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LVPC Celebrating 60 Years of Growth and Resiliency

The concept seems so simple now, but the idea that planning would be more effective if we did it as a single region, rather than two separate counties, was actually rather innovative in 1961.

That concept would soon yield Pennsylvania's first metropolitan area plan and helped guide one of the state's most consistently growing regions through seminal changes that have included Route 22 becoming one of the state's busiest roads, two housing booms that reshaped the region and most recently the Lehigh Valley's place as one of the nation's most important freight corridors.

As the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission celebrates its 60th anniversary, a look back over time reveals an extraordinary history of planning accomplishments, strengthened by regional and local collaboration and public engagement. Since its formation, the LVPC's primary focus has been promoting the health, safety and general welfare of the region's residents through its planning efforts and establishing relationships with local communities and stakeholders.

This regional effort didn't happen all at once. In January 1961, Lehigh and Northampton counties established individual county planning commissions, consisting of nine members each, for the purpose of preparing their county comprehensive plans. As each commission began to develop a planning program, the counties recognized that it would be ineffective to plan independently, leading to the formation of the Joint Planning Commission (JPC) of Lehigh and Northampton Counties in the summer of 1961.

It wasn't until 1967, when organizational changes were required by federal mandate, that the two county planning commissions were dissolved and the JPC became the sole regional planning agency. To ensure representation across all of the region's municipalities, membership increased to 29 members that included municipal elected officials and county representatives, before it was later expanded to 37, with the addition of citizen representatives.

During the 1960s, the main objective of the JPC was to prepare a regional comprehensive plan for the growth and development of the area. Adopted in 1964, this was the first metropolitan area plan to be adopted in Pennsylvania. During this time, the Lehigh Valley Transportation Study (LVTS) was also formed to maintain a transportation planning process necessary for the region to be eligible for federal transportation funding. That was followed by the adoption of the region's first long-range transportation plan. In the spirit of collaboration, the JPC began to provide planning assistance for local municipal planning projects, an effort that remains central to the Commission today.

Recognizing the interrelationships between land development planning and social conditions, the JPC became active in social planning during the 1970s and established working relationships with major social planning agencies, such as the Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley. Significant projects completed during this decade included numerous housing studies and regional storm drainage, solid waste management and recreation and open space plans. Even as the 1980s ushered in a housing boom that saw nearly 5,000 homes approved in 1989 alone, expanding regional efforts included the development of stormwater

management plans through the 1990s for 12 of the region's 15 watersheds, with the remaining three developed later. In 1994, the Local Government Academy—now renamed the Lehigh Valley Government Academy—was created to promote intergovernmental cooperation and educational opportunities for municipal officials. Then in 1997, to further emphasize a united region, the Joint Planning Commission changed its name to the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission (LVPC). Major accomplishments in planning continued in the 2000s, including working with the counties to create Pennsylvania's first regional hazard mitigation plan, collaborating with municipalities on multi-municipal comprehensive plans, and preparing a series of model regulations focused on providing communities with best practices on environmental, housing and land preservation issues. That happened all while guiding a second housing boom in which more than 27,000 new homes were approved by the time the Great Recession began at the close of 2007.

In the decade beginning in 2010, the LVPC's engagement with the community accelerated as the organization launched its social media platforms, rebranded the LVPC and overhauled its website, all during 2013. In 2014, the region's first climate change goals and policies were established in the LVPC's Climate + Energy Element. It marked a progressive decade that included developing the groundbreaking regional sustainable communities plan 1LV, crafting a \$2.5 billion Long-Range Transportation Plan, measuring the real dollar value of our environment with the region's first-ever Return on Environment report, developing the first regional freight plan, creating the first *WalkLV: Sidewalk Inventory* and beginning an annual celebration of municipal planning with the creation of the Lehigh Valley Gala + Awards. The decade closed with the adoption of *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*, one of the nation's first plans linking land use planning policy with transportation funding, setting a blueprint that guides the Lehigh Valley to 2045 and beyond. Now, the LVPC and LVTS look toward a future in which the region makes the most of its many assets to create a Lehigh Valley where everyone has access to health, opportunity and a livable neighborhood.