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Bushkill Township's Distinction is Balance and Cooperation

Look across the horizon from many sections of Bushkill Township and you're likely to see rolling fields of farmland or large swaths of wooded area. That more than 40 percent of the township is agriculture or undeveloped land is a source of pride for residents.

But that hasn't stopped township leaders from partnering with neighboring communities more receptive to land development.

That willingness to balance its focus on preserving the township's rural character with the needs of its neighbors made Bushkill Township the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission's 2015 Community of Distinction, and earlier this month the LVPC gave the borough a way to share its honor with people entering the borough.

During a ceremony at the October Board of Supervisors meeting, LVPC Executive Director Becky Bradley and Northampton County Executive Lamont McClure unveiled steel signs emblazoned with the "Community of Distinction" title and logo, to be placed along borough roads and in parks.

"Your vision for preservation and your role in the [Nazareth Area Council of Governments] really shows your commitment to sound planning principles," Bradley told Supervisors. "Being named a Community of Distinction means you're doing just about everything right."

For the past five years during its annual awards gala, the LVPC has named one Community of Distinction for its commitment to sound planning that makes the region a better place. Bethlehem was the first Community of Distinction in 2014, followed by Bushkill Township in 2015, South Whitehall Township in 2016 and Catasauqua Borough in 2017. Macungie Borough was named the 2018 Community of Distinction Oct. 10, during the 5th Annual Lehigh Valley Gala + Awards.

Bushkill Township distinguished itself not only by being one of the few municipalities to adopt an official map that balances preservation and development – a measure recommended by LVPC – but it also put its money where its priorities are. Its open space plan includes a .25% earned income tax that raises nearly \$700,000 a year, and is credited with preserving 60 properties totaling more than 1,500 acres, including some in sensitive areas around Jacobsburg State Park and up Sober's Run to Blue Mountain.

In addition, Bushkill Township was a key driver in the Nazareth Area Council of Governments, the 10-municipality council of governments that coordinates across municipal boundaries to gain greater efficiency and achieve mutual goals.

“Bushkill Township showed foresight by using legislation and regulation to protect the township’s rural character,” County Executive McClure told supervisors. “As a predominantly rural municipality that still recognizes the likely encroachment of development in its southern extremes, Bushkill Township has consistently demonstrated an appreciation for the best applications of planning to meet objectives of its residents, while striving to harmonize with the widely divergent visions of its many neighbors.”

Also speaking during the ceremony were representatives from the office of State Senator Mario Scavello and State Rep. Marcia M. Hahn.

More information about awards given during the 2018 Awards Gala is available at http://lvpc.org/lvpc_awards_2018.html.