

A New Class of Citizen Planners

More than 70 public officials, professional planners and private citizens gathered this fall on a shared mission to learn more about how their community is run.

All of them came to take classes at the Lehigh Valley Government Academy (LVGA), but a select few were recognized as Certified Citizen Planners during the January Lehigh Valley Planning Commission (LVPC) meeting for completing more than 30 hours of LVGA courses.

LVGA courses are tailored to train local planning commissioners, zoning administrators, zoning hearing board members, elected officials and anyone with an interest in planning about their roles, responsibilities and rights.

“We’d like to recognize the efforts of our Lehigh Valley Government academy graduates,” LVPC Chairman Stephen Repasch said during the January 31 Commission meeting. “These folks have put in a lot of hours and gone above and beyond the call.”

To be eligible, participants had to complete three of the four courses offered at the academy. Available courses are Community Planning, Subdivision and Land Development Review, Zoning, and Zoning Administration.

“Most of these students are people with day jobs and busy family lives, yet they took time out of their schedules to learn more about their community,” Tracy Oscavich, LVPC Director of Development, said before the Citizen Planner certificates were awarded Thursday. “It’s so important that our municipal officials understand their leadership role. We are honored to recognize that passion and commitment.”

LVPC offers the courses in partnership with the Pennsylvania Municipal Planning Education Institute (PMPEI). It’s the only program of its type that spells out the legal obligations of municipal officials who serve on volunteer boards and commissions. These volunteer positions are key to maintaining the quality of life locally and regionally by balancing growth and development with infrastructure, educational, recreational, environment and other needs.

The Certified Citizen Planner recipients were:

Lowhill Township Manager **Brian Carl**, Bethlehem Township Supervisors **Malissa Davis** and **John Gallagher**, Pen Argyl Borough Planning Commissioner **Jeffrey Fox**, Upper Macungie Township Planning Commissioner **Prabodh “Sunny” Ghai**, Lower Nazareth Township Planning & Zoning Administrator **Lori B. Seese**, Upper Milford Township Office Assistant **Kyle Walbert**, LVPC Commissioner **Pamela Pearson**, and LVPC staff members **Dharam Paul Nohar** and **Jon von Kerczek**.

Three other students who were previously named Citizen Planners, were recognized by PMPEI for attending all four classes, logging more than 40 hours of instruction. They are **Pearson**, Polk

Township, Monroe County Zoning Officer **Justin Burkner** and Upper Macungie Township Planning Commissioner **Makala Ashmar**.

Overall, 233 people have taken LVGA classes since 2014, including 53 who earned the distinction of Certified Citizen Planner.

Information about the 2019 LVGA course schedule can be found at <http://lvpc.org/lvga.html>