



Lehigh Valley Planning Commission

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Executive Director

LEHIGH VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION

Minutes from the Thursday July 25, 2024, Meeting

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

LVPC Chair Dr. Chris Amato chaired the meeting.

Mr. Joey Dotta took Roll Call.

Members in Attendance:

Lehigh County

Ron Beittler, Michael Drabenstott, Sunny Ghai, Philip Ginder, Steve Glickman, Mark Hartney (alt. for Jennifer Gomez), Kent Herman, John Inglis, Richard Molchany, Christina Morgan, Santo Napoli and Stephen Repasch

Northampton County

Christopher Amato, Jessica Cope, Andrew Elliott, Charles Elliott, John Gallagher, Judith Haldeman, Carl Manges, John McGorry, Steve Melnick, Armando Moritz-Chapelliquen and Jean Versteeg

Members Absent:

Lehigh County

Phillips Armstrong, Percy Dougherty, Bob Elbich, Diane Kelly, Dennis Klusaritz, Owen O'Neil, Kevin Schmidt and Matthew Tuerk.

Northampton County

Darlene Heller, Ken Kraft, Rachel Leon, Lamont McClure, Scott Minnich, Edward Nelson, Salvatore Panto, Jr., J. William Reynolds, Grace Crampsie Smith and Tina Smith.

Staff Present: Joey Dotta, Jill Seitz, Scott Greenly, Becky Bradley, Susan Myerov, Matt Assad and Ben Dinkel.

Public Present: Steve Althouse (WFMZ), Craig Beavers, Joe Buckel, Kyle Kessler and Elissa Odeh.

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR

None appearing.

CHAIR'S REPORT

Chair Amato introduced the newest member of the LVPC, Scott Greenly, Director of Regional Planning. Mr. Greenly briefed the Commission on his prior experience in municipal planning as the Uwchlan Township Manager and other positions.

MINUTES

Chair Amato stated that the minutes of the Thursday, June 27, 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 Ginder 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: City of Allentown – Land Use of Regional Significance – Muhlenberg College Softball Field

Mr. Dotta presented a proposal to construct a softball field on the Muhlenberg College Campus at 2301 Chew Street. Existing parking and access to the site will continue to be utilized. The proposed project site is located on Muhlenberg College's campus. Mr. Dotta explained that the proposed sidewalk connectivity along Gordon Street helps 'promote safe and secure community design' (*FutureLV: The Regional Plan*, Policy 5.1) and 'ensure transportation accessibility for all persons' (*FutureLV: The Regional Plan*, of Policy 5.2). Internal traffic signs are recommended along Gordon Street near both parking lots to move vehicles and pedestrians more efficiently.

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

ACTION ITEM: City of Allentown – Land Use of Regional Significance – Muhlenberg College Baseball Field

Mr. Dotta presented a proposal to redevelop the existing Bicentennial Park baseball field at 1008-1054 South Howard Street. Muhlenberg College is currently leasing the property and proposes to rehabilitate the existing infrastructure in accordance with the terms of the lease agreement with Bicentennial Park. Existing parking and access to the site will continue to be utilized. The proposed project parcel is located adjacent to the Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority (LANTA) office building. The current use is not expected to change. Mr. Dotta presented a recommendation that the faded crosswalk across Lehigh Street be clearly marked with appropriate signage and crosswalk markings.

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

ACTION ITEM: City of Allentown – Land Use of Regional Significance – Center Square Improvements

Mr. Dinkel presented a proposal to redesign the intersection of Hamilton Street and Seventh Street, including roadway realignment and reconfiguring turn lanes, expanded public plazas, and a north-to-south bike lane. The proposed project is in the core downtown center of the City of Allentown, zoned Central Business District. The proposed improvements to Hamilton Street include converting the right-hand lane into a right-turn only as the lane approaches the Seventh Street intersection, directing traffic southbound onto Seventh Street. The left-hand lane continues through the intersection and splits into two lanes just east of the monument.

The proposed improvements to Seventh Street include reducing travel lanes from three lanes to two between Linden Street and Hamilton Street. The right-most lane north of Linden Street will become a right-turn only lane onto Linden Street, with two lanes continuing south. At Hamilton Street, both lanes continue south around the west side of the monument, while the left-hand lane also allows traffic to turn left onto Hamilton Street. A bicycle lane is proposed along the left (eastern) side of Seventh Street.

Mr. Dinkel noted that the current configuration is signalized and allows vehicular traffic to move around the monument and pedestrians to cross the street effectively, unless they wish to visit the monument. Poor driver and pedestrian behaviors, not design function, affect transportation system operations most in this location. Yet, the design is not particularly optimal either and supports negative driver and pedestrian behaviors.

Mr. Dinkel noted several deficiencies of the cyclist functioning of the Center Square and noted several recommendations to further improve the safety for both cyclists and pedestrians. While designing the roadway to accommodate all transportation modes is encouraged, pedestrian and bicyclist safety should be prioritized in design decisions, as these are the most vulnerable road users.

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

Chair Amato asked for any comments or questions.

Mr. Mark Hartney, City of Allentown Deputy Director for Community and Economic Development, thanked the LVPC and provided background information relating to the purpose of the project. Mr. Hartney emphasized the importance of calming traffic on 7th Street.

Commissioner Drabenstott emphasized the importance of bicycle infrastructure in Allentown and the greater Lehigh Valley. The inclusion of the recommendations can help improve such a vital center and location with cultural significance.

Ms. Bradley thanked the City for tackling the problem of this intersection and demonstrates vision. Mr. Kyle Kessler, the design consultant for this project, commented that the curves were an immediate concern, and they are the minimum allowed pertaining to PennDOT standards. Mr. Kessler thanked the staff for the recommendations in the letter.

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

ACTION ITEM: Comprehensive Planning Committee Summary Sheet

Comprehensive Planning Committee Vice Chair John Gallagher presented a summary of the Committee meeting that occurred on Tuesday. The meeting included one zoning ordinance amendment in Tatamy Borough.

Chair Amato called for a motion to accept the staff comments. Commissioner Gallagher made the motion, and Commissioner Andrew Elliott 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 five Delaware River Basin Commission reviews involving wastewater treatment plant renewals and a new industrial wastewater treatment plant. There were two information items involving the Enactment of PA House Bill 797 – Native Vegetation Along Roadways and an update on the Lehigh Valley Watersheds Assessment and Global Act 167 Model Ordinance Project Update.

Chair Amato called for a motion to accept the staff comments. Commissioner Drabenstott 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. Commissioner Morgan abstained from the first North Whitehall Township DRBC review vote.

TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

INFORMATION ITEM: Transportation Committee Summary

Transportation Committee Chair Kent Herman summarized the Committee meeting that occurred hours before including the Lehigh Valley Passenger Rail Analysis and the next steps that the Lehigh Valley Transportation Study may undertake. Also discussed were the Enactment of PA House Bill 797 – Native Vegetation Along Roadways, the Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan the PennDOT Public Display information on the 309 Center Valley Interchange Project, along with the PennDOT highway Projects report

ACTION ITEM: New England Avenue – Street Vacation Petition Review

Mr. Dinkel presented a proposed street vacation petition for New England Avenue that was reviewed for recommendations under Section 304 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. The proposed street vacation application was submitted by the City of Allentown on behalf of representatives for the Executive Education Academy Charter School. It is strongly recommended that the city perform critical due diligence of the long-term ramifications of vacating these rights of ways. Careful consideration is an essential planning process for the city and is strongly recommended that the city coordinate and involve the Lehigh Valley Transportation Study (LVTS) and PennDOT with any long-term planning or change of direction for potential of planning for and constructing of New England Avenue. It is also recommended that if the City grants the petition to vacate, that the city communicate and notify the Lehigh Valley Transportation Study of the potential change for the viability of studying the corridor for a proposed New England Avenue as referenced in the current Long-Range Transportation Plan if critically important rights of way is vacated.

Ms. Bradley presented an amended letter of the street vacation review with track changes to show the recommended changes for Full Commission action. Commissioner Herman said that the changes reflected the conversation the Transportation Committee had a couple hours prior well.

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

Mr. Hartney said that the City is in complete agreement with LVPC's review letter. The project was originally under construction but due to lawsuits that was suspended. Mr. Hartney stated that the City is not recommending to City Council that this right-of-way be vacated. Commissioner Drabenstott offered two punctuation changes.

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

Chair Amato left the meeting and passed responsibilities to Vice Chair Morgan for the remainder of the meeting.

OLD BUSINESS:

INFORMATION ITEMS: Activity Reports

Mr. Dinkel presented the Monthly Traffic Report, which featured a counter on Route 22 between Airport Road and the Fullerton Avenue Exit, which recorded 104,700 vehicles. Interstate 78, just east of Route 309, recorded 86,985 and Route 309 near Coopersburg logged 51,994 vehicles.

Next, Mr. Dinkel presented commercial truck traffic. Route 33 between Newburg Road and State Route 248 recorded 11,586 trucks and Route 22 recorded 11,386 trucks.

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

Ms. Seitz presented the Monthly Subdivision Report that featured 13 Subdivisions, 36 Development proposals, 11 Stormwater Management reviews, and one Municipal Ordinances and Maps for a total of 61 reviews over 435 acres. 28 of those reviews were in Lehigh County and 33 were in Northampton County.

Ms. Seitz added that the LVPC reviewed 678 total residential units, consisting of 291 single-family detached, 148 townhouses, 237 apartments and two twins. On the non-residential side, it was presented that the LVPC reviewed a total of 2.2 million square-feet, which included 1.8 million square-feet of warehouse in the industrial category, 115,000 square-feet of commercial, 13,000 square-feet retail, 202,000 square-feet public/quasi-public, and 10,000 square-feet of office space.

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

Ms. Seitz presented the Mid-Year Subdivision Report that featured 59 subdivision plans, 157 development plans, 88 stormwater management reviews and 19 municipal ordinances and maps for a total of 323 reviews. Plan activity for the first half of 2024 has slowed by 27% compared to previous years.

Ms. Seitz added that the LVPC reviewed just over 3,500 residential units, on pace to end 2024 with 43% more residential units proposed compared to last year. While apartment proposals remain high, with just under 2,000 units making up over half of residential units proposed, single-family detached units have increased 31% higher than last year's total (794). The LVPC also reviewed 373 townhouses, 78 twins and 66 manufactured homes.

Vice Chair Morgan asked for any comments or questions.

Commissioner Versteeg asked if there is a pulse on what is in-demand in the current market. Ms. Bradley responded that the Lehigh Valley market has comparatively high absorption rates in the industrial market and the Lehigh Valley has bucked the interest rate trends that are occurring in other cities nationwide. Ms. Bradley noted the sensitivity of the office market in the Lehigh Valley and nationwide.

Mr. Dotta presented the Mid-Year Industrial Market Report that illustrated the average asking lease rate went from \$5.79/sq foot/year in Lehigh County and \$8.08/sq ft/year in Northampton to \$11.71 between mid-year of 2022 and the mid-year of 2024. Large jumps in lease rates seem to be tapering off however as the market continues to find equilibrium. Regional industrial inventory increased just over a million square-feet of completions to 117.5 million square-feet in quarter two of 2024. Vacancy rates rose about a half percent. New facilities under construction continue to decrease with about a 1 million square feet in the pipeline for 2024 quarter two.

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

NEW BUSINESS:

INFORMATION ITEM: Lehigh County News Conference: Housing Supply and Attainability Strategy

Ms. Seitz notified the Commission that County Executive Phillips Armstrong and Lehigh County Commissioner Chair Geoff Brace will be holding a press conference to release information about the regional housing supply and attainability strategy launching in the fall.

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

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT: Multi-Municipal Activities Update

Ms. Bradley updated the Commission on the status of four of the current Multi-Municipal Comprehensive: Plan Slate Belt, River Central, Northern Lehigh Plan and NazPlan.

Vice Chair Morgan asked for any comments or questions. Commissioner Versteeg asked if Hanover Township, Northampton County being in a different plan than Hanover Township, Lehigh County complicates aligning the intent of each. Ms. Bradley responded that *FutureLV: The Regional Plan* is the document that bridges the two communities and provides best guidance when there are potential conflicts between municipalities.

COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

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

Mr. Assad summarized the most recent Plan Lehigh Valley radio show about the role of the counties in regional planning policy with guests Northampton County Council President Lori-Vargo Heffner and Lehigh County Commissioners Chair Geoff Brace. The Commissioners discussed the importance of the county farmland preservation programs, why both counties are committed to operating nursing homes, how transportation plays a role in everything and future county initiatives. That show is now streaming at LVPC.org and WDIY.org.

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

INFORMATION ITEM: Department of Community and Economic Development Multimodal Transportation Fund

Mr. Assad presented the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development's Multimodal Transportation Fund grants. These are grants of \$100,000 to \$3 million and can be used for the development, rehabilitation and enhancement of the transportation system, and can include streetscape, lighting, sidewalk enhancement, pedestrian safety, connectivity of transportation assets and transit-oriented development.

Vice Chair Morgan asked for any comments or questions. Vice Chair Morgan stated the importance of the upcoming deadlines. Commissioner Moritz-Chapelliquen thanked Mr. Assad for making the pitch to the communities and encouraging them to apply.

INFORMATION ITEM: Local Technical Assistance Program Virtual Classes

Mr. Hite summarized the Lehigh Valley Government Academy classes this upcoming month. On August 6 there is Geographic Information System (GIS) Basics, August 13 Traffic Signals Basics, August 15 Trucks on Local Roads, and August 21 School Transportation Management. All classes are 8 AM to noon.

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

ADJOURNMENT:

Vice Chair Morgan stated that the next LVPC meeting is set to be on August 22 at 7pm. Vice Chair Morgan then asked if there was a motion to adjourn the meeting and Commissioner Gallagher made a motion to adjourn and Commissioner Ghai seconded. The meeting was adjourned.

Submitted by:
Becky Bradley, AICP, Executive Director and Joey Dotta, Regional Planner