



Lehigh Valley Planning Commission

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Executive Director

LEHIGH VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION

Minutes from the Thursday May 23, 2024, Meeting

The LVPC held a virtual public meeting on Thursday, May 23, 2024. The meeting was advertised in the Lehigh Valley Press on Wednesday, February 14th, 2024.

LVPC Chair Dr. Chris Amato chaired the meeting.

Mr. Joey Dotta took Roll Call.

Members in Attendance:

Lehigh County

Sunny Ghai, Philip Ginder, Steve Glickman, Jennifer Gomez, Kent Herman, John Inglis, Dennis Klusaritz, Richard Molchany, Christina Morgan, Owen O'Neil, Stephen Repasch and Kevin Schmidt

Northampton County

Christopher Amato, Andrew Elliott, Charles Elliott, John Gallagher, Judith Haldeman, Darlene Heller, John McGorry, Steve Melnick, Scott Minnich, Armando Moritz-Chapelliquen, Edward Nelson and Tina Smith

Members Absent:

Lehigh County

Phillips Armstrong, Ron Beitler, Percy Dougherty, Michael Drabenstott, Bob Elbich, Diane Kelly, Santo Napoli and Matthew Tuerk

Northampton County

Jessica Cope, Ken Kraft, Rachel Leon, Carl Manges, Lamont McClure, Salvatore Panto, Jr., J. William Reynolds, Grace Crampsie Smith and Jean Versteeg

Staff Present: Joey Dotta, Jill Seitz, Becky Bradley, Christian Martinez, Matt Assad and Brian Hite.

Public Present: Jeff Ward (WFMZ), Phil Gianficaro (Lehighvalleynews.com), Neil Griffin and Claudia Robinson

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR

None appearing.

CHAIR'S REPORT

Chair Amato recapped the General Assembly meeting on May 14, 2024, and notified the Commission and members of the public that the LVPC is seeking support for the Priority Action Climate Plan Implementation Grant.

MINUTES

Chair Amato stated that the minutes of the Thursday, April 25, 2024, 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 Repasch made a motion to approve the minutes and Commissioner Morgan seconded the motion.

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

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING COMMITTEE

ACTION ITEM: Whitehall Township and City of Allentown – Land Use of Regional Significance – Riverside Drive Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grant

Ms. Seitz presented a proposal for a new 2.3-mile local road and multi-use trail along the former railroad right-of-way between Furnace Street in the City of Allentown and Wood Street/Lehigh Avenue in Whitehall Township. The paved portion of the project extends motor vehicle access from Furnace Street to Wood Street, providing connections to Jordan Drive, Kimmet Avenue and the Route 22 interchange at Fullerton Avenue. The road will be two-way for most of its length and posted with a 25-mile-per-hour speed limit. A paved shared use path for walking and bicycling will be constructed parallel to Riverside Drive, with a landscape buffer and street trees. Where Riverside Drive terminates and connects to Wood Street at Route 22, the path continues using gravel material, extending north past Bridge Street/Race Street with a connection to Lehigh Avenue. The trail extension beyond Bridge Street provides an opportunity to connect to the Ironton Rail Trail at Water Street.

Ms. Seitz noted that the proposal aligns with *FutureLV: The Regional Plan* because it reuses vacant and underutilized properties to enhance multimodal connections, increases access to jobs, provides active recreation opportunities that improve public health, supports emergency management and safety operations, creating safe routes to schools, parks and community facilities, preserves historical and natural resources and re-establishes neighborhood access to the Lehigh River. The project is supported by several regional plans and initiatives, including the Lehigh County Livable Landscapes Plan and the *Walk/RollLV: Active Transportation Plan*, closes Pennsylvania's highest priority trail gap along the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, and fulfills the vision outlined in the Whitehall Township Comprehensive Plan and Allentown Vision 2030.

Chair Amato called for a motion to accept the staff comments. Commissioner Gallagher 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.

ACTION ITEM: Wilson Borough – Land Use of Regional Significance – 1921 Dixie Avenue

Ms. Seitz presented a proposal for an adaptive reuse of the existing Dixie Cup building into 405 apartment units and a separate 3,373-square-foot commercial building at 315 South 24th Street. As a brownfield site, substantial testing and remediation is required to make the redevelopment suitable for residential use. The LVPC commends the applicant for undertaking the necessary steps to initiate the process and encourages the continuation of due diligence to minimize environmental impacts.

The site was previously the Dixie Cup Factory, and while it has been vacant for decades, the building holds considerable local cultural and historical value. The LVPC commends the retention of the existing building as it is adapted to a new use, which promotes development that complements the unique history, environment, culture and needs of the Valley. It is of note, that the property is likely eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places for association with persons and events significant in American history. It is recommended that the developer contact the Pennsylvania Historical and Museums Commission prior to any construction.

Ms. Seitz explained that the proposed redevelopment creates housing opportunities and is aligned with efforts supported by the LVPC to address the Lehigh Valley's substantial housing shortage. This development will increase residential density in an existing center and expand housing options near employment areas. Ensuring housing is available at a variety of price points reduces the need for workers at local establishments to travel further for work, thereby reducing traffic congestion on roadways.

Mr. Hite reviewed the submitted Transportation Impact Study (TIS) for the project. The residential component of the project is anticipated to generate an average of 174 new trips during the morning peak hour period, and 165 trips during the evening peak hour period. The proposed restaurant is anticipated to generate an average of 354 trips over the course of the day.

The operation of parking area gates and access should be specified. Gated access can cause transportation network impediments when a vehicle is unable to gain access while others are queuing behind them. Gated access points should provide ample queuing areas with room for vehicles to reverse to ensure the continued mobility of the transportation network.

Mr. Hite noted that sidewalks are provided throughout the site, along parking areas and connect to the building and recreation areas to the external sidewalk network. The LVPC strongly recommends constructing sidewalks along the 25th Street property frontage. The shoulder of 25th Street shows a sustained history of foot traffic, and providing sidewalks would improve pedestrian safety.

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

Chair Amato commented that his grandfather worked in the Dixie Cup factory and that opportunity allowed him to buy a small home in Easton and raise a family. Chair Amato added that he believes the project aligns with *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*.

Commissioner Moritz-Chapelliquen commented that the language regarding recommending bicycle access on the northern side of the building could potentially be strengthened relating to *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*, Policies 5.1 and 5.2. Commissioner Moritz-Chapelliquen made a motion to amend the letter to add stronger language regarding another bicycle and pedestrian access point. Commissioner Melnick seconded the amended motion.

Neil Griffin commented that the development team is looking into adding a second access. He noted there is a fire lane and there may not be enough room, but the feasibility will be looked at. Ms. Bradley thanked Mr. Griffin for coming and urged him to contact the LVPC Transportation Team. Mr. Griffin responded that he will certainly reach out and recognizes the significance of the property to the local community.

Commissioner Nelson asked if there are discussions about adding lights to the trail due to its proximity to the school. Mr. Griffin responded that there has yet to be discussion but that it would be a welcome addition.

Commissioner Tina Smith thanked the development team for being responsible in the redevelopment of the site. It was mentioned all the preservation they are doing and new green energy initiatives the team is undertaking. Claudia Robinson added that the development team is preserving the Dixie Cup and making a replica for the top of the building.

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

ACTION ITEM: North Whitehall Township – Land Use of Regional Significance – Nexus 78

Mr. Dotta presented a proposal for a 547,500-square-foot warehouse at 3121 Route 309. A portion of the property not proposed for development is also located in South Whitehall Township. The 71.1-acre site is largely undeveloped, containing an existing residence, agricultural land and woodlands.

Mr. Dotta noted that the LVPC is an advisory body to North Whitehall Township and sees preliminary land development plans early in the review and approvals process to support refinement of plans prior to final

action by the local government. The LVPC's review letter looks at various land use, transportation, environment and other aspects of the proposal as it relates to goals, policies and actions in *FutureLV: The Regional Plan* and other LVPC adopted plans and available data. In the case of this proposal, the land use is incompatible to neighboring land uses, lacks transportation and utility infrastructure, and topography concerns exist. Therefore, the development is generally inconsistent with the goals and policies outlined in *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*.

Mr. Dotta explained that the Township's adopted zoning code allows Light Industrial uses in this location, reflecting the communities' intent for development to occur in this location. The size of the proposed building, over 500,00 square feet and 50 feet high, greatly surpasses the scale of surrounding developments. Overall, the site is not served by adequate infrastructure to accommodate the proposal. Additionally, the proposal is located adjacent to incompatible land uses, including residential neighborhoods and educational facilities. The subject property is better suited for smaller-scale low-impact commercial and industrial land uses that support local businesses and residents and can provide a transition between residential and industrial developments.

Mr. Dotta mentioned a variety of natural features, including woodlands, hydrographic features with riparian buffers, and steep slopes. While these features are primarily located in the northern area of the property and the proposed building is situated towards the south to minimize disturbance, a more appropriate form of development would utilize smaller building footprints and increase the buffer between development and natural resources.

Mr. Hite presented that the project is estimated to generate an average of 903 total vehicle trips per day, 600 of which are passenger vehicles and 303 are trucks. The right-out configuration of the driveway on Orefield Road and the impacts to turning movements at Route 309 should be studied, as Orefield Road at Route 309 may not be able to accommodate queuing of vehicles turning southbound on Route 309 from Orefield Road.

Mr. Hite noted that turn movements from the full access driveway area are a concern, as there is an elevation change south of the access driveway, with a posted speed limit of 45. The developer should confirm with the municipality and PennDOT the adequacy of safe and efficient turn movements of freight tractor-trailers at this location and any improvements that could be implemented to improve turn movements for tractor-trailers and passenger vehicles.

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

Chair Amato complimented the letter and highlighted that the Commission's primary job is to determine if a project conforms to *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*. He noted that this project is not viable in the long-term.

Commissioner Melnick commented that the sharp increase in truck traffic poses an additional cost for North Whitehall Township and PennDOT to maintain the nearby roads. Commissioner Klusaritz commented that an industrial use is not a good fit for this area due to the Orefield Middle School being nearby. Commissioner Klusaritz noted that the parcel was rezoned about seven years ago and he voted no on it then.

Commissioner Repasch asked for clarification on why the traffic count numbers were so high for specifically passenger vehicles. Mr. Hite responded that various studies determined that those trips would represent the number of employees at a facility of this size. Commissioner Melnick questioned if there was an end user identified. Mr. Hite responded that there was no end user identified in the TIS.

Commissioner Ghai clarified that the distance between this warehouse and Route 22 is roughly three miles and the bulk of it is single lane. Commissioner Ghai noted existing congestion and that the project seems super-sized.

Commissioner Moritz-Chapelliquen thanked both the staff for the thorough letter and the public who came to the meeting to express their concerns.

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

ACTION ITEM: 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 one subdivision and land development ordinance in Whitehall Township.

Chair Amato called for a motion to accept the staff comments. Commissioner Morgan made the motion, and Commissioner Gallagher 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

ACTION ITEM: Environment Committee Summary Sheet:

Environment Committee Chair Steve Repasch presented a summary of the Committee meeting that occurred on Tuesday. The meeting included a proposed amendment to the 2020 Upper Saucon Township Comprehensive Recreation and Open Space Plan Update.

Chair Amato called for a motion to accept the staff comments. Commissioner Melnick made the motion, and Commissioner Ginder 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. Commissioner Inglis abstained.

TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

INFORMATION ITEM: Transportation Committee Summary

Transportation Committee Chair Kent Herman summarized the Committee meeting that occurred hours before including a recap of the first public meeting of the Draft 2025-2028 Transportation Improvement Program by the Lehigh Valley Transportation Study, the Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside (TASA) awards by PennDOT, and the quarterly PennDOT TASA and Multimodal Transportation Funded projects report and status reports on passenger rail.

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

OLD BUSINESS:

INFORMATION ITEMS: Activity Reports

Mr. Dotta presented the Monthly Subdivision Report that featured seven Subdivisions, 19 Development proposals, 12 Stormwater Management reviews, and nine Municipal Ordinances and Maps for a total of 47 reviews over 232 acres. 22 of those reviews were in Lehigh County and 25 were in Northampton County. Mr. Dotta added that the LVPC reviewed 700 total residential units, consisting of 79 single-family detached, 197 townhouses, 336 apartments, 22 twins and 66 manufactured homes. On the non-residential side, it was presented that the LVPC reviewed a total of 604,547 square-feet, which included 11,704 square-feet of commercial, 5,756 square-feet retail, over 19,132 square-feet public/quasi public, 266,000 square-feet of warehouse, 101,821 square-feet of office space and 199,944 SF of transportation.

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

Mr. Hite presented the Monthly Traffic Report, which featured a counter on Route 22 between Airport Road and the Fullerton Avenue Exit, which recorded 107,365 vehicles. Interstate 78, just east of Route 309, recorded 75,012 and Route 309 near Coopersburg logged 39,677 vehicles.

Next, Mr. Hite presented commercial truck traffic. Interstate 78 east of 309 recorded 22,215 trucks. Route 22, just east of the Lehigh River Bridge, recorded 11,403 trucks. Mr. Hite noted that both counters on Interstate 78 will be offline for a short time for repairs, but two other traffic counters will be back online soon.

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

Mr. Dotta presented the Quarterly Industrial Market Report which showed a slight slowdown in construction and development completions recently. The average asking lease rate increased from \$5.79 a square-foot per year in Lehigh County and \$7.98 a square-foot per year in Northampton in the first quarter of 2022 to over \$11 a square foot in the first quarter of 2024.

Chair Amato asked for any comments or questions. Commissioner Repasch commented that the industrial market is primarily warehouses nowadays rather than industry. Commissioner Ghai added that warehouses often include distribution and fulfillment centers.

NEW BUSINESS:

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

INFORMATION ITEM: Quarterly Work Plan Update

Ms. Bradley presented an overview of work program projects that are currently underway. The Lehigh Valley Priority Climate Action Plan, the Lehigh Valley Watershed Assessment Global Act 167 Plans Update, the Transportation Improvement Project (TIP), and the Regional Housing Supply and Attainability Strategy were all summarized to the Commission members. Ms. Bradley added that later this year the LVPC will begin an update to the Transportation Safety and Mobility Plan and the LVPC is in the process of applying to be nationally recognized in the Vision Zero movement. There are several freight management initiatives underway at the LVPC like the Eastern Pennsylvania Freight Infrastructure Plan and the Lehigh County Freight Land Use Assessment.

COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

INFORMATION ITEM: Morning Call Business Cycle Column

Mr. Assad spoke about the most recent Morning Call column where Becky explains the Green Transportation Infrastructure Project and urges people to send support letters to the US Environmental Protection Agency. The LVPC has applied for a \$115 million grant to fund the project and community support helps tremendously. That column can be found at lvpc.org/news/v or at mcall.com.

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 that aired May 6, and took a close look at the Transportation Improvement Program, with guests PennDOT District Executive Chris Kufro and LVTS Coordinating Committee Chairman Rick Molchany. That show is streaming at lvpc.org/news/v and at WDIY.org.

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

INFORMATION ITEM: Local Technical Assistance Program Virtual Classes

Mr. Assad summarized the PA Municipal Planning Education Institute (PMPEI) being offered in PA land use and planning. In 2024, the three courses offered are Zoning Administration in May were sold out, and

future classes include Subdivision and Land Development in September, and Community Planning in October. Mr. Assad urged prospective participants to sign up quickly as spots are being filled.

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

ADJOURNMENT:

Chair Amato stated that the next LVPC meeting is set to be on April 25 at 7pm. Chair Amato asked what the meeting setting would be for June. Chair Amato asked if the Commission could take a vote that night and Ms. Bradley asked Commissioner Herman the legality of voting. Commissioner Herman said that there should be full notice of action items. Ms. Bradley offered the idea of an email vote but said she would check with Gary Asteak. It was determined that Ms. Bradley would follow up with the Commissioners about the possibility of voting for a hybrid meeting.

Chair Amato then asked if there was a motion to adjourn the meeting and Commissioner Molchany made a motion to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned.

Submitted by:

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