction Grant Program, or CPRG. This program allocated \$1 million to the largest metropolitan areas in the US to create a Priority Climate Action Plan (PCAP), and a Comprehensive Climate Action Plan (CCAP), with the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and providing broad benefits to communities, particularly those that are low income and disadvantaged. EPA guidance states that the PCAP must be focused on a specific sector of importance. We have chosen transportation, due in part to the population and economic growth we have been experiencing in the Lehigh Valley, our historically poor air quality, and the ability of our sister agency, the LVTS, to allocate funding from various other federal programs that also support transportation decarbonization.

Ms. Myerov summarized five themes or measures that are in the plan and how they relate to the goal of the document. Ms. Myerov said the LVPC is creating this plan to reduce transportation emissions because they are one of the largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions by sector. The Lehigh Valley is experiencing increased transportation activity due to population and economic growth, and there are a multitude of funding programs that can be leveraged to implement decarbonization projects. She highlighted that the LVPC has no legal authority to enforce this plan. It will provide strategies, set targets, and provide useful data and funding information. Because the plan has a March 1st deadline, the next major step is for it to be reviewed and voted upon in LVPC committee meetings in February. We will be providing commissioners with copies of the draft to review around the beginning of February.

Ms. Myerov invited those interested in hearing more to the final WorkshopLV Environment/Transportation virtual meeting on February 21, 2024 at 11:00 AM.

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

INFORMATION ITEM: LVPC LVTS Website Rebuild

Ms. Beasley presented that the LVPC is in the midst of a several month transition to a new website builder and content management system. Moving to a new website was in our 24-month workplan, but when Adobe kept reducing its support for our old format, we thought that this was the perfect time to make the transition at a time when it fits in with our office relocation and the move to electronic plan filing. We expect it to take up to six months, and in the meantime, we've built a temporary site we'll use until it's ready. I've been working hard to get the most essential plans and documents on the temporary site.

Mr. Assad noted that the reason the LVPC website is functional is because of Taylor' hard work and teaching herself web development skills overnight.

Chair Amato thanked Taylor for her hard work and then asked for any comments or questions. There were none.

INFORMATION ITEM: Statement of Financial Interests Form Reminder

Ms. Milagio presented a reminder that the PA Ethics Act requires all public officials and employees to file an annual Statement of Financial Interest. LVPC Commissioners are required to file a digital or paper copy with the LVPC by May 1st. Please send your completed to me by physical mail or email at hmilagio@lvpc.org. It's important to note that these files are confidential and will be kept so by the staff.

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

Executive Director's Report:

INFORMATION ITEM: LVPC Updates and Annual Training Part 1

Ms. Bradley presented the beginning and forming of the Joint Planning Commission of Lehigh and Northampton County, which name changed to the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission in February 1997. The first regional comprehensive plan laid out Routes 22 and 33 and Interstate 78, planning for population growth, economic growth and the preservation of natural resources in the name of the public, health, safety and welfare. These men made no little plans and their strength of purpose lives on today through our work.

Ms. Bradley noted that also in 1997 the Commission expanded from 18 members to 37, established attendance requirements, adopted county subdivision and land development ordinances and updated the regional plan. It's of note that both County Council and Commissioners require Commissioners to attend at least 8 meetings a year and in 1994 adopted operating procedures for the Commission that also require people participating in Committees to attend at least 6 of these meetings in addition to the 8 Full Commission meetings.

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

Communications and Public Engagement:

INFORMATION ITEM: Morning Call Business Cycle Column

Mr. Assad spoke about the most recent Morning Call column called "It's the plenty to see here list." The next column will delve into the LVTS's new Public Participation and Limited English Proficiency Plans, which as you heard earlier, are in their public comment period. That column will run Feb. 5.

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

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

Mr. Assad summarized the most recent Plan Lehigh Valley radio show aired January 1 on WDIY FM 88.1, and focused on that same List of Obligated Projects. Ms. Bradley was joined by LVPC Managing Editor Matt Assad and LVPC Transportation Planner Brian Hite. That 30-minute show is now streaming at LVPC.org and WDIY.org.

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

INFORMATION ITEM: Local Technical Assistance Programs

Mr. Hite presented some exciting Local Technical Assistance Program classes starting on February 26th. LTAP will hold the first of two of the same class, Road Safety Audit with the other class scheduled for February 15. January 30th will have Traffic Signal Basics and next Traffic Signs Basics on February 9th. On February 21 we have the Americans with Disabilities Act training in relationship to access for persons of all abilities on the transportation network. On February 1st is a one-hour class for our municipalities involving municipal services and what resources are available to local communities from PennDOT involving Liquid Fuels, the Agility program, Project Development and Delivery as well as COSTAR program for purchasing. All these classes are virtual and are generally from 8 AM to noon, except for that February 1 class, and are free to attend.

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

ADJOURNMENT:

Chair Amato stated that the next LVPC meeting is set to be virtual on February 22nd at 7pm. Chair Amato then asked if there was a motion to adjourn the meeting and Commissioner Morgan made a motion to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned.

Submitted by:

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