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South Whitehall's Distinction is Turning Challenges into Opportunities

Sitting at the confluence of some of the region's busiest roads, South Whitehall Township leaders had to determine how to grow, while preserving the township's parks and open space, even as much of the Lehigh Valley's commuting public passed through daily.

They developed a package of planning and zoning strategies that focused development around bustling arteries such as Interstate 78 and Routes 22, 309 and 222. The result has been smart growth such as Spring View Apartments, the Hills at Winchester and the Fields at Blue Barn Meadows that take advantage of existing infrastructure rather than building more. In addition, its role in developing a Jordan Greenway trail will provide people recreating or commuting a direct link to Allentown's urban core and the Trexler Nature Preserve.

That kind of forethought helped make South Whitehall Township the LVPC's choice as Community of Distinction in 2016, and now it can share its honor with people entering the city with Community of Distinction road signs, presented to the township by the LVPC.

"Because of its location, South Whitehall Township faced a variety of challenges," Becky Bradley, LVPC Executive Director, said before the ceremony. "It used good planning, vision and a long-term approach to turn those challenges into opportunities. We're honored to present these reminders of why we chose the township as a Community of Distinction."

The sign unveiling was done Sept. 19 at the South Whitehall Municipal Building. Speakers included Lehigh County Executive Phil Armstrong, Lehigh County Commissioner Percy Dougherty, LVPC Commissioners Kathy Rader and Bob Elbich, South Whitehall Commissioner Tori Morgan and South Whitehall Township Manager Renee Bickel.

"We're really proud of South Whitehall because of the way it is adding to the quality of life," Armstrong said. "Someday we'll be able to bike from Allentown, through South Whitehall, and up to the Nature Preserve."

Bickel said the award - and signs - are a recognition of a township blueprint that takes a methodical approach to managing land use, housing, maintenance, historic sites and transportation.

"The award captured the importance of transportation looking at pedestrian amenities and streetscapes and finally it recognized the progress in open space, our covered bridge part masterplan and the seven miles of the Jordan Creek Greenway that run through the South

Whitehall Township,” Bickel said. “We are pleased to place these signs on our campus and throughout our parks.”

For the past four 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.

Previous sign unveiling ceremonies were held in Bethlehem and Catasauqua. The final ceremony was awarded Thursday in Bushkill Township.

This year’s 5th Annual Lehigh Valley Gala + Awards is scheduled for October 10 at DeSales University Center. More than two dozen communities have been nominated for awards.

More information is available by contacting LVPC Managing Editor Matt Assad at 610-264-4544, or massad@lvpc.org.