

The Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan for the SLATE BELT

April 1, 2020 – 7 PM, Virtual Steering Committee Meeting

Steering Committee Attendees:

Bangor: Nate Dysard, James Kresge
East Bangor: Jason Huggan
L. Mt. Bethel: Susan Disidore, Jen Smethers, Sandra Newman
Pen Argyl: Robin Zmoda, Jeffrey Fox
Plainfield: Tom Petrucci, Stephen Hurni, Terry Kleintop
Portland: Lance Prator, Stephanie Steele
Roseto: Joe Angelini
U. Mt. Bethel: Anthony DeFranco
Washington: Justin Huratiak
Wind Gap: Louise Firestone

Members of the Public in Attendance:

Judith Henckel – Upper Mount Bethel Township
Gina Kormanik – Workforce Board Lehigh Valley
Andrew Kleiner – Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation
Bob Kilbanks – State Representative Joe Emrick
Marc Blau – Slate Belt Heritage Center
Cullen King – Slate Belt Heritage Center

Planning Partners in Attendance:

Becky Bradley – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
Tracy Oscavich – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
Sue Rockwell – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
David Towsey – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
Simon Okumu – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
Mahdis Modaresi – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
Stephen Reider – Slate Belt Rising
Mark Hartney – Northampton County
Ellen Neises – University of Pennsylvania
Joshua Ketchum – University of Pennsylvania
Melissa Hough – Slate Belt Heritage Center

Ms. Bradley welcomed everyone to the first Plan Slate Belt Virtual Steering Committee meeting. The meeting was advertised in the Morning Call on March 27, 2020, promoted on the Plan Slate Belt website, and emailed to Steering Committee members and members of the public who participated in previous meetings. The agenda and meeting materials are posted on the website in the meetings section. Minutes of tonight's meeting are being taken via recording.

Roll Call

Mr. Petrucci asked for roll call to identify the communities that are participating in the meeting tonight. Ms. Rockwell took roll call.

Courtesy of the Floor

Mr. Petrucci welcomed members of the public and asked them to state their name for the record. He asked if anyone would like to speak on an item not on the agenda. Hearing none, Mr. Petrucci proceeded to the next agenda item.

Minutes from the March 4th Meeting

Mr. Petrucci called for a motion on approval of the March 4, 2020 meeting minutes, which were emailed to Steering Committee members and posted on the Plan Slate Belt website. Mr. Hurni made a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Fox seconded the motion. Mr. Petrucci called for a roll call vote, which passed unanimously.

Old Business

Policy Development: Economic Development & Education and Workforce Development

Mr. Petrucci said that the Economic Development roundtable notes were distributed at the March Steering Committee meeting, and revised notes were posted to the project website. The Education and Workforce notes were emailed to the Steering Committee and any comments can be sent to Sue Rockwell (LVPC) by April 14. The notes will be finalized and added to the website after that.

New Business

COVID-19 Contingency Planning

Mr. Petrucci said that the COVID-19 pandemic has created limitations on the multi-municipal planning process, and the committee needs to discuss how the group should proceed with this planning effort. He asked if we should proceed with the virtual meeting sessions or temporarily put the meetings on hold, but break-out work assignments into sub-committees so that the LVPC could continue to gather information. Mr. Petrucci turned the discussion over to the committee. The committee consensus was to postpone the meetings until they can be held in person since the planning process is at a critical stage, and virtual meetings could be an impediment to some people, eliminating input from certain people. However, the committee would leave the discretion of establishing sub-committees to work on certain aspects of the plan to the LVPC. Mr. Petrucci said, since he hasn't heard a dissenting opinion, he would call for a motion to temporarily postpone the meetings and establish sub-committees to continue the work. Mr. Hurni made the motion, and Mr. Huggan seconded the motion. Mr. Petrucci called for a roll call vote, which passed unanimously.

Policy Development and Partnership: Heritage and Nature-Based Placemaking/Economic Development - Adaptive Quarry Reuse Initiative

Mr. Petrucci said that this business item is a parallel effort that cross-supports the multi-municipal planning effort, especially the heritage and outdoor economy that has been prioritized during the roundtable discussions. He introduced Ellen Neises and Joshua Ketchum, University of Pennsylvania Weitzman School of Design, and Melissa Hough, Slate Belt Heritage Center, who will provide a presentation on this initiative.

Ms. Hough said about five years ago the Slate Belt Heritage Center was introduced to the University of Pennsylvania School of Design's multi-year project to survey and evaluate

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underutilized sites throughout the Slate Belt. Students created visions for the future, showing how these sites had the potential to become economic drivers and add to the local quality of life. Other similar regions across the world have successfully transformed projects into centerpieces for development. With Northampton County Department of Community and Economic Development block grants, the school will be able to refine the students' many ideas into several viable plans. Weaving the projects into local and regional plans will help inspire thoughtful development, while preserving the unique character of the region. She said that the Issues and Opportunities report points out that tourism/museum employment in the Slate Belt is far below the region and the nation. Local people go outside the area to visit heritage and recreation sites. Ms. Hough hopes this project can change that and becomes part of the Slate Belt's vision.

Ms. Neises identified two project goals:

- Heritage-based placemaking and economic development
- Enhancement of the Slate Belt as an outdoor recreation destination

Ms. Neises said they are at the very beginning of the project. The first step will be to talk to people about what the best options are then start looking at the sites, project types, constraints and opportunities, acquisition of sites, and feasibility of the projects. Once there is a project people are really interested in, then they can take the project to the next step, visualizing the site concept and connecting with sources of funding.

Mr. Ketchum presented successful projects from around the world with similarities to the Slate Belt:

- National Slate Museum and Dinorwic Quarry, Wales, UK: This was a phased project, with smaller projects that added up to be something significant. The quarries are used as attractions, with access for hiking, rock climbing and other features. The slate museum is part of Snowdonia National Park, the largest park in Wales. It includes multiple slate quarry sites and is comprised of 1,497 miles of public footpath. The slate towns provide food and lodging for visitors.
- Manitoga, Garrison, NY: This project is the site of a former granite quarry that was turned into a cultural destination, which hosts dance, art music and other events. There was not a lot of investment made in this project.
- West Point Foundry Preserve, Cold Spring, NY: This project tells the story of the site's industrial past as an iron forge. It is an attraction to the region, but is also important to the community: a place to have lunch, walk dogs.
- Quarry Garden, Crenshan Botanical Garden, Shanghai, China: This project provides visitors with access to the park and an up close view of the quarry walls and landscape.
- Allmannajuvet Zinc Mines, Sauda, Norway: This project is part of a larger network of cultural attractions on the tourist route. Visitors can get up close to the mines and walk around the trail system.
- D&L Trail/National Heritage Corridor: Whatever quarry project is selected, it needs to be part of a larger network that ties historic and heritage features to the community in the larger area. The D&L can serve as an anchor point and has a series of heritage markers.
- Bethlehem SteelStacks: Not much was done to the Stacks, however, access was provided to them, giving a view of the cultural heritage. A lot of development happened around them.

Mr. Ketchum said that the quarries in the Slate Belt, with their dramatic, incredible views, should be developed as attractions themselves. Visitors are coming just to the edge of the Slate Belt.

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There are over 3 million visitors per year to the Delaware Water Gap, as well as visitors to the Lehigh and Appalachian trails. Also, the cities of Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton are within a 20-30 minute drive from the Slate Belt, and there is potential to draw people from farther away.

Many ideas were generated after visiting sites and having conversations with local people over the past few years. Mr. Ketchum presented some of the ideas, which involved creating connections between the quarries and towns through trails.

- A Bangor to East Bangor park system project, happening over time, involved proposed development and trails around the quarries, which would be used as attractive features.
- Another project connecting quarries to the Appalachian Trail involves the North Bangor Quarry that would be used as a campsite for visitors.
- A project involving the American Bangor Quarry would allow visitors to be level with the water. Historical markers, lighting and paths are added features.
- The Wind Gap quarries could be integrated into future development, which would surround the quarries (used for managing stormwater and habitats).
- The Dally Quarry in Pen Argyl could allow for viewing platforms to watch operations at an active quarry site.
- A project about the people in the Slate Belt that still have knowledge of how to cut stone, and employing those skilled craftsman to create a park and new path systems.

Mr. Ketchum said that, after speaking with the Heritage Center, they thought the best way forward was to develop one of the quarries and tie it to a trail system as a heritage and economic development strategy. He discussed the three quarries they thought had the strongest potential: North Bangor Slate Quarry, American Bangor Slate Quarry and Pen Argyl Slate Quarries.

Mr. Ketchum discussed a number of project considerations:

- Potential to create an anchor destination
- Visibility of quarry works and cultural landscape
- Addition to character and amenity of the Slate Belt communities
- Local interest and importance of the place
- Potential for investment and partners
- Quarry can be acquired at reasonable cost
- Site can be redeveloped at reasonable cost (not too challenging to make safe)
- Proximity to town centers
- Proximity to trails and other area destinations (Delaware Water Gap, etc.)
- Central to all or most Slate Belt communities, potential for linkage
- Scale and options to phase development of the project

Mr. Ketchum turned over the discussion to the committee for questions and feedback.

Mr. Huratiak thought it was a great presentation. Recreation is a key part to bringing economic development to the Slate Belt, allowing the town centers to prosper from tourism. It would also be a way to build up the communities without too much impact from industry. The Steering Committee should drive more in-depth conversation on what kind of recreational activities they would like to see. He thinks that they need more than a museum feature to pay for development.

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Mr. Kleintop asked if the presentation has been shown to state senators and PA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). He thinks these are great ideas that would move the area forward in a positive direction. What they are seeing up to this point, however, are trucks dumping polluted soil from the tri-state area into the quarries. Mr. Ketchum responded that they have not. They wanted to start the conversation with the Slate Belt municipalities first. Mr. Kleintop also believes that the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and Northampton County Parks would be interested in the presentation. Ms. Neises said that Bryan Cope, Northampton County, was involved in many of the discussions all along. The aim is to reach out with help from the LVPC and others. Ms. Hough said that this is a positive direction. There are other things that can be done to make the quarries real assets to the area.

Mr. Hurni asked if the Dally Quarry is owned by someone in Scranton now. Ms. Zmoda responded that it is no longer owned by the Dally family. A large portion is owned by Waste Management, who uses the quarries to mine for their temporary cap. They have indicated that they plan to continue that process for many years. Ms. Zmoda said that creates a lot of pressure from outside agencies, resulting in conflicts between the needs of the whole versus the wants of the whole. Mr. Hurni agreed. He said that one thing for him is an attraction tied to water. He asked whether anyone had any thoughts on that. Mr. Kleintop said to keep in mind that these areas are tremendous natural recharge areas and fresh water aquifers that could also serve as real tourism attractions if properly used.

Mr. Prator said that they are working on the Liberty Water Gap Trail, a 146-mile trail from the walk bridge in Portland to the Statue of Liberty and are trying to extend it to the Delaware Water Gap. Also, a few years ago, Northampton County Parks and Recreation completed a study on the Northern Tier Trail, which extends from the walk bridge in Portland to the other end of Northampton County. In between, it stops at Lake Minsi and through East Bangor and Bangor, where quarries are located.

Ms. Neises said they also thought the Martins Creek Cement Quarry would be a great site since it's on the Delaware, but thought the focus should be on developing a slate quarry before a cement quarry to assert the region's identity.

Mr. Hurni asked if they need a motel, such as Red Roof or Holiday Inn Express, to attract this tourism. Ms. Bradley said they don't necessarily need a brand name. They could build the overall economic base from using existing opportunities like Airbnb, Vrbo and other vacation rental places. Once established, then the chain motels will want to come in.

Ms. Neises asked if anyone had any thoughts on the American Bangor or North Bangor quarries. Mr. Huratiak said he thought the American Bangor Quarry has the most potential for a museum site with a lot of infrastructure in place.

Ms. Bradley asked if they would like to establish a sub-committee to keep discussing the heritage and nature-based placemaking initiative. Mr. Petrucci said yes. As part of the Northern Tier Trail study, the communities involved are in the midst of forming an inter-municipal committee to study trail connections and that a sub-committee should be formed to look at this further and partner with the Northern Tier project. It should also tie in with the Lehigh Valley Greenways, DCNR and DEP so that all important stakeholders are aware of what is going on, as well as potential funding sources for master site planning. The task for the sub-committee would be to bring this to stakeholders. Ms. Bradley said LVPC staff are the planners for Lehigh

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Valley Greenways, which is an initiative of DCNR. Also, the LVPC is the regional connection to DEP. In addition, the LVPC communicates with Bryan Cope often. She said the idea of connecting with the Northern Tier and Liberty Water Gap Trail groups would be beneficial to all. Mr. Kleintop noted that a major artery of the Northern Tier Trail is the Plainfield Trail. There are many quarries located along the trail. In addition, the Gall Farm will be developed into a county park, which will include 3-4 quarries. Tying them into the park is a topic of discussion.

Mr. Petrucci asked if a sub-committee should be set up now or offline so momentum is not lost. Ms. Bradley said the LVPC could send out an email survey to identify who wants to be part of the working group. She will inform Bryan Cope about this discussion since he is a key partner at the county.

Mr. Kleintop asked if anyone has an inventory of quarries. Ms. Hough said yes. The Slate Belt Heritage Center website under Slate History includes the history and shows many of the quarries and all aspects of them. Ms. Neises said that students and preservationists documented, surveyed and mapped the quarries, in addition to identifying fantastic slate walls, slate roofs on period buildings and other maps and drawings on water features, habitat systems and how the quarries fit in. This was developed about a year ago.

Next Steps

Policy Development – Shared Services & Infrastructure

Mr. Petrucci said that the shared services and infrastructure discussions are on hold, but the LVPC is collecting information on partners to be involved in the discussions. He asked the municipalities to provide partner contact information if they haven't already.

Site Tour

Mr. Petrucci said the site tour of southwest Lehigh County has been postponed until further notice.

Adjourn

Mr. Petrucci said the May 6th Steering Committee meeting will be cancelled, but the group will stay in touch on the next steps via email and the website. The LVPC will reach out to individuals to obtain information and about working on the sub-committee. He thanked everyone for participating in the virtual meeting and called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Hurni made a motion to adjourn.

Attachments

- March 4, 2020 Steering Committee Minutes
- Education and Workforce Development Roundtable Notes

Minutes prepared and respectfully transmitted by the LVPC.