



Lehigh Valley Planning Commission

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Executive Director

LEHIGH VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION Minutes from the Thursday, November 21, 2024, Virtual Meeting

The LVPC held a virtual public meeting on Thursday, November 21, 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

Michael Drabenstott, Bob Elbich, Sunny Ghai, Philip Ginder, Steve Glickman, Jennifer Gomez, John Inglis, Diane Kelly, Dennis Klusaritz, Richard Molchany, Christina Morgan, Stephen Repasch and Kevin Schmidt

Northampton County

Christopher Amato, Jessica Cope, Andrew Elliott, John Gallagher, Carl Manges, John McGorry, Armando Moritz-Chapelliquen, Tina Smith and Jean Versteeg.

Members Absent:

Lehigh County

Phillips Armstrong, Ron Beitler, Percy Dougherty, Kent Herman, Santo Napoli, Owen O'Neil, and Matthew Tuerk.

Northampton County

Charles Elliott, Judith Haldeman, Darlene Heller, Ken Kraft, Rachel Leon, Lamont McClure, Steve Melnick, Scott Minnich, Edward Nelson, Salvatore Panto, Jr., J. William Reynolds and Grace Crampsie Smith.

Staff Present: Joey Dotta, Jill Seitz, Scott Greenly, Becky Bradley, Susan Myerov, Humaira Nabeela and Brian Hite

Public Present: Phil Gianficaro (Lehighvalleynews.com), Craig Beavers, Steve Althouse (WFMZ), Paul Levits, Kelli, and Jane Mellert

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR

Commissioner Moritz-Chapelliquen congratulated LVPC Transportation Planner Brian Hite for earning his American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) certification. Mr. Hite thanked the Commission. Chair Amato brought to attention that Commissioner Herman received recognition as well.

CHAIR'S REPORT

Chair Amato reminded the Commission of the upcoming Now and Next Open House, December 10, at the LVPC office.

MINUTES

Chair Amato stated that the minutes of the Thursday, October 24, 2024, LVPC meeting are attached. Chair Amato asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Commissioner Repasch 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. Commissioners Cope, Kelly, Klusaritz and Gallagher abstained.

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING COMMITTEE

ACTION ITEM: Wind Gap Borough and Plainfield Township – Land Use of Regional Significance – 905 Pennsylvania Ave. (Cubes at Wind Gap)

Mr. Dotta presented a proposal to construct two warehouses located at 905 Pennsylvania Avenue (PA Route 512) totaling 640,400 square feet with associated parking, utilities, and access drives. A previous application proposed development of two warehouses – Building A being 786,000 square feet and Building B being 308,000 square feet – and a 19,520-square-foot office and shop. Building A has been reduced about 50% to 385,400 square feet and Building B has been reduced about 17% to 255,000 square feet.

Chair Amato called for a motion to accept the staff comments. Commissioner Ginder made the motion, and Commissioner Manges 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 McGorry voted no.

ACTION ITEM: City of Allentown – Land Use of Regional Significance – Northridge School

Mr. Dotta presented a proposal to construct a multi-story, 203,400-square-foot elementary and secondary school and new roadways at 1600 Hanover Avenue. The site once housed a psychiatric hospital which closed in 2010, and the building was demolished in 2020. The redevelopment of such a pivotal and important area accessible by the community supports several goals and policies in *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*.

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

Commissioner Gomez thanked the staff and for the feedback. Commissioner Moritz-Chapelliquen stated that it was refreshing to see a project like this one.

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

ACTION ITEM: Plainfield Township - Zoning Ordinance Amendment – Solid Waste Processing and Disposal District

Ms. Seitz presented a proposal, submitted by Waste Management as a private applicant, to amend the Plainfield Township Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map pertaining to sanitary landfill facilities. The application proposes to amend the Township's Zoning Map by rezoning 18 parcels on the east side of Pen Argyl Road from Farm and Forest Zoning District (FF) to Solid Waste Processing and Disposal (SW). The total area to be rezoned is 211 acres, with a total land area of 325 acres to be acquired by Waste Management to incorporate buffering. The area to be rezoned is adjacent to the existing landfill, which is zoned Solid Waste Processing and Disposal (SW) Zoning District, indicating capacity for the general area to accommodate the land use at the existing scale and intensity. Based on the context of the location, rezoning the area to accommodate continuation of landfill operations can make sense for the Township if the environmental impacts of the land use are scrutinized and mitigated through the Township's regulations.

Ms. Myerov added that the ordinance amendment proposes to add an exception for Sanitary Landfill uses from the Township's steep slope regulations, stating that such use is appropriately regulated by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). The conceptual site plan shows that slope areas of varying steepness will be impacted by the landfill expansion if the properties are rezoned. The Township may find that DEP requirements should not be the primary reason to exempt the land use from

local steep slope regulations because they may not reflect local community concerns, goals and values. Rather than exempt Sanitary Landfill uses from all provisions of the Steep Slope Overlay District, a better regulatory approach could be to permit solid waste disposal as a special exception in the steep slope regulations, to ensure an efficient development process that is responsive to regional needs. Another alternative that could be explored is to reconfigure the sanitary landfill footprint area to minimize impacts to Class A steep slope areas.

Ms. Seitz concluded that the LVPC received numerous impact analyses prepared by the applicant, including environmental, transportation, health and economic impacts. Because the existing landfill is nearing its maximum capacity, at which point operations will cease, the rezoning will allow a continuation of existing operations. If the area is rezoned, significant adverse community impacts are unlikely due to the proximity of the expansion area to existing operations. The most substantial impacts would be to the land itself. Mitigation measures for impacts on natural resources present on site must be secured and accepted by permitting agencies, and the Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory report included in the submitted application should be updated to 'minimize environmental impacts of development to protect the health, safety and welfare of the public.'

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

Ms. Jane Mellert stated that she believes not enough information has been reviewed and urged the LVPC to consider documents that were sent via email to staff the day prior, November 20th, 2024. They requested the LVPC take into the account the study information and why the district was created. There was a letter emailed to LVPC staff that provides more detail about the change of the setback area and tonnage allowed when the district was created. Ms. Mellert sent a 1988 study detailing the purpose of the solid waste zoning district and another letter specifying Plainfield Township's position. Ms. Mellert noted that the information reviewed was from Waste Management and not indicative of the Township's and its residents' feelings.

Ms. Seitz read aloud an email sent to the LVPC that was requested to be recorded. The message from Ms. Millie Beahn read:

"The Plainfield Township Supervisors have been asked again - twice to review and consider rezoning a new area for solid waste. The solid waste area that has been in use for many years was made bigger "several years" quite a few years ago (I believe it went from 300 feet high to 900 feet high). Now WM the multibillion-dollar conglomerate wants a new dump site in Plainfield Township. Our area hosted and has endured and had the landfill for many years and it is time for it to end. So - they have someone that owns 200 plus acres and wants WM to buy it so they can start a new site on the other side of Pen Argyl Road. This is not an expansion. This is a whole new area of farmland that they want rezoned to from farm and forest to solid waste. So, they dangle money to all the little people ... our health and welfare should be considered and based on the Penna Constitution Article 27, the people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural resources are the common property of all people including generations yet to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all people (May 19, 1971, P. L. 769, J. R. 3)."

There was further discussion with several commissioners, Ms. Mellert and LVPC staff about what the limitations of amending the letter could be. There was discussion specifically regarding language that spoke to the impacts and whether new information could be used to amend the wording.

Commissioner Repasch amended the motion and Commissioner Morgan seconded the amendment to add language requesting the municipality consider additional materials.

Chair Amato called for affirmative votes to accept the staff comments. The motion passed. Chair Amato and Commissioner Versteeg voted no.

ACTION ITEM: Comprehensive Planning Committee Summary Sheet

Commissioner Gallagher briefed the Commission on the Comprehensive Committee Summary Sheet that featured a zoning map amendment in the City of Bethlehem, zoning ordinance amendments in Upper Saucon and Williams Townships. Also, the updated zoning ordinance, zoning map and new official map for Heidelberg Township, and a zoning ordinance and map amendment in Wilson Borough.

Chair Amato called for a motion to accept the summary sheet. Commissioner Elbich 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.

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Environment Committee was cancelled for the month of November.

TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

ACTION ITEM: Transportation Committee Summary Sheet

Commissioner Schmidt briefed the Commission on the Transportation Committee Summary Sheet that featured a street vacation in Wilson Borough and a street vacation in Salisbury Township.

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

Commissioner Moritz-Chapelliquen added that he was pleased about the notifications relating to the street vacation for nearby residents.

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

OLD BUSINESS:

PRESENTATION ITEM: 1st Through 3rd Quarter Traffic Monitoring Report

Ms. Nabeela presented the 1st Through 3rd Quarter Traffic Monitoring Report that featured the active continuous traffic counters in operation in the Lehigh Valley. The total vehicle traffic and vehicle traffic counts were presented.

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

PRESENTATION ITEM: Industrial Market Report

Mr. Dotta presented the industrial market report that featured information on average asking lease rates, development and review trends, and vacancy rates. The data illustrated that while square footage is down from pandemic-induced expansion, it is still relatively high and ever-evolving.

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

NEW BUSINESS:

PRESENTATION ITEM: Briefing on Drought Conditions in Lehigh Valley

Ms. Myerov gave a topical presentation on the lack of precipitation and its consequences of spiked drought conditions. There was general information about drought indicators and historical comparisons for context.

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

INFORMATION ITEM: December In Person Meeting Reminder

Mr. Dotta gave a brief reminder that December's Annual Meeting will be in person at the LVPC office at 615 Waterfront Drive in Allentown, PA. To accommodate the holidays, the meeting will be held on December 19, 2024, at 11:00 am.

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

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

Lehigh Valley General Assembly

Ms. Bradley briefed the Commission on the General Assembly that was held at the LVPC office on October 29, 2024. Ms. Seitz, Ms. Myerov, and Mr. Dotta summarized what happened at the event and some general takeaways from participants. Ms. Bradley closed it out by inviting everyone to the next General Assembly meeting on April 30, 2025, at 7:00 pm.

Commissioner Moritz-Chapelliquen asked about educational opportunities and ways to get more access to the communities. Ms. Bradley talked further about upcoming educational initiatives.

COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Chair Amato notified the Commission that items for communications and public engagement are featured in the meeting packet.

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

ADJOURNMENT:

Chair Amato stated that the next LVPC meeting will be in person on Thursday, December 19 at 11 am. 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