



Lehigh Valley Planning Commission

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Executive Director

**LEHIGH VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION**

**Minutes from the Thursday, March 26, 2020 Meeting**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the LVPC held a virtual public meeting on March 26, 2020 at 7:00 pm using Microsoft Teams. Commissioners and the public were able to join the meeting via web ([tiny.cc/lvpc326mtg](https://tiny.cc/lvpc326mtg)) and/or via phone (1 872-222-9976, Conference ID: 694 562 627#)

Mr. Zebrowski chaired the meeting.

Ms. Bradley took Roll Call.

**Members in Attendance:**

**Lehigh County**

Percy Dougherty, Bob Elbich, Mike Gibson, Steven Glickman, Ce-Ce Gerlach, Michael Harakal, Kent Herman, Richard Molchany, Christina Morgan, Kathy Rader, Stephen Repasch, Kevin Schmidt, Leonard Lightner, and Donna Wright

**Northampton County**

Christopher Amato, Janell Connolly, Malissa Davis, Liesel Dreisbach, Charles Elliott, Darlene Heller, Susan Lawless, Carl Manges, William McGee, Stephen Melnick, Pamela Pearson, Tina Smith, and Greg Zebrowski

**Members Absent:**

**Lehigh County**

Jamie Johnson, Owen O'Neil, Joshua Seigel, and Amy Zanelli

**Northampton County**

Bryan Callahan, Robert Lammi, Kevin Lott, John McGorry, Spirit Rutzler, and Gerald Yob

**Staff Present:** Becky Bradley, Tracy Oscavich, Geoff Reese, Jill Seitz, Samantha Smith, and Bethany Vazquez

**Public Present:** Ted Ritter, Jeff Ward, Peggy Palmer, Casey Ross, and Sarah Bowen

**COURTESY OF THE FLOOR**

None.

## MINUTES

Mr. Zebrowski stated that the minutes of the February 27, 2020 LVPC meeting are attached. Mr. Melnick made a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Glickman seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Mr. Zebrowski thanked everyone for participating in the March LVPC meeting virtually as the organization maintains social distance during the pandemic. Mr. Zebrowski stated that as plans continue to come into the Commission for review and all deadlines for subdivision, land development, municipal ordinance and plans, stormwater, sewer and water review, among other state and federal mandates and requirements remain unchanged, the Commission needed to meet virtually. Mr. Zebrowski continued by stating that the virtual meeting was advertised in the Morning Call on Sunday, March 20, 2020 and promoted through LVPC e-news, on the website, and on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

### Comprehensive Planning Committee

Mr. Zebrowski stated that the Comprehensive Planning Committee did not meet this month due to the pandemic, and that Committee business has been forwarded to the Full Commission for consideration. Ms. Wright announced each review item with Ms. Seitz and Ms. Smith presenting the information.

1. *Whitehall Township – Land Use of Regional Significance – Muhlenberg College Baseball and Softball Fields*

Ms. Seitz reviewed the Land Use of Regional Significance for Whitehall Township. The subject application constitutes as a Land Use of Regional Significance as an Educational Facility. The project proposes to construct a softball and baseball field complex on a 69.4-acre site located on Lehnert Road near Mickley Road. This proposal is generally consistent with *FutureLV: The Regional Plan* because it serves to 'increase the social, economic and environmental well-being of the region' (policy 1.1) by locating educational and recreational facilities within an area designated for Development in the General Land Use Plan. Additionally, the project serves to 'promote education that improves social and economic opportunities' (policy 4.3). Ms. Seitz shared additional comments from the LVPC staff with the Commission and public. Ms. Wright made a motion to approve the staff comments as presented to the Commission. Mr. Melnick seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

2. *Whitehall Township – Land Use of Regional Significance – Elementary School*

Ms. Smith reviewed the Land Use of Regional Significance for Whitehall Township. The subject application is considered a Land Use of Regional Significance, as an Education Facility. The project proposes to construct a new 93,946-square-foot

elementary school at the existing 153.5-acre school campus located on Mechanicsville Road. An existing elementary school building will be used as an administration building at the completion of the proposed project. This proposal is generally consistent with *FutureLV: The Regional Plan* because it serves to 'increase the social, economic and environmental well-being of the region' (policy 1.1) by location education facilities within an area designated for Development in the General Land Use Plan. The site location along a Major Corridor in the Transportation Plan serves to 'promote education that improves social and economic opportunities' (policy 4.3). Ms. Wright asked if there needed to be LANTA bus consideration for the project. Ms. Smith and Ms. Bradley stated that the location of the development is in a walkable distance to a LANTA facility located on MacArthur Road. Ms. Wright made a motion to approve the staff comments as presented. Ms. Pearson seconded the motion. Mr. Glickman asked if sidewalks were proposed. Ms. Smith stated that sidewalks are proposed on some of the internal driveways and will be constructed with the project, but there are no existing sidewalks located on the existing driveways within the campus which would mean that the proposed sidewalks are not connecting with anything that would allow for pedestrians to move between locations and off the site. The motion passed unanimously.

3. *City of Bethlehem – Land Use of Regional Significance – Lehigh University College of Business and Economics*

Ms. Smith reviewed the Land Use of Regional Significance for the City of Bethlehem. Due to the nature of the proposed development, the subject application is considered a Land Use of Regional Significance, as an Educational Facility. The subject application proposes to redevelop an existing block, containing several smaller structures and a surface parking lot, for the purpose of constructing a 73,300-square-foot facility for the Lehigh University College of Business and Economics. The property is a single parcel, bounded by the East Packer Avenue and Webster, Taylor and Van Buren Streets. This proposal is generally consistent with the County Comprehensive Plan, *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*, because it is located in the Development Area of the General Land Use Plan. The proposed development fulfills the intent of FutureLV to 'encourage reuse and redevelopment within urban areas' (policy 1.1) and creation of 'public spaces that reflect and enhance local culture' (policy 5.4). The LVPC applauded the efforts to provide bike racks near the corner of East Packer Avenue and Taylor Street to accommodate bicyclists, which serves to further 'develop a mixed-transportation network to support a more compact development pattern, optimize roadway capacity and encourage alternative travel options' (policy 2.1). The proposed project also supports the intent the 'implement complete streets and traffic-calming measures' (policy 5.1). The LVPC commended the inclusion of wide sidewalks and a pedestrian plaza along the property frontage, because it integrates 'mixed-transportation into public space design' (policy 5.2). Mr. Melnick asked for clarification regarding the 'green commitment' praised in the staff letter. Mr. Zebrowski stated that it is his understanding that the University is installing a green-roof on the building to accommodate for the vast impervious space occupied by the structure. Mr. Zebrowski also added that the University has designated funds for

the purchase of trees to be planted throughout the campus and City. Mr. Glickman added to the discussion by stating that the applauding of bike racks seemed to be excessive and that the language should seem more of a 'note' or 'recognition', rather than an 'applaud'. Mr. Zebrowski agreed stating that there should be "more ambitious commitment to mixed-transportation than just bike racks". Ms. Bradley stated that bike racks are a rarity when it comes to a development plan. Mr. Glickman stated that he would like to make a motion to approve the letter with the change of the word 'applauds', in reference to the bike racks, to 'noted'. Mr. Repasch seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. *City of Easton – Comprehensive Zoning Amendment*

Ms. Smith presented the comprehensive zoning amendment for the City of Easton. The proposed zoning ordinance amendment considers a comprehensive rewrite, reformatting, and evaluation of the existing ordinance. Subsequent to the LVPC's review of a comprehensive zoning ordinance amendment in January 2020, the City determined that substantial change to the proposed amendment had been made through the public engagement process and, as such, forwarded this revised proposal to the LVPC for review. The draft zoning ordinance is generally consistent with the County Comprehensive Plan, *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*, because it improves management of growth and development to enhance the City (policy 1.1). The LVPC thanks the City for incorporating many of the comments associated with the previous ordinance amendment version, and for allowing the Commission to review this refined amendment. There remains several concerns that the LVPC respectfully requests be revised to ensure the full ordinance amendment is consistent with FutureLV. Ms. Smith reviewed the LVPC's recommendations with the Commission. Ms. Wright made a motion to approve the staff comments. Mr. Zebrowski seconded the motion. Ms. Oscavich mentioned that a public comment has been submitted and Ms. Bradley read the comment into the record. Ms. Palmer, "the public participant", asked if the letter that will be sent to Easton could include all of the LVPC comments on context sensitive design standards as contained in the January 28, 2020 letter, rather than just a reference to that letter. Ms. Bradley stated that Ms. Smith added language into the letter that clearly stated that the context sensitive design standards are a priority as referenced in the January 28<sup>th</sup> letter and that the comments of the Commission did not change in that regard. Mr. Zebrowski thanked Ms. Bradley for reading the comment and asked for a call to vote. Mr. Elliott and Mr. Manges abstained from the vote. The vote passed unanimously with the two abstentions.

5. *Borough of Stockertown – Zoning Ordinance Amendment – Lot Width and Steep Slopes*

Ms. Seitz presented the zoning ordinance amendment for Stockertown Borough. The proposed zoning ordinance amendment update the Stockertown Borough Zoning Ordinance by increasing minimum lot areas and decreasing maximum lot coverage in the Residential (R-1) and Mixed Use (MU) zoning districts. Additionally, the amendment adds definitions pertaining to steep slopes, those with a grade of 15% or greater, and establishes construction regulations in these areas. This amendment is generally inconsistent with *FutureLV: The Regional Plan* because the proposed increased minimum lot size would reduce density in an area identified as a Historic

Center and along a Major Corridor in the Transportation Plan. This does not serve to 'increase density of residential and mixed-use development in centers' (policy 2.1). Additionally, to 'promote the fiscal health and sustainability of municipalities' (policy 4.6), the LVPC recommends higher density to support public utility systems so that the infrastructure cost to the municipality may be distributed across a greater number of properties. The proposed amendment limits development on slopes of 15% or greater, and prohibits development on slopes of 25% or greater. This amendment is generally consistent with FutureLV because it aims to 'minimize environmental impacts of development to protect the health, safety and welfare of the public' (policy 3.2) by discouraging development in potentially hazard-prone areas, and serves to 'conserve and manage natural lands and water resources for environmental and recreational benefits' (policy 3.1). The steep slopes policy contained within Goal 1 of the Northampton County Livable Landscapes Plan is to 'avoid development on steep slopes greater than 25% and provide development restrictions on steep slopes of 15% to 25% to prevent erosion'. The LVPC notes that the phrasing of the thresholds for steep slopes could be interpreted other than intended and could present unnecessary opportunity for appeal. The LVPC recommends minor adjustments to the technical ordinance phrasing to clarify these regulations. Ms. Wright asked since it is most likely the density amendment was proposed in protection of historic buildings, if there were any recommendations to the Borough regarding increasing density in a historic area. Ms. Seitz stated that she spoke to the engineer who prepared the amendment, and that he did not specifically state that protection of historic buildings was the motivation behind the amendment's creation; rather it was to direct development towards the Borough's exterior vacant properties. Ms. Wright thanked Ms. Seitz for her clarification and made a motion to approve the staff comments as presented. Ms. Dreisbach seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

6. *Borough of Stockertown – Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance Amendment – Sidewalks and Curbs*

Ms. Seitz presented the subdivision and land development ordinance amendment for Stockertown Borough. The proposed subdivision and land development ordinance amendment strengthens language regarding the installation of sidewalks and curbs, stating that "curbing and sidewalk shall be provided on both sides of all streets" in subdivisions or land developments. This proposal is generally consistent with *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*, because Stockertown Borough is in an area designated for Development in the General Land Use Plan, and is a Historic Center in the Transportation Plan. The LVPC commends the Borough for amending its street design provisions to 'strengthen sidewalk, bike route and trail infrastructure that are critical to 'establish mixed-transportation corridors' (policy 2.1). Ms. Wright made a motion to approve the staff comments. Mr. Lightner seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

7. *Project Review, Summary Sheet*

Ms. Wright stated that March continued to be a busy first quarter and asked that Ms. Smith give a quick recap of the summary sheet items. Forks Township submitted a combined zoning ordinance and map amendment for apartments. Upper Saucon

Township submitted a zoning ordinance amendment for forestry. Bath Borough submitted a subdivision and land development ordinance amendment regarding steep slopes, associated with the zoning ordinance amendment for residential height limitation, and Upper Macungie Township submitted a zoning ordinance amendment pertaining to various items. Ms. Wright made a motion to approve the summary sheet. Ms. Dreisbach seconded the motion. Ms. Morgan stated that she will abstain from the vote on South Whitehall Township's Zoning Ordinance Amendment. Ms. Rader stated that she will abstain from the vote on the Upper Macungie Township Zoning Ordinance Amendment. With the abstentions from Ms. Morgan and Ms. Rader on their respective Townships' items, the motion passed unanimously.

## **Environment and Transportation Committees**

### **1. *Walk/RollLV: Active Transportation Plan***

Mr. Herman stated that the Environment and Transportation Committees did not meet in March due to the need to maintain social distance. The Committees have been working since last year with the Lehigh Valley Transportation Study Technical and Coordinating Committees and the Multimodal Working Group to develop the region's first pedestrian, bicycle, last feet to transit and accessibility strategy. This important planning activity dovetails with the policies and actions adopted by the Commission in *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*. The LVPC has received a final draft of the *Walk/RollLV: Active Transportation Plan* from Toole Design Group and Traffic Planning and Design. The Plan is posted to the LVPC website. Mr. Herman encouraged the Commission to read the draft as the Committees will be reviewing this and considering forwarding it to the Full Commission as soon as practical. Mr. Reese walked the Commission through the anticipated adoption process. The LVTS would like the review of the Commission and Multimodal Working Group as part of the adoption process. The goal is that the Full Commission will adopt the plan and recommend that the LVTS do the same. As for the LVTS, the Multimodal Working Group or WorkshopLV: Multimodal, will be meeting online and/or by phone on April 22<sup>nd</sup> at 3 pm to consider the final draft and recommend adoption to the LVTS Technical Committee. The LVTS Technical Committee will review the plan and send it to the Coordinating Committee for final adoption. Mr. Reese asked that the Commission and public forward any comments or questions by April 9<sup>th</sup> to [greese@lvpc.org](mailto:greese@lvpc.org).

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### **1. *BuildLV: 2019 Development and Housing Trends Report***

Ms. Bradley gave a short update on the BuildLV: 2019 Development and Housing Trends Report. The BuildLV: Annual Development Report was distributed to our major partners at the end of February. Prior to the pandemic, Ms. Bradley presented a report on BuildLV at the Lehigh Valley Business Journal Real Estate Symposium in early March. Ms. Oscavich and Ms. Bradley also

presented the development and housing report at the Pennsylvania Brownfields Conference in State College. After the COVID-19 pandemic, the LVPC will need to schedule our annual presentation to Northampton County Council and the Lehigh County Commissioners. The LVPC staff is also scheduled to present FutureLV and BuildLV at the Chamber Real Estate Outlook on April 23<sup>rd</sup>. Ms. Bradley stated that if Commissioners were interested in attending the Chamber Real Estate Outlook, they can notify Ms. Vazquez at [bvazquez@lvpc.org](mailto:bvazquez@lvpc.org).

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### *1. Proposed LVPC Bylaws Amendment*

Mr. Zebrowski stated that due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, in-person meetings have stopped for the foreseeable future. The Lehigh Valley Planning Commission Bylaws authorize only the Executive Committee mail, electronic and telephone ballots under special circumstances. Mr. Zebrowski continued by stating that Commissioner Lammi recommended to the Executive Committee, consideration be given to the Full Commission to consider other voting methods in special circumstances as the LVPC handles a significant volume of time-sensitive business, per Pennsylvania statutes. Because of these statutes, it is imperative that the Full Commission continue to issue review letters and guidance to our municipal and private sector partners as the bi-county planning commission. Depending on the type of review the Commission has between 30-45 days to issue communication on the matters previously outlined. As such, the Full Commission needs a procedure to address special circumstances, such as the COVID-19 Pandemic, if in-person meetings are not possible. As such it is recommended that the procedure for mail, electronic and telephone ballots under special circumstances be given to the Full Commission. Mr. Zebrowski reviewed the proposed language for the Full Commission bylaws amendment. The amendment states: *“Section 9: In special circumstances, where the action of the Commission is required prior to the next regularly scheduled meeting, the Chair may authorize a special mail, electronic or telephone ballot. A majority of the votes by said ballot shall authorize said action. A record shall be kept of the aye and nay responses to said ballot and shall be reported and ratified at the next regularly scheduled meeting”*. Mr. Zebrowski made a motion to accept the bylaws amendment. Ms. Dreisbach seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

## **COMMUNICATION**

### *1. Census Report*

Mr. Zebrowski stated that included in the non-action items portion of the packet is a memorandum from LVPC Managing Editor, Matt Assad, outlining the significant push the Commission is doing to promote the 2020 Census. Mr. Zebrowski stated that Census mailers are being delivered to the Lehigh Valley mailboxes and encouraged the Commission to participate.

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

### *1. Monthly BuildLV: Subdivision and Land Development Report*

Ms. Bradley presented information on the February Monthly BuildLV: Subdivision and Land Development Report. The report will be distributed publicly around the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month and is available at lvpc.org.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

Ms. Oscavich stated that a list of the meetings anticipated to be canceled or postponed due to the need to maintain social distance are listed in the packet. Any questions can be referred to bvazquez@lvpc.org or called in to 610-264-4544.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Mr. Zebrowski stated that in the back of the packet is an article shared by Commissioner Pearson on 'Optimizing Cold Storage through Semi-Automation' that can be reviewed at the Commission's leisure. Mr. Zebrowski stated that it is the desire of the Commission to share good information as it becomes available.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Mr. Zebrowski stated that the next LVPC meeting is set to be virtual and the LVPC staff will be sending out meeting specific information and posting it to the LVPC website shortly. Mr. Zebrowski asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting; Mr. Dougherty made the motion. With the motion made by Mr. Dougherty to adjourn the meeting, Mr. Zebrowski thanked everyone for their participation and adjourned.

Submitted by:

Becky Bradley, AICP, Executive Director  
Bethany Vazquez, Program Associate