

The Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan for the SLATE BELT

October 7, 2020 – 7 PM, Virtual Steering Committee Meeting

Steering Committee Attendees:

Bangor: Brooke Kerzner, James Kresge
East Bangor: Jason Huggan
L. Mt. Bethel: Susan Disidore, Sandra Newman
Pen Argyl: Robin Zmoda, Janell Connolly
Plainfield: Tom Petrucci, Stephen Hurni, Terry Kleintop
Portland: Lance Prator, Stephanie Steele
Roseto: Not in attendance
U. Mt. Bethel: Not in attendance
Washington: Not in attendance
Wind Gap: Louise Firestone, George Hinton, David Hess

Members of the Public in Attendance:

Judith Henckel – Upper Mount Bethel Township
Don Moore – Plainfield Township
Nancy Dischinat – Workforce Board Lehigh Valley
Gina Kormanik – Workforce Board Lehigh Valley
Andrew Kleiner – Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation
Bob Kilbanks – State Representative Joe Emrick
Jane Mellert – Plainfield Township
Joe LeDonne – Pen Argyl Borough
Lisa Amy – State Representative Marcia Hahn

Planning Partners in Attendance:

Tracy Oscavich – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
Sue Rockwell – 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
Alan Jennings – Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley
Melissa Hough – Slate Belt Heritage Center

Roll Call

Mr. Petrucci asked for roll call to identify the communities that are participating in the meeting tonight. Ms. Rockwell took roll call. Three municipalities are not represented at the meeting: Roseto Borough, Upper Mt. Bethel Township and Washington Township. Mr. Petrucci asked the committee if they should proceed since three municipalities are not on the call and noted the requirement to have unanimous voting. Mr. Huggan said that since the quarry project, which is partially located in Washington Township, is on the agenda tonight, the Township should be on the call. Mr. Petrucci was concerned that three out of the ten municipalities were not in attendance. Ms. Oscavich thought that the meeting could proceed, and tonight's meeting minutes would be sent to everyone.

Courtesy of the Floor

Mr. Petrucci asked members of the public to state their name for the record and asked if anyone would like to make a statement.

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Mr. Moore said that a few things have happened over the past month that he would like to bring to the committee's attention. His first concern was the Upper Mt. Bethel industrial park zoning amendment adopted a few weeks ago by the Township that was reviewed by the LVPC, which identified serious environmental and traffic concerns. The Township held a workshop the night before the amendment was adopted. At the workshop, the Township engineer strongly recommended the Township not approve the amendment without changes. The next evening, the engineer spoke out again, but the amendment was adopted by the Township. However, five days later, the Township announced that there will be another amendment to the amendment. He said that the second amendment may have addressed one of the LVPC's concerns. His concern is that the Township is one of the ten Plan Slate Belt communities, and they withdrew from the Slate Belt Council of Governments (COG) at the beginning of the year and are not in attendance tonight.

Mr. Moore said his second concern relates to the requested landfill expansion in Plainfield Township. The Township received a letter from Wind Gap at the beginning of September, two months after the Township Supervisors voted to not pursue the expansion request. He said the current zoning and boundaries of the solid waste district match the future land use plan in the current joint comprehensive plan with Wind Gap and Pen Argyl. Wind Gap did not attend the February or July meetings on this topic held by the Township or send a letter. After the Township turned the request down, the letter sent by Wind Gap said the Borough strongly encourages approval and mentioned they would have to raise taxes by 25% when the landfill closes. He said he has two concerns: 1) We have a joint comprehensive plan. The planning that went into the boundaries of the plan went far beyond what the Township or the residents wanted, but legal counsel advised them that they should allow for future expansion. 2) Township taxes will go up, too. The Township has a trust fund they are investing in and will draw upon. He estimates taxes will go up 25-30%, even though they will be drawing on the trust fund. He asked what has been discussed if anything about solid waste being in the multi-municipal plan future land use plan, and will it be the same as now, or since the Township is not in favor of the expansion, will one of the ten municipalities have to consider having it in their municipality.

Mr. Petrucci said he can speak to the solid waste issue on behalf of Plainfield. He said the Township cannot be expected to shoulder the responsibility of providing for the solid waste use through this planning process. It is his understanding that the sentiment of the Board of Supervisors is that they have shouldered that responsibility long enough and have had its fair share of solid waste or similar uses. They will honor what is there now but are not prepared to take solid waste or similar uses beyond what is provided for under the current solid waste processing and disposal district. Mr. Moore said his only concern is whether this is something that will be on a future agenda at a point that you come up with future land use planning.

Ms. Henckel wanted to reiterate what Mr. Moore said about the Upper Mt. Bethel zoning amendment. She said a good number of residents are not in agreement with Township leaders. They obtained 500 signatures on a petition in opposition of the amendment.

Mr. Kleintop asked, since Upper Mt. Bethel dropped out of the COG and representatives are not in attendance tonight, are there any indicators that they are in the process of dropping out of this planning effort? Mr. Petrucci said that question is for the Township to answer. He said as Chair of this committee, he would reach out to the Township. Mr. Huggan said they should also be made aware of the concerns from the public about their current status.

Minutes from the April 1, 2020 Meeting

Mr. Petrucci asked if the committee was legally allowed to approve the April 1st minutes since we need unanimous voting and not all municipalities are represented, or should the vote be tabled. The committee recommended that the vote on the minutes should be tabled. Mr. Petrucci tabled this item.

General Issues and Opportunities Discussion

Ms. Oscavich said a summary of the subdivision and land development, municipal ordinance, plans and map activity for the region from January through September was provided with the meeting packet. Ms. Newman said that the zoning amendment attributed to Lower Mt. Bethel Township for the Industrial Plan Design & Construction Requirements was not submitted by the Township and needs to be corrected. Ms. Rockwell said staff will address that error.

Ms. Oscavich informed the committee about a LANTA survey regarding Route 33 and, since this is directly related to their communities, encouraged them to participate. The LVPC will send a link to the survey after the meeting.

Old Business

1. Administrative: Proceeding with Plan Considering Extended Nature of the Pandemic

- Continuing Virtual Steering Committee Meetings

Mr. Petrucci asked the committee for their thoughts on continuing with virtual meetings and considering the technical difficulties we are having. The question was raised about holding it at the Pen Argyl Community Center and just practice distancing. Ms. Oscavich said the capacity threshold recommendation from Governor Wolf is 25 people indoors, and the LVPC is adhering to that recommendation. Mr. Petrucci said an order by the Governor was just issued that says 20% of a building's occupancy allowed under normal circumstances. Ms. Zmoda said at this time the community center is not being used for outside uses. Any change to that restriction would have to go to Borough Council. Mr. Petrucci said we would have to research possible locations based on the Governor's restrictions and come back to the committee. The committee sentiment was to meet in person if possible. Ms. Oscavich said we typically have 35-40 people at a meeting.

Mr. Petrucci said Mr. Kresge had a question about the intent of unanimous voting applying to only municipalities present at a meeting. Does anyone remember those discussions? Do all ten have to vote or only municipalities present? Mr. Hartney said he thinks it depends on what the vote is for. If it affects all municipalities, then you would want them all voting. We need to make sure we have full participation at the meetings. Mr. Hurni thought it worked on the presumption that since there are three representatives from each community, there would be at least one representative in attendance. Mr. Petrucci said it was his recollection with zoning and land use matters that we would need all ten voting. The issue being if not all municipalities were on board with the approach or vote, it would go to the governing body, and there could be an issue approving it. Ms. Oscavich said under the Steering Committee section of the Intermunicipal Agreement that "... the foregoing Steering Committee recommendations shall be unanimous consent of the members present with respect to the content of the plan. Final adoption of the plan shall be the province of the governing bodies of each municipality." Based on the agreement, Mr. Petrucci said you have the right to vote, but

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the governing bodies have the final say. However, the responsibility of a committee member is to bring back something that can be approved by the governing body. Ms. Oscavich said she will get in touch with the municipalities not in attendance to see if they need any help, especially if we continue with virtual meetings.

- Project Timeline Adjustments

Mr. Petrucci asked Ms. Oscavich if anything contractually needs to occur regarding the project timeline. Ms. Oscavich said she did not think so. The revised project schedule was provided with the meeting packet. She walked through the schedule with the committee. The project is about six months behind due to the pandemic. She said the Community Preferences Survey will begin this fall and continue through spring of next year. The draft plan will begin early next year, with a final plan by the fall of next year.

New Business

1. Programmatic

- Zoning Diagnosis Work

Ms. Oscavich said the zoning diagnosis is underway and is being headed by the LVPC GIS department. It is intended to identify gaps in uses not covered in municipal zoning ordinances. GIS mapping was displayed to show some of the work completed so far. For each municipal zoning ordinance, a list of permitted, conditional and special exception uses was created and will be mapped. By clicking on a municipality and then a zoning district, all the uses will be shown for that district. Ms. Oscavich said the first step is to get the information in this format before completing the analysis to identify gaps. The timeline to complete the analysis is April 2021. A more detailed discussion will be provided at the next meeting.

- Scheduling Topic Specific Meetings on Shared Services and Infrastructure

Ms. Rockwell said that complete contact information, including sewer and water authorities, EMS, public works, parks & recreation, was still needed from municipalities prior to scheduling meetings. A list of contacts received to date will be emailed to each municipality after the meeting with a request to fill in any blanks. Ms. Oscavich said in the past we held these sessions during the regularly scheduled committee meetings but was thinking to hold them separately to get them done. Mr. Petrucci thought that made sense and asked if anyone had an issue with that approach. Ms. Oscavich said for now the meetings will probably be virtual. Mr. Petrucci thought the smaller breakout sessions are more conducive to being virtual, but meetings covering things like in-depth discussions on zoning and land use matters should probably be in person. We should try to do that and get information on how it can be done and report back to the committee.

2. Partnership

- Heritage and Nature-based Placemaking/Economic Development – Adaptive Quarry Reuse Initiative Report

Ms. Hough provided a brief overview of the project. A more complete presentation with images will be provided at the November meeting. Through a Northampton County

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Department of Community and Economic Development grant, the Slate Belt Heritage Center engaged with PennPraxis to review and refine ideas for the adaptive reuse of underutilized industrial spaces in the Slate Belt. The goal of the project was to create a heritage site that would become an outdoor destination, economic driver and enhance the amenity of the area. From May to August, a subcommittee of stakeholders met to work on a vision for a site. Through meetings, site visits and research, the site was narrowed down to one possible site: the American Bangor Quarry. The quarry is centrally located and met all the criteria for a site, including environmental and heritage preservation, revenue generation and recreation. It could link to the entire Slate Belt through a network of existing and proposed trails. Based on discussions from the meetings, PennPraxis created a visualization for the site, which Ms. Hough displayed for the committee. She said that there was not a lot that needs to be done at the site, the project protects water quality and living space for surrounding neighbors, and there would be no heavy industrial traffic.

Ms. Hough said since August, they have presented the visualization to Plainfield Township Supervisors, Slate Belt Chamber of Commerce and some potential contributors and plan to meet with Washington Township Supervisors, as well as other municipal leaders and state representatives. They are working with Wildlands Conservancy and others to work on challenges to make economically viable, create a business plan and timeline for action. The committee had questions about cost estimates, who will own/operate the site, if the project is self-sustainable and to what extent have the benefits to all the municipalities been looked at. Ms. Hough said they have cost estimates for initial footwork that must take place. They are looking into ownership now and think they will create an entity that will be the initial owner. Wildlands Conservancy is assisting with this to help see what options are available. She said she believes the project is self-sustainable. They are looking at long-range funding, advocacy and the potential through foundations and conservancies. She believes the project will benefit the entire region. The project is distinct from anything else in the area, is not in competition with existing parks, would link into existing and future trails and, long range, will connect with municipalities and residential areas. Combined with other attractions in the area, it will bring people to stay and participate.

Ms. Oscavich reminded everyone about the upcoming LVPC Gala and Awards being held virtually on October 13. The program is an hour long and features speakers from across the Lehigh Valley. If interested in attending, please contact the LVPC.

Adjourn

Mr. Petrucci said we can assume the next meeting will be virtual for now, but we will work toward in-person meetings. He called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Kerzner made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Hurni seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.

Attachments

- April 1, 2020 Steering Committee Minutes
- Slate Belt Communities' Activity Log
- Plan Slate Belt Project Schedule

Minutes prepared and respectfully transmitted by the LVPC.