

Proposed Development Remained Busy Through The Pandemic

Developers proposed more than 2,000 new homes and nearly 4 million square feet of non-residential space in the first half of 2020, extending the region's busy development period into a seventh consecutive year.

Despite a pandemic that slowed the economy and shuttered many business, investors continued to show confidence in the region, filing 196 plans on more than 1,800 acres of property from January through June, according to the LVPC's BuildLV Subdivision and Land Development Six-Month Report.

"More than 2,000 new housing units in the first six months is a big number, and nearly half of them are single-family detached, which is a housing type that took a break for several years after the recession," Becky Bradley, LVPC Executive Director, told commission members. "You can see that despite everything, it has been absolutely hopping."

Single-family detached homes dominated the region's new home development in the first decade of the century, but apartments have been the preferred choice of developers the past six years. However, the first half of 2020 featured a more balanced mix in which detached homes outnumbered apartments for the first time since 2013.

Overall, 2,036 new homes were proposed, consisting of 942 single-family detached, 795 apartments, 123 row homes, 108 condominiums, 40 planned residential units and 28 twins.

Of those homes, 554 have already been approved, nearly matching the 574 approved homes approved for development in the first half of 2019.

For non-residential, 3.98 million square feet of space has been proposed, including 2.2 million square feet of warehouse space, 596,068 square feet of public/quasi-public space, 407,119 square feet for office, 406,000 square feet for commercial use, 41,928 of retail space and 20,160 square feet for agricultural use.

Of that nearly 4 million square feet, about 1.5 million square feet have been approved, with the rest still working through the approval process.

And July started the second half of the year just as busy, with 534 new homes and nearly 2 million square feet of non-residential space proposed in just one month.

Bradley noted that it's been a rare year in which the number of development plans are outpacing the minor lot line adjustment plans, but with that kind of activity comes challenges. The plans propose using 1821 acres of land, of which 826 is in Northampton County and 995 is in Lehigh County. It should be noted that not every proposed plan makes it to approval, and those that do are sometimes altered in size and scope. However, if anything approaching that number is approved, it would be the most acreage used since before the recession began in late 2007, which ended a string of six consecutive year in which more than 3,000 new homes – most of them single-family detached – were approved. *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*, adopted in 2019, calls for denser, more walkable neighborhoods, enabling the region to preserve the natural resources, farmland and open space that have come to define the region.

“The number of acres proposed is also a big number that will put pressure our efforts to protect farmland and open space,” Bradley said “And its really everywhere, from the urban core, to suburban communities to boroughs and even rural townships. We expect that a high number of plans to be filed through the end of the year.”

The LVPC's 2020 BuildLV full year report will be available early next year. The Mid-Year Report, Monthly BuildLV Snapshots and past BuildLV reports can be found at <https://www.lvpc.org/subdivision---development.html>