EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Planning for the region’s continued success, stability and resiliency, a fourteen member regional alliance, the Lehigh Valley Sustainability Consortium, embarked on a nearly three-year long journey to plan for a sustainable Lehigh Valley. Recognizing the future will be guided in part by where the region stands today—after thirty years of population growth and diversification, economic evolution and maturation, extended periods of development with simultaneous investment in existing communities and infrastructure—the Consortium partners developed a philosophy rooted in protecting and growing the Lehigh Valley’s assets for future generations. The Consortium partners organized ten plans and projects around four themes:

Economy. The region demonstrates, time-and-time again, its remarkable diversity and resiliency during periods of economic decline. As the Lehigh Valley evolves in this new, global economy it must continue its mission of addressing skills gaps by aligning its educational infrastructure with the workforce to target and attract key industries, with innovations in manufacturing and energy among the most crucial.

Environment. While the region demonstrates how it values its natural and agricultural resources through a variety of conservation initiatives, it can expand and appreciate these resources and use financial assets more wisely by ascribing concise value, not only as food commodities, habitat preservation or recreational destinations, but as strategic vantage points to mitigate the impacts of climate change and continued population growth.

Transportation. Both the quality and durability of the transportation infrastructure have proven themselves through the region’s ability to adapt to growth in population, commercial development and logistics depending on the region’s most critical.

Livable Communities. Across 62 municipalities, the Lehigh Valley offers something for everyone. But the real testament to successful regional thinking is the remarkably intact older building stock, the persistent job and population growth and the ability to celebrate diversity both across municipal boundaries and within them. This balance of collaboration with individual initiative can help the region address the challenges facing its most politically and economically marginalized populations.

The Lehigh Valley Planning Commission (LVPC), a member of the Sustainability Consortium and the agency responsible for creating this document, has assessed each of the different reports from the Consortium partners, identified critical elements and developed a series of 31 goals, found at the conclusion of this document. These goals are intended to serve as an update to the Comprehensive Plan The Lehigh Valley …2030 (Comprehensive Plan), the primary document guiding growth and development throughout the two county region as it looks into the future. It serves as the principal authority by which the LVPC provides its planning recommendations to the counties, cities, townships and boroughs within the Lehigh Valley. The official Comprehensive Plan for the region was last completed and adopted in April of 2005. The Comprehensive Plan identifies areas recommended for natural features preservation, farmland preservation, urban development and rural development as shown on the General Land Use Plan on the opposite page. The pages included under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant help to launch an update to the entire Comprehensive Plan, which, when complete, will layer in policies and implementation strategies associated with the new goals.

It is because of the work of the Lehigh Valley Sustainability Consortium that the information in this document exists. The Consortium, under the banner of the Envision Lehigh Valley initiative, deftly blended its research with a public engagement process that incorporated intensive civic participation into the planning and research, with specific focus on disseminating the message of the Sustainable Communities Grant to historically low-income and politically marginalized communities. In addition, the entire process integrated Six Livability Principles stipulated by HUD, demonstrated throughout this report. As the Sustainable Communities work winds down at the end of 2014, the report assembles the following components of the Consortium’s work:

• Ten distinct reports covering a variety of topics across four themes, all relevant to the Lehigh Valley’s long-term vision of sustainability.

The output of the Lehigh Valley Sustainability Consortium is a testament to the quality of regional partnerships, and the missions of these agencies prove that the two counties, cities, townships and boroughs within Lehigh and Northampton counties...
Chapter 1 - OVERVIEW

The Lehigh Valley Sustainability Consortium was formed in 2010 as a collaboration of organizations to advance the Comprehensive Plan (The Lehigh Valley 2030 Comprehensive Plan). Consortium partners each agreed upon the need for a coordinated, multi-jurisdictional planning effort to integrate housing, land use, economic and workforce development, transportation and infrastructure investments. Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation (LVEDC) served as the administrator of the grant. Consortium members include:

- Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation (LVEDC)
- Lehigh Valley Planning Commission (LVPC)
- Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley (CACLV)
- Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority (LANta)
- Renew Lehigh Valley (RenewLV)
- Lehigh County Department of Community and Economic Development (LCCED)
- Northampton County Department of Community and Economic Development (NCCED)
- Wildlands Conservancy (WC)
- City of Allentown
- City of Bethlehem
- City of Easton
- The Nurture Nature Center
- Lehigh Valley Research Consortium (LVRCC)
- Lehigh Valley Association of Independent Colleges (LVAC)

The individual organizations that CACLV historically established to execute work programs in the cities are also part of the Consortium, including the community action development corporations of Allentown and Bethlehem and the West Ward Neighborhood Partnership in Easton.
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES Regional Planning Grant Received

Lehigh Valley Consortium is formed

Consortium members develop plans and projects

Efforts culminate in 31 new goals for the Lehigh Valley
Since the 1960’s, the LVPC has maintained the Comprehensive Plan for Lehigh and Northampton counties to meet the provisions of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC). The Comprehensive Plan was adopted by the LVPC and both counties to guide the orderly growth, development, redevelopment and preservation efforts throughout the region. The graph on the opposite page—demonstrating the steady loss of vacant or agricultural land over the last fifty years—reflects a fundamental condition that the LVPC and the Comprehensive Plan strive to address. Elements of the Comprehensive Plan include growth trends and forecasts, natural resources, farmland preservation, land use, economic development, housing, transportation, community utilities, parks and recreation, and historic preservation. The Consortium successfully demonstrated to HUD that the Lehigh Valley already had, in essence, the desired product of the program—a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development—as embodied in the Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan was demonstrated to meet HUD’s Six Livability Principles required of a sustainability plan as follows:

1. Provide more transportation choices
2. Promote equitable, affordable housing
3. Enhance economic competitiveness
4. Support existing communities
5. Coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment
6. Value communities and neighborhoods

The only significant gaps in the Comprehensive Plan relative to the HUD requirements were energy and climate change plans and a fresh food plan. Moreover, through this new effort, each partner is making a commitment to the HUD Livability Principles for sustainable development and redevelopment of the region. The Consortium aims to develop stable, working communities by connecting workers with economic opportunities throughout the region and bringing jobs back to the cities. The opportunity gaps and the distributinal inequalities in the region will widen unless addressed by aggressive policy that is both sustainable and transformative.

The intensive studies and plans created under the HUD Program are documented later in this report, grouped by four themes—Economy, Environment, Transportation, and Livable Communities—which serve as the subjects for Chapters 2 through 5. These studies and plans not only shed light on the regional conditions across a variety of topics that explore how the Lehigh Valley measures up on principles of livability, but they will directly serve to inform the update of the Comprehensive Plan. To that end, the LVPC has translated the various studies and plans created by Consortium partners into a set of goals that form the beginning of the Comprehensive Plan update process—a process that will add specific policies and implementation strategies associated with each goal. The update of the Comprehensive Plan will solidify the Lehigh Valley as a fully collaborative, fully sustainable community.

### The Amount of Agricultural/Vacant Land Has Decreased Since 1964 from Urbanization, Particularly Through Residential Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Residential Land</th>
<th>Non-Residential Land</th>
<th>Parks</th>
<th>Agriculture / Vacant</th>
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</thead>
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<td>12%</td>
<td>59%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>17%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CURRENT TRENDS + SNAPSHOTS

This summary document organizes the HUD Sustainable Communities Grant reports around four basic themes: Economy, Environment, Transportation and Livable Communities. This section looks at current trends and conditions as they relate to those four themes, identifying and illustrating some of the issues that the Consortium set out to explore when this project began in 2011. Concerns raised by the maps in this section reveal the interrelatedness across all four themes and serve as key findings in several of the reports. The LVPC has integrated existing data from a variety of reliable sources to provide an overview of the region through the lens of the four themes.

ECONOMY

It is impossible to consider Economy as a theme without exploring the interplay between where people live and work. Most jobs today are being created in the suburban townships and not the cities. Suburban townships are also the source of the vast majority of population growth. Townships located within the urbanized areas contain low to moderate population densities, while the rural township densities are very low. Meanwhile, the highest concentrations of people remain in Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton, despite comparatively modest growth—or even decline—in job density. The two maps, which depict population and jobs per square mile for each census block in the Lehigh Valley, not only confirm these observations but elicit an array of other concerns relating to households’ access to capital. For example, the high costs of housing and transportation especially affect residents of the three cities, given that the majority of jobs are outside the three cities and require dependable transportation. Industries with abundant jobs—entry-level retail, services and warehousing—are not place-oriented but dispersed throughout the region, usually on the outer fringes of the existing transit system.

ECONOMY

In recent decades, jobs have moved out of the cities, proven by the high concentrations in the suburban townships.
The Lehigh Valley has many important natural areas worthy of protection. These include rare, threatened and endangered plant or animal habitats and outstanding geologic features. The Comprehensive Plan includes a natural resources component. Unique natural resource elements used to produce the natural resources component include floodplains, hydric soils, the Blue Mountain natural area, unique plant and animal habitats, river resource areas, steep slopes, water quality, wetlands, woodlands, interior woodlands and riparian woodlands. The LVPC used Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping to overlay these eleven elements and assign weights relative to conservation priority. The calculations resulted in discovering the areas where the greatest concentration of natural resources occurs in the Lehigh Valley, defining those critical natural features that should be preserved and protected from development.

ENVIRONMENT

The Lehigh Valley has a wealth of protected parks, outdoor recreation sites and natural areas. These lands serve a variety of important uses, such as improving air and water quality, providing wildlife habitat, reducing the impact of urban heat islands, providing space for recreation and entertainment, reducing flooding by absorbing large amounts of stormwater, and enhancing the region’s aesthetics and quality of life. According to LVPC records, 622 protected parks, outdoor recreation sites and natural areas totaling about 33,000 acres are located in Lehigh and Northampton counties.

Another component of open space in the Lehigh Valley is preserved farmland. Both counties have been proactive for decades in preserving the most productive farmland. According to each county’s farmland preservation office, 252 farms totaling 20,069 acres and 126 farms totaling 12,505 acres have been protected from development in Lehigh and Northampton counties, respectively.
Many residents of the Lehigh Valley depend on the automobile to get around on a daily basis. According to U.S. Census statistics, nearly 95% of the region’s labor force uses a car to get to work, school or shopping. The dependence on cars for getting around may be related to a lack of accessibility to important amenities using other transportation options. The map of LANta’s accessibility reveals the full network of approximately 2,600 fixed-route bus stops. GIS resources have helped to generate areas surrounding the bus stops within a quarter-mile distance for walking and two miles for biking. The percentage of the Valley’s population that lives within these distances of non-motorized access is based on population counts within census blocks. The metrics include the full population for any blocks that fall entirely within the distance and a proportioned population for those blocks that only fall partially within the distance. Almost half of the people in the region are not within the quarter-mile walking distance of LANta stops. Most people in the region are within the 2-mile biking distance of LANta stops, though the safety, directness and interconnectivity of the bicycle routes is an entirely different consideration. Most transit stops are in the cities, but the majority of population growth over the last 30 years has taken place in the townships.

Using a combination of Census, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and LVPC data, the second map shows that the majority of Lehigh Valley residents do not live within walking distance of schools or grocery stores—potential evidence of decades of decentralized development outside the cities and boroughs. The majority of new schools today are built in areas only accessible by a school bus. Grocery stores are often located in shopping malls or along major highways. By using the 2-mile biking distance, most people in the region are within that distance of schools and grocery stores, but these high numbers do not necessarily coincide with a large population safely being able to use the bicycle routes. Those who lack the ability or income to either drive or ride bicycles may find that essential goods and services remain out of reach.

A MAJORITY OF LEHIGH VALLEY RESIDENTS ARE NOT WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE OF A SCHOOL OR GROCERY STORE.

THE VAST MAJORITY OF RESIDENTS ARE WITHIN A REASONABLE BIKING DISTANCE FROM LANta BUS STOPS.

DISTANCE TO LANta FIXED-ROUTE BUS STOPS

52% 86% To Fixed-Route Stops % of LV Residents within distance

NON-MOTORIZED ACCESS

18

19

LV ONE LEHIGH VALLEY

TRANSPORTATION
LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

In the wake of the Great Recession, homeless shelters, food pantries and similar operations have seen demand for aid soar. Poverty remains concentrated in the three cities of the Lehigh Valley. According to American Community Survey (ACS) 2006-2010 estimates, nearly 25% of residents in Allentown were below the poverty level, especially affecting households headed by women (41%). In Bethlehem, nearly 20% of all residents were below the poverty level, with female-headed households nearing 38%. In Easton, about 20% of residents and 30% of female heads of household lived below the poverty level. Conversely, the poverty rate for individuals and families across the remainder of the Lehigh Valley (everything except the three cities) was only 5%, by the same ACS estimates. While these snapshots of poverty show profound disparities between the cities and the rest of the two counties, the trend map reveals that demand for aid over the last decade has grown the most where it’s expected least: the rural and suburban boroughs and townships.

Meanwhile, homeownership—historically a reliable means of building personal wealth and promoting household stability—has lagged nationwide, particularly for younger generations entering the job market. Homeownership levels remain very strong in certain sections of the Lehigh Valley, with 12 municipalities having rates that exceeded 90%, according to data from the 2010 Census. However, the overall homeownership rate in the Lehigh Valley has decreased 0.8% when compared to 2000. The trend map reveals that suburban townships have enjoyed the majority of growth in homeownership over the previous decade, while homeownership rates in the cities and boroughs have generally declined. High debt burdens and an upward trend on housing costs have pushed more households, particularly those under age 45, toward rental units in recent years.

The ability of new arrivals to the Lehigh Valley to afford housing (both rental and ownership) has long attracted people to the Lehigh Valley; any deterioration in that affordability could affect quality of life and regional competitiveness in the years ahead.
COMMUNITY HEALTH: WHERE THE FOUR THEMES INTERSECT

The way we plan, design and build our communities can greatly influence our health. The built environment influences people’s levels of physical activity, the safety of travel, the quality of the outdoor air, access to jobs and services, access to healthy food choices, and opportunities to enjoy the many local recreation opportunities—like local parks, pools and ball fields. A well-designed neighborhood offers transportation choices, accommodates people at all stages of life, encourages social and activity interaction, and offers a mix of housing that is close to a good range of jobs. The connection between community health and the four themes addressed by the Sustainability Consortium is deeply ingrained, yet often goes understated.

Recent statistics on mortality and morbidity released by the Health Care Council of the Lehigh Valley (HCC) demonstrate the importance of scrutinizing the Economy, Environment, Transportation and Livable Communities through the lens of community health. Morbidity is the state of being unhealthy or diseased. Examples of morbidity statistics include the number or percentage of residents who are overweight, have diabetes, and have cancer or heart disease. Mortality statistics track the manner of death and the frequency and total number of deaths caused by specific morbidity. As the numbers reveal, high quality hospitals and healthcare keep the mortality rates close to a good range of jobs. The connection between community health and the four themes addressed by the Sustainability Consortium is deeply ingrained, yet often goes understated.

A summary from the HCC recognized the gravity of the issue:

“Our region’s strength continues to be high-quality medical care, and the numbers show pending data indicating that our medical care providers are getting better at improving access to care and reducing unnecessary hospitalizations. Unfortunately, . . . individual behaviors, and social and economic factors continue to negatively affect our overall health. With increased numbers of people living in the Lehigh Valley and an aging population, improving the overall health of the region should be a focus of behavior change and proactive improvement on structural forces such as educational opportunity, environmental health and employment that affect health.”

Regardless of whether they explicitly reference the subject, all of the subsequent reports can influence community health that undergirds any sustainability dialogue. The reports in the following four chapters respond to the Themes and Snapshots from the previous pages, forging connections between the project and the existing goals of the Comprehensive Plan. Six Livability Principles have been assigned an icon that will be used in subsequent chapters to demonstrate the principles that have been addressed through this effort.

1. Provide more transportation choices. Develop safe, reliable and economical transportation choices to decrease household transportation costs, reduce our nation’s dependence on foreign oil, improve air quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote public health.

2. Promote equitable, affordable housing. Expand location and energy-efficient housing choices for people of all ages, incomes, races and ethnicities to increase mobility and lower the combined cost of housing and transportation.

3. Enhance economic competitiveness. Improve economic competitiveness through reliable and timely access to employment centers, educational communities, services and other needs by workers, as well as expanded business access to markets.

4. Support existing communities. Target federal funding toward existing communities—through strategies like transit-oriented, mixed-use development and land recycling—to increase community revitalization and sustain the economic vitality of all communities by investing in healthy, safe and walkable neighborhoods—rural, urban or suburban.

5. Coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment. Align federal policies and funding to remove barriers to collaboration, leverage funding, and increase the accountability and effectiveness of all levels of government to plan for future growth, including making smart energy choices such as locally generated renewable energy.

6. Value communities and neighborhoods. Enhance the unique characteristics and cultural fabric of our neighborhoods, and leverage the diversity of our communities to increase the livability, safety and walkable neighborhoods—rural, urban or suburban.

LIVABILITY PRINCIPLES

Under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Partnership for Sustainable Communities, Six Livability Principles were established to help communities develop in more environmentally and economically sustainable ways. From providing a variety of housing and transportation choices with destinations close to home, to using energy more efficiently, to becoming more economically realistic, these principles are designed to give communities the direction needed to achieve long-term sustainability. The Six Livability Principles have been used by the Consortium partners to help guide the development of new goals to be considered during the Comprehensive Plan update process. The Livability Principles and a description of each are presented to the right. Each Livability Principle has been assigned an icon that will be used in subsequent chapters to demonstrate the principles that have been addressed through this effort.

Chapters 2 through 5 group the projects according to the four themes: Economy, Environment, Transportation and Livable Communities. Across the four chapters, a two-page summary is provided for each project completed by the consortium partners under the HUD Sustainable Communities Grant. Each two-page summary identifies connections to the project and the existing goals of the Comprehensive Plan, while deploying the Livability Principle icons that are addressed by the project. These icons also link the Livability Principles to the additional goals identified by Consortium partners, as provided in Chapter 6.

COMMUNITY HEALTH RANKINGS (OUT OF 67 COUNTIES)

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<tr>
<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>OVERALL HEALTH</th>
<th>MORTALITY</th>
<th>MORBIDITY</th>
<th>HEALTH BEHAVIORS</th>
<th>CLINICAL CARE</th>
<th>SOCIAL + FACTORS</th>
</tr>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>12</td>
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2014 STATE HEALTH RANKINGS (OUT OF 67 COUNTIES)

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<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>OVERALL RANKING</th>
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The HUD Sustainability Consortium partners developed the Envision Lehigh Valley (Envision) program, a public outreach effort designed to engage a diverse array of Lehigh Valley residents. Envision represented an unprecedented outreach partnership between economic development entities, community development agencies and planning partners, with each playing a specific role. The program provided branding and recognition for the public participation efforts of the Consortium as a whole. The goal of the program was to engage residents in discussion on how they "envision" the future of the region. Renewed through a variety of topics, all of which helped to inform the various reports required under the HUD Sustainability Consortium Contract grant. In the end, the Consortium partners engaged over 12,000 individuals between July 2012 and August 2014 under the Envision program and various topic-specific meetings.

The Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley (CACLV) used its strong connections and community outreach expertise to provide a direct link to lower income populations through the extensive public participation process. Renew Lehigh (RenewLV) acted as the coordinator of all general public outreach promotion and managed the effort to engage the more suburban populations of the region.

With a focus on "meeting people where they are" under the Envision program, there were nearly 30 public meetings from July 2012 to February 2013 at locations ranging from the Senior Center in Allentown to the Wind Gap Middle School, from the Diamond Social Hall in Walmport to the Shiloh Baptist Church in Easton. The meetings garnered significant public interest with over 600 attendees in total. Each meeting consisted of attendees filling out an Envision opinion survey, a presentation, and facilitated discussions around topics relevant to the four primary themes of Economy, Environment, Transportation and Livable Communities. Envision representatives recorded and transcribed comments from participants in the facilitated discussions. Representatives from CACLV and its subsidiaries—Community Action Development Corporation (CADC) of Allentown, CADC of Bethlehem, and West Ward Neighborhood Partnership in Easton—harnessed their strong connections and community outreach expertise to provide a direct link to low/moderate income populations through the extensive public participation process. Renew Lehigh (RenewLV) acted as the coordinator of all general public outreach promotion and managed the effort to engage the more suburban populations of the region.

Another way Consortium partners were "meeting people where they are" under the Envision program was by providing key information at 22 different community events (baseball games and municipal fairs) and 31 civic agency meetings (chambers of commerce, historical societies). In 2013, the Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation (LVEDC) and RenewLV presented an overview of the sustainability projects at municipalities throughout the Lehigh Valley, resulting in an additional 1,028 invitations to participate in the Envision program. Advertisements for Envision included posters, billboard ads and fliers placed across a variety of neighborhoods, "virtual town hall" meetings, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and electronic newsletters, online advertisements in Patch.com and Lehigh Valley Live, and the Spanish-language news outlets of La Ola Radio and El Torero newspaper.

The Enviion Lehigh Valley initiative recognized the crossover appeal of the four themes and Consortium partner work, so most meetings encompassed a variety of subjects. However, Consortium partners also organized topic-specific public meetings beginning in 2013 to inform specific reports. Buy Fresh Buy Local held ten public meetings to support the development of its Assessment Report: Lehigh Valley Local Food Economy. LVEDC held stakeholder interviews and engaged nearly 150 people to inform the development of its economic development plan titled A Blueprint for Success: An Economic Development Strategy for Sustainable and Energy Growth in the Lehigh Valley. The Lehigh Valley Planning Commission (LVPC) developed Housing Matters, a public participation program centered on its Regional Housing Plan, which consisted of 15 public discussions that reached nearly 200 individuals, stakeholder interviews, a Housing Advisory Committee, as well as a survey completed by over 1,600 people. The LVPC utilized its standing Environment and Comprehensive Planning committees, the Energy and Environment Committee of the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce, as well as eight public meetings to develop the Climate and Energy Elements of the Comprehensive Plan. Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton have held, and will continue to hold, meetings for their ongoing catalytic projects. Envision Lehigh Valley represents a milestone of community engagement for the region, remarkable for the diversity of methods and strategies employed.
The immense response of residents during the public participation process illustrates that we are One Lehigh Valley (1LV), with a collective interest in the future of the region. While the previous map demonstrates the spatial distribution of the public outreach across the Lehigh Valley, the timeline to the right displays the consistent engagement over time. Each color in this timeline corresponds to one of the principal themes of the meeting (Economy, Environment, Transportation, Livable Communities). However, the vast majority of meetings—particularly in the first year of the initiative—fell under Envision, whose process recognized the cross-pollination of all these key issues, so that most meetings opened the discussion to a variety of topics simultaneously. The size of the circles indicates the number of people engaged at that particular meeting, thus demonstrating the continuum of public outreach activity over the two-year period.
The public participation efforts engaged Lehigh Valley residents through meetings, forums, focus groups, social media and surveys. Surveys were a convenient way for residents to share their opinions and thoughts on a variety of local topics. Between 2011 and 2013, over 3,300 residents completed surveys on topics of food access, housing and transportation needs. Consortium partners used the survey results as input and guidance on their prospective projects. The partners decided to conduct a survey after the projects were completed to explore residents’ opinions about some of the key findings and results from the projects. In August 2014, the partners surveyed over 800 Lehigh Valley residents asking questions through a telephone survey administered by the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion. The results are reported with a +/- 4% margin of error. Faculty of the Lehigh Valley Research Consortium analyzed the results.

Preliminary data from the survey is provided on the following pages.

**PUBLIC OPINION**

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**ECONOMY** – When it comes to regional growth and development, what is the Lehigh Valley’s greatest challenge?

- Providing adequate job opportunities or higher wages: 46%
- Reducing traffic congestion: 23%
- Protecting natural resources: 9%
- Other: 2%

**ENVIRONMENT** – Which of the following natural resources should the region promote as a top priority?

- Clean air + water: 63%
- Wildlife + habitat: 19%
- Scenery + open vistas: 13%
- Other: 1%
- None: 4%

**TRANSPORTATION** – Which of the following changes to the transportation system should be the top priority in the Lehigh Valley?

- Road improvements: 52%
- Enhanced transit service: 13%
- Pedestrian safety improvements: 10%
- Additional bike infrastructure: 5%
- Improved sidewalks: 4%
- Other: 1%

**LIVABLE COMMUNITIES** – Which is the top housing need in the Lehigh Valley?

- More quality housing that is attainable for working families: 48%
- More independent living, extended care and nursing facilities: 14%
- More assisted living, extended care and nursing facilities: 12%
- More rental housing: 11%
- More luxury housing: 1%
- Other: 5%

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**ECONOMY** – Lehigh Valley residents overwhelmingly see the region’s greatest challenge as the insufficient number of “good” jobs with wages and benefits that allow them to afford shelter, healthcare, and other basic necessities of life.

**ENVIRONMENT** – The majority of residents polled on natural resources consider clean air and water as the top environmental priority. Air and water are necessities of life and ensuring their quality is the most critical of environmental objectives for the Valley and across the globe.

**TRANSPORTATION** – The majority of Lehigh Valley residents favor the roads and bridges rather. These improvements occur as state, federal and local funding is available. The remaining responses detail the multi-modal issues of rail, transit, walking and biking that also guide efforts into the future.

**LIVABLE COMMUNITIES** – The demographic changes affecting the Lehigh Valley are evident in how residents answered this question. The majority of residents polled would like to see housing that is affordable relative to their wages offered in the region. Residents would also like to see the region meet the housing needs of the growing elderly population.

The public participation efforts engaged Lehigh Valley residents through meetings, forums, focus groups, social media and surveys. Surveys were a convenient way for residents to share their opinions and thoughts on a variety of local topics. Between 2011 and 2013, over 3,300 residents completed surveys on topics of food access, housing and transportation needs. Consortium partners used the survey results as input and guidance on their prospective projects. The partners decided to conduct a survey after the projects were completed to explore residents’ opinions about some of the key findings and results from the projects. In August 2014, the partners surveyed over 800 Lehigh Valley residents asking questions through a telephone survey administered by the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion. The results are reported with a +/- 4% margin of error. Faculty of the Lehigh Valley Research Consortium analyzed the results. Preliminary data from the survey is provided on the following pages.
The economy of the Lehigh Valley is the dynamic and daily interaction between individuals, business and government that produces, distributes and consumes. It’s also resilient. The Lehigh Valley economy has bounced back from numerous downturns and changes in the national economy and is more diverse and productive than ever.

This section explores the projects undertaken by Consortium partners that used a collaborative, community-driven process to focus on two resources that embody our resilience: our people and our energy. The Valley is steadily growing a regional economy that is feasible, desirable and viable.

A Blueprint for Success: An Economic Development Strategy for Sustainable Growth in the Lehigh Valley studied the types of industries we have and don’t have and the workforce needed for a sustainable, competitive economy.

Allentown’s Re-industrialization Plan provides the blueprint to implement the city’s vision to enhance employment opportunities for its residents. The plan provides the map for the city to jumpstart and reinvest in its existing manufacturing corridors and its labor force.

Energy contributes to our economic growth and standard of living in two ways. First, energy is an important sector of the economy that creates jobs and value through its extraction, transformation and distribution. It’s also the input for all of our goods and services; it powers our cars and heats and cools our homes. The Energy Element encourages responsible development of our abundant energy resources, a continued effort to diversify those energy sources (particularly through renewables) and a renewed goal to conserve them where we can.
The report supports the Economic Development Element of the Comprehensive Plan, which has a goal of supporting economic development activities that provide jobs at above average wages and improve the regional tax base. LVEDC’s efforts now provide the region a blueprint to grow and expand the talent pipeline to provide a highly skilled workforce and to leverage the region’s many assets to attract the types of high quality jobs and businesses that will increase economic opportunities for all residents. The Comprehensive Plan does not currently have goals that resolve regional workforce reinvestment issues or that seek to build a locally sourced talent pipeline. The Plan’s update could address these reinvestment efforts, namely the “skills gap” that was identified as the primary obstacle by stakeholders interviewed for the study, which inhibits the Lehigh Valley from growing its ability to attract and expand businesses.

ONE PLAN MANY VOICES - INFORMING THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

INTRODUCTION

The Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation (LVEDC) sought to develop a sustainable economic development strategy for the Lehigh Valley and kickstart the creation of the organization’s strategic plan for the next three years. Their document, A Blueprint for Success: An Economic Development Strategy for Sustainable Growth in the Lehigh Valley, outlines strategies to attract and retain companies, build a talented workforce and bring investment to the region.

KEY FINDINGS

1. The Lehigh Valley metro area, defined by the federal government as Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton Metropolitan Statistical Area, is the 68th largest metro in the United States out of 381, placing it in the top 20% of metro areas.

2. Over the last five years, real Gross Domestic Product in Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton increased by $629 million or 2.4%, a rate slightly below the nation and the state.

3. Recession losses were not severe in the Lehigh Valley, with the greatest losses at -4.2% or 11,716 fewer jobs, which is a rate lower than the nation and the state experienced.

4. Over the last five years, the largest employment gains came from Healthcare & Social Assistance (up 5,758 jobs or 12%). Other significant gains were made in Transportation & Warehousing (up 4,567 jobs or 32%) and Arts, Entertainment & Recreation (up 3,877 jobs or 54%).

5. Compared to the state and the nation, the Lehigh Valley attracts a higher proportion of new residents aged 25 and older whose highest level of educational attainment is less than high school diploma.
The Allentown Re-industrialization Plan is a three-phased catalytic project that shows how Allentown can strategically position itself for potential "re-shoring" of manufacturing jobs that left the city and the nation as a whole, decades ago. The study explores the question of how Allentown can re-industrialize itself and create sustainable employment opportunities accessible to city residents with the intent of raising incomes and reducing poverty. It is very much a plan that addresses systemic issues fundamental to the success of the city's entire economy—workforce, infrastructure, and its entrepreneurial culture. It responds to the needs of key industry sectors where the city can capitalize on its competitive advantages. Phase I of the study provides a city-wide strategy for re-industrialization. Phase II explores the Little Lehigh Creek Corridor and provides a master plan for redeveloping key strategic sites and buildings. Phase III explores the redevelopment potential of one of the largest available industrial sites in the city, the 18-acre Allentown Metal Works site.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Over the last decade, the manufacturing sector shrunk by 30% or 2,500 jobs in Allentown. Despite the losses, manufacturing remains the third largest major industry sector in the city. Allentown remains a net importer of labor.

2. Allentown's population and labor force are the largest in the city's history. Unemployment remains above 10% as the city has low rates of labor participation. Allentown has a high number of temporary workers, and the city's education gap (defined as observed and persistent disparities in academic performance among select identified groups) with the rest of Pennsylvania is growing to double digit margins.

3. The greatest demand for industrial/manufacturing space outside of warehousing is space below 8,000 square feet and space between 20,000-80,000 square feet. The Lehigh Valley will need 4.2 million square feet of non-warehousing industrial/manufacturing space, based on Allentown's regional marketing study.

1. Animal Food Manufacturing
2. Medical Equipment + Supplies
3. Household Appliance
4. Electrical Equipment + Component
5. Textile Product Mills
6. Sugar + Confectionary Product
7. General Purpose Machinery
8. Furniture Related Product
9. Household/Institutional Furniture + Millwork
10. Apparel Accessories + Other Apparel
To fill a “sustainability gap” in the existing Comprehensive Plan, the LVPC created an Energy Element for the Plan based on a strong framework of existing goals and policies that promote efficiency through compact development and the use of mass transit. The Energy Element creates new goals, policies and strategies that address sustainable/energy efficient transportation, energy conservation, and renewable energies. Although many of the complex and sometimes rapidly changing issues surrounding energy production and its use must be addressed at state and federal levels of government, there is a great deal that Lehigh Valley municipalities can do to use energy more efficiently, to communicate energy conservation to their constituents and to shift from nonrenewable sources to more renewable ones.

INTRODUCTION

The LVPC has been evaluating energy consumption and conservation in the region since the 1970’s. It has been over 20 years since an Energy Element was included in the Comprehensive Plan. Renewed interest in energy due to national security, pricing and new technology is instrumental in developing energy policy at the regional level. The Lehigh Valley will need to rely on multiple energy sources, waste reduction practices, sustainable development and innovative land use planning to reduce energy impacts. The Energy Element is a framework through which the region can address new energy sources, infrastructure, production, conservation and efficiency. The following are the goals of the Energy Element:

- To promote energy efficiency and natural resource conservation within existing and new buildings and land development.
- To encourage alternatives to automobile use, both motorized and non-motorized.
- To support the diversification of energy sources.
- To advocate increased energy conservation and efficiency awareness.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Although alternatively fueled and “hybrid” vehicles only make up 3.2% of all vehicles on the road today, by 2025 many analysts anticipate that 36% of all vehicles globally will be alternatively fueled, using energy sources such as electrical batteries, natural gas or hydrogen fuel cells.

2. Nearly 40% of all electricity comes from the burning of coal, and over 75% of coal mined in Pennsylvania is used to generate electricity.

3. Regionally, consumers of energy will increase by 226,722 people from 2010 to 2040. This is an increase of 35% over three decades.

4. The region added 72,706 housing units between 1980 and 2010 or an average of 2,423 per year. Inexpensive energy prompted intense population growth and a low density, land intensive development pattern locally.

5. In 1964, 74% of the 466,357 acres in the Lehigh Valley were vacant. By 2010, vacant land had decreased to 48%. Land being converted to housing, commercial and industrial development has risen.
The Comprehensive Plan has a strong environmental protection philosophy embodied by the natural resources; farmland preservation; land use; and parks, open space and recreation elements. Environmental protection is also a cornerstone of the community utilities component, covering sewage disposal, water supply, stormwater management and solid waste management. The Climate Change Element, Local Food Economy report and Return on Environment study serve to broaden, deepen and more fully connect the environmental perspectives of the Comprehensive Plan.

The Climate Change Element deals with the functioning of the earth’s meteorology and ecosystems under global warming. Climate change has implications across many elements of the Comprehensive Plan, as evident in the breadth of the goals, policies and implementation strategies. Although a new element in the Comprehensive Plan, many of the climate change mitigation concepts are already embodied in the Plan because they represent long understood benefits of natural areas and farmland preservation and a compact urban form.

The Local Food Economy report takes an in-depth view of all aspects of the provision of fresh, local food to Lehigh Valley residents. The Comprehensive Plan is built on strong advocacy for farming, with 25% of the land area of the Lehigh Valley recommended for farmland preservation in the land use component. The Local Food Economy Element looks further into the agricultural support services needed to sustain local farming and provides opportunities to enrich the Comprehensive Plan.

The Return on Environment study adds to the known environmental value of natural resources already included in the Comprehensive Plan, with estimates of the dollar value of the environment for recreation, natural system services, air quality and property values. It serves to enhance the advocacy for natural resource protection.
INTRODUCTION

The Climate Change Element evaluates the potential impacts on the Lehigh Valley and identifies goals, policies and strategies that can be effective in both helping the region adapt to impacts and assisting municipalities and regional groups with implementing those strategies. There are six climate change goals for consideration in the Comprehensive Plan. They are:

1. To protect, conserve and enhance natural eco-systems to provide long-term resilience to climate change.
2. To protect public infrastructure from potentially harmful impacts associated with climate change.
3. To protect residents, property and critical facilities from natural hazards as evolving over time due to climate change.
4. To create a land use pattern that helps to mitigate climate change impacts through a compact urban development area, mixed land uses, higher densities in urban areas and through preserving land for agricultural and environmental purposes.
5. To provide building and site design practices that help to mitigate climate change impacts.
6. To reduce Lehigh Valley greenhouse gas emissions from residences, government operations and businesses.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Sustained changes to the amount of Earth’s incoming or outgoing energy can lead to climate change, which has occurred throughout the life of the planet due to natural forces. Prior to humans populating the Earth, the planet experienced natural periods of warming and cooling.

2. The discovery of fossil fuels and their use for heat, transportation and manufacturing has resulted in the release of substantial amounts of heat-trapping gases or “greenhouse” gases into the Earth’s atmosphere. According to scientists, this increase in greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is resulting in global climate change.

3. Carbon dioxide (CO₂) is considered the primary greenhouse gas contributing to climate change. Current CO₂ concentrations have never been higher compared with the previous 650,000 years.

4. While uncertainties remain surrounding the magnitude of climate change impacts over time, scientists believe that humans can lessen their severity by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and planning for the changes that are expected to occur to reduce vulnerability to them.

5. The 2009 Department of Environmental Protection’s Pennsylvania Climate Impact Assessment identifies the projected impacts of climate change for the state. The impacts include heavier rain events and less snow; forests more suitable for southern species; decline in cold water aquatic communities; decreased yields of cooler temperature crops and increased rate of respiratory disease.

ONE PLAN MANY VOICES - INFORMING THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

To fill a “sustainability gap” in the existing Comprehensive Plan, the LVPC created a Climate Change Element for the Plan. The Climate Change Element provides policy direction to help the Lehigh Valley respond to expected climate change in the future. Climate change is perhaps the singular topic studied by the Consortium that impacts every other plan or project. For example, our climate impacts the food we can grow, the design and function of our houses and the reliability and often the price of our energy sources and use. The Climate Change Element, with its goals, policies and implementation strategies, builds upon the land use goals already in the Comprehensive Plan and the infrastructure protection goals of the Lehigh Valley Hazard Mitigation Plan.

CLIMATE CHANGE ELEMENT

PARTNER: LEHIGH VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION


INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION
Buy Fresh Buy Local celebrates locally grown food—fruits, vegetables, cheeses, meats, and more—through programs and opportunities that make it easier for Lehigh Valley residents to find, choose and use local foods while supporting the farmers and the valuable lands that produce them.

Buy Fresh Buy Local – Greater Lehigh Valley prepared the Assessment Report: Lehigh Valley Local Food Economy to discuss food in a regional context and provide guidance on how food can intersect with local planning work. The report presents ideas and opportunities to strengthen the regional food system and ensure that all residents of the Lehigh Valley, present and future, have access to fresh, healthy, affordable, culturally appropriate food.

KEY FINDINGS
1. Since 1990, the Lehigh Valley has lost 80% of its farms and 53% of its farmland. Residents living in these “food deserts” lack convenient access to healthy, affordable food and sometimes have an overabundance of fast food restaurants and convenience stores instead.

2. The region severely lacks “food infrastructure” such as processors, aggregators, distributors, co-packers, food business incubators, custom milling grain mills, slaughterhouses and food hubs to support regionally grown foods.

3. Locally grown food contributes an estimated $17 million annually to the local economy. If every household spent $10 a week during the growing season (May-November) on locally grown food, that number would increase to $97 million annually.

4. The Comprehensive Plan does not currently have goals that specifically address the region’s areas of limited food access or the need for improved fresh food system infrastructure.

IN 2012, LEHIGH COUNTY RANKED 25TH OF 67 COUNTIES IN TOTAL VALUE OF ALL AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS SOLD, WHILE NORTHAMPTON RANKED 37TH.

LEHIGH VALLEY CROPLAND (2012)
- Corn (62,798 acres)
- Soybeans (30,216 acres)
- Winter Wheat (6,545 acres)
- Alfalfa (8,363 acres)
- Other Crops (2,863 acres)
- Developed
- Uncovered

The report supports the Farmland Preservation Element of the Comprehensive Plan, which has goals of preserving 25% of the Lehigh Valley for agriculture and supporting farming as an essential component of the regional economy. Buy Fresh Buy Local – Greater Lehigh Valley supports establishing a regional food policy council to develop a long-term coordinated plan to address local food access issues.
The Return on Environment study for the Lehigh Valley documents the value of natural resources and open space in the region as it relates to economic benefits and quality of life. The study creates conservation leverage, showing that quality of life can be improved while saving tax dollars and growing the economy. Study components include environmental services, air quality health benefits, outdoor recreation economic benefits, and property value benefits of being in proximity to open space. A value map shows the total natural economic benefits of these four components that will be used to help prioritize natural areas for conservation. The Return on Environment study details trends impacting the quality of life, local economy and the environment.

**KEY FINDINGS**

1. Outdoor recreation economic benefits to the Lehigh Valley for walking, running, hiking, fishing, hunting, biking, kayaking, camping, birding, nature study and wildlife watching total approximately $800 million annually.
2. The value of environmental services provided by Lehigh Valley open space for flood protection, water quality, waste treatment, biological control, wildlife habitat, soil formation/retention, and pollination is approximately $350 million annually.
3. The health benefits associated with air quality treatment by Lehigh Valley natural systems in terms of avoided healthcare expenditures are approximately $50 million annually.
4. The increased value for residential properties located adjacent to protected open space for the Lehigh Valley is approximately $10,000 per property.
Chapter 4 - TRANSPORTATION

The Lehigh Valley is moving forward, both literally and figuratively, with the initiatives outlined in the Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority’s (LANta) Transit Supportive Land Use for the Lehigh Valley and Easton’s 13th Street Corridor catalytic project. Though the reports have different scopes, they share a critical component: multi-modal connectivity. LANta’s Transit Supportive Land Use for the Lehigh Valley describes transit friendly strategies on a regional level, prioritizing walkability and mixed-use development along existing transit corridors. Simultaneously, Easton’s 13th Street Corridor catalytic project guides the redesign of one of Easton’s main thoroughfares by improving clarity at key intersections for drivers, while making it safer for pedestrians and bicyclists. Together, these documents signal a renewed commitment to user-friendly access for the Lehigh Valley’s most prominent employment centers.
**INTRODUCTION**

LANta’s Transit Supportive Land Use for the Lehigh Valley targets services, sidewalks, site planning and centers as four vital components of transit-friendly development. Municipalities play an important role in transit-friendly development by allowing for and encouraging the density levels appropriate for desired service levels. Decisions regarding the placement of bus service and the intensity of that service (or route type) are primarily based on an area’s population and employment densities. Municipalities should pursue transportation equity in their development decision-making by comprehensively considering the need for walking, biking and transit in existing and proposed areas of their communities. Targeting significant developments to corridors already served by LANta’s higher service level routes creates more transit options for residents. The HUD grant also supported an update to LANta’s ongoing Moving Lehigh Forward initiative to reflect current conditions.

**KEY FINDINGS**

1. A comprehensive pedestrian network is a vital element in the feasibility of transit as a modal choice in the Lehigh Valley.
2. LANta has an adopted route classification guideline that attempts to best match employment and population density conditions with appropriate transit service levels.
3. The development or densification of mixed-use, walkable nodes, especially in the traditional village centers, should be a strategy employed along existing transit corridors.
4. Municipalities should give highest development priority to locations along the corridors designated for enhanced bus or bus rapid transit service in LANta’s Enhanced Bus Service (EBS)/Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Study.
5. Site designs should be done in a way that facilitates transit use while allowing LANta to maintain operational efficiencies.

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**TRANSIT SUPPORTIVE LAND USE FOR THE LEHIGH VALLEY**

**PARTNER: LEHIGH + NORTHAMPTON TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY**


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**ONE PLAN MANY VOICES - INFORMING THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

*The Comprehensive Plan aligns effectively with LANta’s goals regarding site design, pedestrian networks and mixed-use development principles. Both the Comprehensive Plan and the Transit Supportive Land Use Plan strongly promote population and employment densities as priorities for an effective transit network. However, LANta’s vision of a network of high-frequency transit corridors—featuring most prominently a Bus Rapid Transit system—provides a new opportunity to address regional connectivity, density and viability of mass transit within the Comprehensive Plan. Finally, while the existing Comprehensive Plan recognizes the need for safe pedestrian and bicycle access, the LANta plan offers precise design techniques (e.g., pedestrian islands at wide streets, pedestrian-only phases in traffic signals) as essential elements to a pedestrian network.*
KEY FINDINGS

1. The 13th Street Corridor, which connects the City of Easton to the neighboring municipalities of Palmer, Forks and Wilson, carries the second highest traffic volume in the city behind Route 22.

2. The current conditions at the 13th Street interchange with Route 22 are confusing to motorists, evidenced by tire ruts in the grass from vehicles correcting themselves, knocked over signs, and cars backed up at chokepoints, sometimes extending onto Route 22.

3. This corridor redesign and the redeveloping Silk Mill site will be reflective of planning priorities described in Easton’s forthcoming new Comprehensive Plan. The current Comprehensive Plan, which dates to 1997, was written during a time when the city was thirsting for any sort of economic development. Easton’s Comprehensive Plan rewrite will focus less on initiating a renaissance and more on perpetuating the one already taking place.

INTRODUCTION

A visitor to Easton would never guess 13th Street’s importance as a main thoroughfare from the design. That is, until now. This catalytic project intends to eliminate the confusion for motorists at the street’s interchange with Route 22 and to make it safer for other users: bicyclists, pedestrians and passengers on LANTA buses.

ONE PLAN MANY VOICES - INFORMING THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The improvements along 13th Street demonstrate a goal of complete streets, which will maximize the corridor’s access for other users beyond cars. While the Comprehensive Plan recognizes the importance of bicycle/pedestrian issues, it does not yet set forth design to the notion of complete streets—a concept that has become increasingly popular in municipal planning policy. After construction, 13th Street will incorporate design strategies for minimizing flooding and stormwater runoff. While the Comprehensive Plan addresses stormwater management for new developments and proposes a future regional stormwater infrastructure plan, it does not yet prioritize tactics for integrating water management or strategic landscaping (better known as “blue-green infrastructure”) into public rights-of-way.
Chapter 5 - LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

Though this report up to this point has not explored what constitutes a livable community, it has touched on relevant key aspects: enhancing economic competitiveness, coordinating policies to leverage investment, supporting community efforts through technical assistance and providing more transportation options. Linking all of these concepts with housing is critical because housing affordability and access are at the foundation of a livable community. As one of the basic human needs, housing can elicit emotionally charged responses when discussion shifts to topics as diverse as condition, location, size, design, pricing, tenure and even characteristics of the occupants themselves.

The sustainability, vibrancy and overall livability of a region is dependent not only on providing a range of housing across pricing and type, but upon maintaining the viability of the existing, older housing stock, both of which are recognized in the Regional Housing Plan. Meanwhile, South Bethlehem’s Eastern Gateway Plan acknowledges the need to bring new energy and a sense of entry to an older, predominantly residential neighborhood that has experienced significant population changes over the past two decades. The discussion of housing is inclusive of economic development, and the creation or retention of appropriate housing near employment affects transportation and energy consumption. Together, these two reports support a unified notion of what constitutes “livability”, which in turn reinforces the interconnectedness of the other three key subjects within this Sustainable Communities summary: Economy, Environment and Transportation. Finally, under the Sustainable Communities Grant Program, several ongoing initiatives of various partners are briefly described as Forthcoming Projects. These projects will be completed near the end of the grant, therefore, results cannot be provided within this report.
1. From 1980 to 2010, Lehigh Valley townships and boroughs experienced 87% of the population increase, while cities experienced 13%. From 2010 to 2040, the two counties are anticipated to grow an additional 35%.

2. Sixty-four percent of Lehigh Valley residents (186,497) work in the Lehigh Valley. Nearly 36% of residents (103,667) work outside of the Valley, while 88,764 workers in the Valley commute from homes outside the Valley. Thus, the Lehigh Valley is a net exporter of labor.

3. At $44,826, Lehigh Valley average annual wages are 5% lower than the state as a whole ($47,035).

4. Homeownership rates are higher in the townships at 84.9%, versus 50.1% and 64.4% for the cities and boroughs, respectively.

5. Homeownership rates in the Lehigh Valley for age 44 and younger have declined and rates for ages 45-64 have increased.

INTRODUCTION

A regional study of housing must view the Lehigh Valley as a collective of municipalities with widely varying issues. Some municipalities are older and in need of housing rehabilitation, others are agriculture-based with limited available land for housing development, while others are either growing or slowing in growth and have the capacity to accommodate various housing types in key locations. While the Lehigh Valley offers a diversity of housing types (with 57% in traditional single family detached), over 55,000 households are spending more than 30% of their income on rent or mortgages, so affordability is a great concern. Living within close proximity to work reduces transportation cost and travel time. Providing baseline data on housing in the Lehigh Valley lays the foundation to gauge where we are and where we would like to be in the next 5, 10 or 15 years. A collective discussion ensures that all sides are considered in planning for the region’s housing needs in the future.

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ONE PLAN MANY VOICES - INFORMING THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

South Bethlehem is transitioning from the city’s back door to its front door. The catalytic project intends to instill a sense of arrival to South Bethlehem by calming traffic and increasing pedestrian safety along and across the Route 412 corridor that bisects this neighborhood. This strategy will improve accessibility to recently developed recreational amenities (South Bethlehem Greenway, Skateplaza), targeting redevelopment opportunities at key gateway parcels, and initiating a wayfinding/signage program and strategically located artistic installations.

KEY FINDINGS

1. What was once the world’s third largest steel mill is now home to a regional arts and cultural center (SteelStacks), the Sands Bethlehem Casino Resort, and over 3,000 new jobs in warehousing, manufacturing, entertainment and high tech. The project developed plans for traffic calming and streetscape elements between the neighborhood and the new jobs.

2. The Eastern Gateway neighborhood saw a household growth rate of 10% from 2000 to 2011. It has a predominantly Hispanic/Latino population (74% of neighborhood), a median age of 30.3 and a housing vacancy rate at 3.5%. A market analysis of the neighborhood and South Bethlehem reveals demand for a variety of new housing units.

3. Bethlehem has invested heavily on open space and recreation throughout the Eastern Gateway, such as the South Bethlehem Greenway and the Skateplaza. However, access to these amenities is difficult. The high traffic on Route 412 serves as a barrier to non-vehicular access and deters people from entering the neighborhood. Designs were developed to enhance connections to the Lynn Avenue Bridge and East 4th Street.

4. Although the Skateplaza is a major amenity to the neighborhood, improvements could expand its profile to a broader range of users. Development is underway for a gathering area with seating, shade structures, landscaping, a concession stand and restrooms.

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South Bethlehem is transitioning from the city’s back door to its front door. The catalytic project intends to instill a sense of arrival to South Bethlehem by calming traffic and increasing pedestrian safety along and across the Route 412 corridor that bisects this neighborhood. This strategy will improve accessibility to recently developed recreational amenities (South Bethlehem Greenway, Skateplaza), targeting redevelopment opportunities at key gateway parcels, and initiating a wayfinding/signage program and strategically located artistic installations.

KEY FINDINGS

1. What was once the world’s third largest steel mill is now home to a regional arts and cultural center (SteelStacks), the Sands Bethlehem Casino Resort, and over 3,000 new jobs in warehousing, manufacturing, entertainment and high tech. The project developed plans for traffic calming and streetscape elements between the neighborhood and the new jobs.

2. The Eastern Gateway neighborhood saw a household growth rate of 10% from 2000 to 2011. It has a predominantly Hispanic/Latino population (74% of neighborhood), a median age of 30.3 and a housing vacancy rate at 3.5%. A market analysis of the neighborhood and South Bethlehem reveals demand for a variety of new housing units.

3. Bethlehem has invested heavily on open space and recreation throughout the Eastern Gateway, such as the South Bethlehem Greenway and the Skateplaza. However, access to these amenities is difficult. The high traffic on Route 412 serves as a barrier to non-vehicular access and deters people from entering the neighborhood. Designs were developed to enhance connections to the Lynn Avenue Bridge and East 4th Street.

4. Although the Skateplaza is a major amenity to the neighborhood, improvements could expand its profile to a broader range of users. Development is underway for a gathering area with seating, shade structures, landscaping, a concession stand and restrooms.
**FORCOMING PROJECTS**

**Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation (LVEDC)**

**Targeted Business Marketing Strategy**

LVEDC will develop a comprehensive, action-oriented three-year marketing plan to capitalize on the strengths of the Lehigh Valley to attract targeted industries to the region. The plan will focus on key industry clusters and target markets. The plan will provide a framework for strategic outreach, including industry intelligence, outreach/engagement campaigns, marketing communications, and evaluation/monitoring. The plan will be completed by December 2014.

**Allentown Downtown Plan**

The City of Allentown will conduct an engineering and traffic study to determine the feasibility of a roundabout for this key intersection. The study will also include consideration of other intersections within the Little Lehigh Parkway corridor. The plan is scheduled to be completed by December 2014.

**Lehigh Valley Transportation Authority (LVT)**

The Eastern Strategy Committee and the City of Bethlehem will prepare a plan for real estate development at a targeted location. The plan will be completed by December 2014.

**Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley (CACLV)**

A “minority report” will be developed that will assess disparities in the Lehigh Valley and issue recommendations for eliminating barriers to fair housing choices. The plan will be completed by December 2014.

**LVPC’s Regional Analysis of Impediments (RAI) for Fair Housing**

LVPC will work to foster effective fair housing strategies through development of a Model Fair Housing Ordinance. Fair housing is a fundamental civil right that must be maintained, and the LVPC recognizes that it is not uncommon for those with disabilities to be disproportionately impacted. The plan will be completed by December 2014.

**Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation (LVEDC)**

**Allentown Front and Hamilton Street Roundabout Feasibility Study**

The City of Allentown will conduct an engineering and traffic study to determine the feasibility of a roundabout for this key intersection. The study will also include consideration of other intersections within the Little Lehigh Parkway corridor. The plan is scheduled to be completed by December 2014.

**Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley (CACLV)**

The City of Bethlehem, in conjunction with consultant Urban Matrix, is preparing a new Comprehensive Plan for the city. The existing Comprehensive Plan dates to 1997, a time when the city’s economy was quite different. Since then, the city has witnessed millions of dollars of investment and dynamic regional acclaim for its Arts, culture, travel and tourism activities and form, environmentally responsible development and complete neighborhoods. The Comprehensive Plan will strengthen the city’s role as the center of the surrounding communities. This effort has been ongoing since 2012, with over 800 individuals providing input on plan elements. A new Comprehensive Plan will be available for public comment in late 2014, with projected adoption by City Council in January 2015.

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The City of Allentown will conduct an engineering and traffic study to determine the feasibility of a roundabout for this key intersection. The study will also include consideration of other intersections within the Little Lehigh Parkway corridor. The plan is scheduled to be completed by December 2014.

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Chapter 6 - COMPREHENSIVE PLAN – MAKING THE LINKS

The previous four chapters summarized a variety of documents created by the Lehigh Valley Sustainability Consortium partners. Each summary includes a text box titled “One Plan Many Voices – Informing the Comprehensive Plan”. Within this text box is a discussion of how the individual study links to the current goals of the Comprehensive Plan and creates ideas for new goals. Given the diversity of the studies, they inform the Comprehensive Plan in different ways as follows:

• LVPC-initiated reports that generate significant new “elements” to the Comprehensive Plan on subjects either previously unaddressed or covered in much less detail (Climate + Energy, Return on Environment, Regional Housing).

• A carefully focused report from a partner that will help refine the most relevant goals within the Comprehensive Plan (LVEDC, LANta, Buy Fresh Buy Local).

• Catalytic project sponsored by the three cities, which, by nature of the physical development endorsed through the project, explores themes that can sharpen the Comprehensive Plan’s goals (Allentown’s Re-industrialization, Bethlehem’s Eastern Gateway, Easton’s 13th Street).

• An initiative that integrates public involvement and brings into focus the needs of underrepresented communities (Envision/CACLV/RenewLV Public Participation), further informing Comprehensive Plan goals.

By assembling all these reports into this summary document and making the link to the Comprehensive Plan, the LVPC has translated the documents into an additional set of goals for the Comprehensive Plan. The update to the Comprehensive Plan will influence the LVPC’s decision on issues of regional concern, and it will help influence the 63 municipalities in the Lehigh Valley (cities, boroughs and townships) to develop their own planning and legislation in support of greater sustainability. Ultimately, the update to the Comprehensive Plan will demonstrate sensitivity to HUD’s Six Livability Principles and will look deeper into the additional goals to layer-in policies and implementation strategies for moving forward.
ECONOMY
ENVIROMENT
TRANSPORTATION
LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

GOALS
Presented below are the additional Livability Principles. For each goal, the assigned icon shows the further linkage to the Livability Principles.

**ECONOMY**

**EQUITY**

**SUSTAINABILITY**

**LIVABILITY**

**ECONOMY**

**ENVIROMENT**

**TRANSPORTATION**

**LIVABLE COMMUNITIES**

**G1** To build a pipeline of highly skilled workers that is aligned with the current and future needs of regional employers by creating stronger linkages between employers, education and workforce training.

**G2** To support economic development strategies to target industry sectors that match the unique competitive advantages of the region.

**G3** To improve the capability and availability of a local workforce to take advantage of employment opportunities in the most high-growth and high-wage manufacturing sectors.

**G4** To promote energy efficiency and natural resource conservation within existing and new buildings and land development.

**G5** To encourage alternatives to automobile use, both motorized and non-motorized.

**G6** To support the diversification of energy sources.

**G7** To advocate increased energy conservation and efficiency awareness.

**G8** To protect, conserve and enhance natural ecosystems to provide long-term resilience to climate change.

**G9** To protect public infrastructure from potentially harmful impacts associated with climate change.

**G10** To protect residents, property and critical facilities from natural hazards as evolving over time due to climate change.

**G11** To create a land use pattern that helps to mitigate climate change impacts through a compact urban development area, mixed land uses, higher densities in urban areas and through preserving land for agricultural and environmental purposes.

**G12** To provide building and site design practices that help to mitigate climate change impacts.

**G13** To reduce Lehigh Valley greenhouse gas emissions from residences, government operations and businesses.

**G14** To identify, support and implement market and needs-based solutions that provide ready access to nutritious and healthy food choices in the region’s areas of limited food access.

**G15** To support alternative agricultural strategies suitable for areas with high existing levels of development.

**G16** To strengthen regional food systems by linking food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management to facilitate development and consumption of the Lehigh Valley’s food resources.

**G17** To encourage the implementation of programs that mentor new farmers and those interested in farming.
To consider the dollar benefits to the public versus expenditures in open space preservation decisions.

To encourage specialized pedestrian design techniques to facilitate convenient access to transit in areas recommended for urban development, according to the Comprehensive Plan.

To improve development density and transit services along corridors designated by LANta as enhanced bus/bus rapid transit, to make them more convenient for work and school-related trips, and by minimizing on-board and wait times, in areas recommended for urban development, according to the Comprehensive Plan.

To accommodate as many users and uses as possible on rights-of-way, with special consideration to multi-modal access (bicycle, pedestrians, transit) and intersections that are clear and safe for both motorists and other users.

To integrate stormwater best management practices in the form of blue-green infrastructure into the design of new or improved rights-of-way.

To strive for livable mixed income neighborhoods throughout the Lehigh Valley that collectively reflect the diversity of housing types, tenures and income levels of the region.

To promote the creation of a range of housing types, prices and rents to foster culturally and economically diverse neighborhoods, which allow households to find new housing that meets changing needs within their existing community.

To ensure opportunities for the development or rehabilitation of homes with basic amenities or design features to guarantee housing for low income households or members of protected classes.

To consider the impact of regulations and fees in the balance between housing affordability and other objectives, such as environmental quality, urban design, maintenance of neighborhood character and the protection of public health, safety and welfare.

To improve regulatory clarity and predictability that will encourage infill and redevelopment.

To promote and maintain suitable living environments and housing.

To promote the orderly development of new, well-planned residential environments.

To promote job growth in the immediate vicinity of redevelopment projects through strategic alliances with local entrepreneurs.

To promote redevelopment strategies that account for the existing local culture, either in the form of preservation or compatibility with the existing character of the surroundings.

To promote and maintain suitable living environments and housing.

To promote the orderly development of new, well-planned residential environments.
The Lehigh Valley Sustainable Communities project began with high expectations regarding collaboration, technical plans and studies, public participation and additions to the Comprehensive Plan to foster a more livable, sustainable Valley. Those expectations can be met and possibly exceeded through the creation, adoption and implementation of the individual plans and studies, as well as the creation of the updated Comprehensive Plan by the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission. The technical plans and studies themselves provide implementation ideas for the organizations responsible for their creation—some of these ideas already in motion through the “catalytic” projects in the cities and other partner efforts. The 1LV document translates this impressive body of work into goals across the spectrum of topics studied—goals that will address the update of the Comprehensive Plan as a key part of the initiative. These goals will be used by the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission and Consortium partners to guide development, redevelopment and preservation efforts into the future. 1LV also relates the goals to HUD’s Six Livability Principles that form the foundation for the Sustainable Communities effort. In the end, the Lehigh Valley Sustainable Communities initiative achieved an unprecedented level of collaboration among the Consortium partners, established an impressive benchmark for public participation and inclusion of traditionally marginalized populations, and set the Lehigh Valley on a fresh course towards sustainability. Through the continuing Consortium partner efforts, combined with the work of the hundreds of other organizations to be involved in implementation and public engagement, the Sustainable Communities initiative and the updated Comprehensive Plan will demonstrate that we are ONE LEHIGH VALLEY.
NOTE: SNAP-eligible groceries must meet one of the following criteria:

- Transit stops GIS layers, Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
- Retailers by State April 2014, Schools (all public, private, including colleges and universities) and LANta

CREDIT: U.S. Census, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

GRAPHIC: Schools and grocery stores within walking/biking distance

CREDIT: Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority, Lehigh Valley Planning Commission

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- Natural resources: conservation priority
- Riparian buffer in riparian buffer corridor

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- Riparian buffer in riparian buffer corridor

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- School boards and school districts
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- Strong manufacturing industries

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