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Executive Director

LEHIGH VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION

Minutes from the Thursday, 22nd 2021 Meeting

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the LVPC held a virtual public meeting on Thursday July 22nd, 2021. The meeting was advertised in the Lehigh Valley Press on Thursday July 8th, 2021.

Mr. Zebrowski chaired the meeting.

Ms. Amofah took Roll Call.

Members in Attendance:

Lehigh County

Percy Dougherty, Bob Elbich, Steven Glickman, Michael Harakal, Kent Herman, Jamie Johnson, Joyce Moore, Christina Morgan, Owen O'Neil, Stephen Repasch, and Kevin Schmidt.

Northampton County

Christopher Amato, Malissa Davis, Liesel Dreisbach, Andrew Elliott, Charles Elliott, Susan Lawless, William McGee, John McGorry, Stephen Melnick, Pamela Pearson, Tina Smith and Greg Zebrowski.

Members Absent:

Lehigh County

Philip Armstrong, Geoff Brace, Mike Gibson, Ce-Ce Gerlach, Leonard Lightner, Richard Molchany, Ray O'Connell, Kathy Rader and Joshua Seigel.

Northampton County

Janell Connolly, Robert Donchez, Darlene Heller, Kevin Lott, Carl Manges, Lamont McClure, David O'Connell, Salvatore Panto, Spirit Rutzler and Gerald Yob.

Staff Present: Matt Assad, Becky Bradley, Tracy Oscavich, Brian Hite, Paul Carafides, Denjam Khadka, Craig Kackenmeister, Geoff Reese, Jill Seitz, Samantha Smith and Yvonne Amofah

Public Present: Melissa Starace and Ted Strohl

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR

None

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Mr. Zebrowski welcomes New Team Members: Mr. Paul Carafides, Director of Transportation Planning and Data and Mr. Denjam Khadka, Senior Civil/Stormwater Engineer. Mr. Carafides and Mr. Khadka introduce themselves and provide a summary of their experience and qualifications, as well as sharing their gratitude to be a part of LVPC. Mr. Repasch shared his congratulations and further welcomes Mr. Carafides and Mr. Khadka. Mr. Zebrowski reads a summary of Mr. Hite's work history with LVPC and then congratulates him on his promotion to Transportation Planner. Mr. Zebrowski asked if anyone on the LVPC Commission has any questions for Brian. No Commission members had questions.

MINUTES

Mr. Zebrowski stated that the minutes of the Thursday June 24th, 2021 LVPC meeting are attached, and he then asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Dougherty made a motion to approve the minutes and to state that Mayor Harakal was present at that meeting (the mayor was mistakenly marked as absent). Mr. Melnick seconded the motion. The motion passed with Mr. Charles Elliott, Mr. Bob Elbich and Ms. Joyce Moore abstaining.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Comprehensive Planning Committee

ACTION ITEM: Kratzer Elementary School Addition - A Land Use of Regional Significance in South Whitehall Township.

Ms. Seitz reviewed a Land Use of Regional Significance in South Whitehall Township proposing to construct an 18,589-square-foot addition to the existing Kratzer School (2200 Huckleberry Road). The proposal exhibits consistency with *FutureLV* because it is located in the Development area of the General Land Use Plan and serves to 'enhance the long-term viability of assets' (of Policy 1.3). The LVPC strongly encourages educational institutions to incorporate sustainable practices into facility design to 'reduce climate change impacts through mitigation and adaptation' (Policy 3.4). Ms. Seitz asks Commission members if they have any questions. No question were asked of Ms. Seitz. Mr. Zebrowski asked the Commission to make a motion to accept the staff comments. Mr. Elbich makes the motion, Ms. Moore seconded the motion. Motion passes with Ms. Morgan abstaining.

ACTION ITEM: Lafayette College: Markle Hall Parking Deck - A Land Use of Regional Significance in the City of Easton.

Ms. Seitz reviewed a Land Use of Regional Significance in the City of Easton proposing to demolish an existing parking structure and redevelop the site with a larger parking deck and related improvements. The project is located on North Campus Lane between Fisher Stadium to the north and Markle Hall to the south. The proposal exhibits consistency with *FutureLV* because it supports 'reuse of vacant and underutilized properties' (of Policy 5.4) and increasing parking capacity to serve Lafayette College supports expanding access to education and job training (of Policy 4.1). Ms. Seitz states that after conversations about sustainability at the comprehensive planning committee meeting, Commissioner Manges reached out to the engineer to find out if they have any solar initiative planned for this project. The engineer informed the Commissioner that the solar panels were considered for the parking desk project but were found to be impractical. Mr. Zebrowski asked if there are any comments or questions. Mr. Glickman asked Jill "you said this was in a historic district"? Is it local or national district? Ms. Seitz states that it's a national district. Mr. Zebrowski thanks Commissioner Manges for his inquiry with engineer. Mr. Zebrowski also commends Lafayette college for trying to use solar panels, even though it was not

possible. Mr. Zebrowski calls for a motion to accept staff comments. A motion was made by Mr. McGee and seconded by Ms. Pearson. Motion passes with Mr. Charles Elliott abstaining.

ACTION ITEM: Lafayette College: Temporary Parking Lot - A Land Use of Regional Significance in the City of Easton.

Ms. Seitz reviewed a Land Use of Regional Significance in the City of Easton proposing to construct a temporary parking lot to serve Lafayette College at the block bounded by McCartney Street, Marquis Street, Clinton Terrace and March Street. The proposal is located at the site of the previously submitted McCartney Street Housing and Wellness Center proposed by Lafayette College and exhibited consistency with *FutureLV* when reviewed by the LVPC in June last year. This project is associated with the parking deck proposal we just saw, serving as temporary parking while the parking deck is constructed. The LVPC commends the dual use of this site to meet parking needs of Lafayette College prior to beginning construction on the previously proposed development, which supports reuse and redevelopment in an urban area (of Policy 1.1), while 'capitalizing on existing infrastructure' (Policy 2.2). No questions were asked of Ms. Seitz. Mr. Zebrowski asked the Commission to make a motion to accept staff comments. Ms. Moore makes the motion, seconded by Ms. Dreisbach. Motion passes with Mr. Charles Elliott abstaining.

ACTION ITEM: Readington Farms - Land Use of Regional Significance – Upper Macungie Township.

Ms. Smith reviewed Land Use of Regional Significance in Upper Macungie Township, a 'local freight generator' proposing to subdivide a 48.2-acre lot from an existing parcel for the construction of a 273,471-square-foot food/dairy manufacturing facility at 8550 Main Street. The proposal is located within a Preservation Buffer of the General Land Use Plan, an area 'where factors may be present and capable of accommodating additional development' and additional planning analysis of development criteria is encouraged. The property is adjacent to Interstate 78 (I-78), near the interchange at State Route 100, where transportation improvements are being planned and coordinated. Based on these factors, the proposal exhibits consistency with *FutureLV*, though several outstanding issues exist as outlined in the review. Specifically, Ms. Smith reviewed the extensive presence of karsts in the form of surface depressions throughout the site and recommendations to increase landscape materials and incorporate sustainable systems. To ensure adequate stormwater capacity continues to remain available into the future – particularly as it relates to I-78 – continued coordination should include the LVPC, PennDOT, USDOT Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Lehigh County Authority and any other entities which may be appropriate. This proposal includes only the land development plan for Readington Farms and does not include any changes to the roadway network. Per the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, the LVPC is prepared to review future development proposals pertaining to roadway infrastructure. Improvements to the transportation network are crucial to managing impacts to Fogelsville, and to the success of not only this proposal but also to future expansion of I-78 and the potential Adams Road Interchange, which is currently included in a point of access study. A partner engagement meeting was held for this proposal earlier in the month. During the meeting, discussion included the potential to improve the plans based on stated concerns regarding pedestrian and transit access, electrical hook-ups and emergency access. The LVPC is encouraged that these recommendations are being thoroughly considered.

Mr. Zebrowski asked if there are any questions or comments. Mr. Dougherty recants his vote against this, made at the committee meeting, due to Ms. Smith giving a detailed presentation alleviating his previous objections. Mr. Melnick ask that the language in Ms. Smith's presentation be strengthened regarding geotechnical testing. Ms. Smith says she can strengthen the language. Mr. Zebrowski says the area is sinkhole prone. Mr. Repasch says there is a powerful drinking well there and questions the volume of wastewater. Mr. Reese says they are proposing a treatment facility on-

site to deal with the bio-chemical demands. Ms. Bradley says they need permission to run pipes under I-78 from the federal government and that the development will take a while for approval at the municipal level. Mr. Zebrowski calls for a motion to accept the staff comments. Mr. McGorry makes the motion, seconded by Mr. Elbich. Motion passes with no abstentions.

ACTION ITEM: Comprehensive Planning Committee Summary Sheet

Mr. Melnick presented the July Comprehensive Committee items with staff presenting information. Mr. Zebrowski says the 'Martin Tower' project is too car-centered, with not enough walking space. Mr. Zebrowski calls for a motion to accept the staffs' comments. Mr. Dougherty makes the motion, seconded by Ms. Dreisbach. Motion passes with Mr. Charles Elliott abstaining on the City of Easton item.

Environment Committee:

ACTION ITEM: Environment Committee Summary Sheet

Mr. Repasch stated that the Environment Committee Summary Sheet is in the packet for review. Mr. Zebrowski calls for a motion to accept the staff comments. Mr. Repasch makes the motion, seconded by Mr. Melnick. Motion passes with no abstentions.

Transportation Committee:

ACTION ITEM: Street Vacation, Portion of Mason Street, City of Allentown

Mr. Herman presented the Street Vacation for a portion of Mason Street in the City of Allentown. Mr. Hite makes comments. The proposed Street Vacation for the unopened portion of Mason Street from South Jute Street and South 4th Street also known as State Route 145 in the City of Allentown was submitted by Michael P. Hanlon of the City of Allentown on behalf of the petitioner LLT Property, LLC of 1902 South 4th Street, Allentown PA 18103. Currently this portion of Mason Street is inaccessible to vehicular traffic due to the elevated construction of the existing parking lot retaining wall on the west side of 1902 South 4th Street at Jute Street. The petitioner explains this section of Mason Street is being utilized by LLT Property, LLC and serves no public purpose. The proposed plan submitted for recommendations under Section 304 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code was reviewed for general consistency with the intent of *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*. Street vacation requests require all abutting property owners to agree to the street vacation, along with the City of Allentown. LLT Property, LLC, through their legal representatives did attempt to contact the adjacent property at 1869 South 5th Street owned by AutoZone Inc of Memphis TN on March 3, 2021, and February 25, 31 2021, to get their concurrence with no response to date. The transportation review of proposed street vacation does not appear in conflict with any proposed transportation plans. Mr. Herman on behalf of the Transportation Committee makes the motion to accept the staff review as presented, pending any further discussion. Mr. Zebrowski asks for any questions or comments. There were none. Mr. Repasch seconded the motion. Motion passes with no abstentions.

Old Business:

FOLLOW-UP REQUEST: RAISE Grant Application for Riverside Drive Letters of Support

Riverside Drive USDOT RAISE grant request. Mrs. Oscavich noted the Executive Summary of the grant request on page 29 of the packet. Mrs. Oscavich indicated the LVPC has applied for the United States Department of Transportation, Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant on July 12th. The Riverside Drive Multimodal Revitalization Corridor is a 3-mile transformation creating a robust, multimodal commuting, emergency management and equitable access corridor stretching from the City of Allentown through Whitehall Township. The driving theme behind this shovel-ready project is providing safe, healthy and efficient transportation mode choices by connecting roadways, transit, sidewalks and trails into a more equitable and sustainable system. Mrs. Oscavich asked the

Commission to tell USDOT to support this project by visiting RAISERiversideDrive.com and click on the “Show your support” button to send the letter directly. Mr. Zebrowski asks Mrs. Oscavich when we will know the outcome. She says around Thanksgiving.

INFORMATION ITEMS: Activity Reports

Mid-Year Subdivision, Land Development, Stormwater and Municipal Ordinance/Plans and Traffic Reports

Ms. Bradley presents comments. In June we saw 17 Subdivisions, 23 Development proposals, 6 reviews for Stormwater Management, and 5 Municipal Ordinances and Maps for a total of 51 reviews. Aside from subdivisions and lot line adjustments, residential development made up the bulk of those reviews, with 679 total housing units proposed in June. Apartment proposals were especially high at 469 units, the most we have seen in a month so far this year. Single-family detached units were up there, too, at 184 units, and we saw 24 new townhouses and two twin dwelling units proposed. About half of the apartment proposals are located in Allentown and the City of Bethlehem, and many of the apartment, single-family detached, and townhouse units are in Upper Macungie. However, on the non-residential side, proposals were fairly low in June with a total at just under 189,000 square feet. About half of that is from Public/Quasi-Public investments by health care facilities. We had only 51,600 industrial square feet, 6,500 retail, a little over 9,000 of commercial and a little under 9,000 of office space. Lastly, in the agricultural category we saw a final plan for a 20,160-square-foot duck barn in Weisenberg Township. While non-residential numbers were low for June, these bring us to the mid-year point, so wait until you see how all these month-to-month numbers add up so far in 2021.

We're past the midway point for the year, so we have the six-month BuildLV report to present, and the theme for the first half of the year is more. As in more housing, and more industrial proposals than we've seen in a long time, but also more diversity – and that's a good thing. Overall, our reviews included 79 minor lot line adjustments and 145 development proposals. That's a total of 224 subdivision and development reviews, compared to 189 last year at this time. We also did 80 reviews for stormwater management and 26 for municipal ordinances. Those are about on pace with last year's totals. One thing well ahead of last year's pace is our housing numbers.

There were 2,545 housing units proposed. That's more than 500 more units above what was proposed in a very busy 2020. And it can't come soon enough because, as we've been detailing all year, our housing market is overheated. That number includes 932 single-family detached homes, 413 townhouses, 1,122 apartments, 58 twins and 20 condos. That townhouse number is more than triple last year's number. So, you can attribute virtually all of this year's increases to the additional 290 townhouses and 327 apartments over last year. Of note on the residential side of things is a 400-unit development proposed in Lower Macungie Township, and the fact that there has been very few large housing developments this year. Most were smaller community infill projects, the type that 40 are recommended by *FutureLV*.

On the non-residential side, we had roughly 7.1 million square feet square feet of proposed development, and not surprisingly more than 75% of it was for warehouse and distribution space. If that seems like a lot, it's because it is. The 5.5 million square feet of warehouse space is more than twice what we had by this time last year. We've had several large warehouse proposals, including multiple projects in Forks Township in what continues to be an evolving industrial park there, and one we've talked about several times here – the first project in River Pointe Logistics Center in Upper Mount Bethel Township.

Other non-residential included 433,298 square feet of commercial, 151,801 square feet of office, 148,499 of public/quasi-public, and 33,863 square feet of retail. We had 115,623 square feet of transportation development, and while that number doesn't rival those giant industrial numbers, it involves some pretty interesting stuff. It includes portions of the Riverside Drive project in Allentown on the developer's site itself, a proposal for a new paratransit facility for LANTA, improvements at the security checkpoints at LVIA, and new parking garages in Allentown and Bethlehem. So, this year has included lots of encouraging development and more diversity in new housing proposals, but if there's one number, we'll have to keep close watch on, it's the acreage being used. That was dropping for years but came in at 2,779 acres for the first six months. That's nearly 1,000 more acres more than by mid-year 2020. And as it turned out, 2020 really got busy late and closed with more than 4,600 acres, so we'll be keeping an eye on the number of acres proposed for development as this year progresses. As we've noted several times during this Pandemic, the comparison even to the early part of the Pandemic in 2020 remains fair because while much of the world shut down, proposals didn't slow down during that period for us. I think it's safe to say, we can expect more of the same for the remainder of 2021 and beyond. Mr. Zebrowski asks the Commission if they have any question. No questions.

Highway Traffic Monitoring

Mr. Carafides and Mr. Hite presented a mid-year review of the Traffic Count Data. The Traffic Count Data for years 2019, 2020 and 2021 were compared at multiple locations including Interstate 78 and Route 33. In all cases, due to the pandemic, there was a significant drop in passenger vehicles during 2020. However, during the same time truck traffic increased year over year. This is consistent with the continued rise in e-commerce and industrial development in the Region. In conclusion, Mr. Hite stated that Traffic Count Data will continue to be a critical element of our planning for our transportation networks and sustainability.

New Business:

INFORMATION ITEM: Draft Community Guidance on Personal Shooting Ranges

Ms. Bradley presents the draft Community Guidance Memo on Personal Shooting Ranges. Ms. Bradley reviews the reasoning behind the guidance document, a Commonwealth Court case – with the potential to impact planning and zoning decisions statewide – regarding a Stroud Township in Monroe County and a property owner's right to discharge firearms as a personal shooting range. There is a Monroe County property owner who took Stroud Township to court over a zoning permit application denial for a personal shooting range. On the basis that his denial was a violation of his constitutional second amendment rights. So, after moving through the county court system then up to the Commonwealth in May. The Commonwealth Court decided in favor of the property owner. So basically, the court ruled that the Township did not meet its burden under the immediate scrutiny standard to justify an outright ban on personal shooting ranges at a person's residence because it did not establish that the ordinance does not burden more conduct than is reasonably necessary. Ok so what does all that mean? It means that somewhere in every community personal shooting ranges will need to be allowed, unless the community is part of a multi-municipal plan, then the group of communities will need to determine where this use should be allowed. At the end of the day there is already a lot of types of shooting ranges all over the Commonwealth and certainly in Northampton and Lehigh counties. So, we quickly put together things to think about. We're going to do a little bit more research on this and get this out to the communities later this year as part of the all-community General Assembly. But if you do have an outdoor range, that's a lot different than an indoor range. If your range is located in an urban environment, it's a whole lot different than a suburban environment. If it's a business or a gun club that's different than personal. Once you start regulating one type of shooting range, communities will need to think through regulations for a

variety of types of shooting ranges. Mr. Zebrowski asks does anyone have any question? No question asked.

INFORMATION ITEM: Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection Local Climate Action Program

Mr. Zebrowski said the next item on the agenda is the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection Local Climate Action Program presented by Ms. Oscavich. Good news to report today. On July 1, we were notified that we were accepted into the PA Department of Environmental Protection Local Climate Action Program! The program provides technical assistance to help create a Lehigh Valley greenhouse gas inventory and then enhance climate action planning. We are awaiting full details of the program from DEP. We will keep the Commission updated on the details as they are available, but we wanted to share the good news that the counties and all 62 municipalities will be working towards a more robust climate action strategy over the next year to two. We'll be coordinating with many communities and non-profit partners over the planning process and the two counties will be leadership, as well. Mr. Zebrowski asks the Commission if anyone has any questions. No questions.

Executive Director's Report

None.

Communications, Public Engagement and Participation:

INFORMATION ITEM: The Mid-Year Web Report

Mr. Kackenmeister presented about the Mid-Year Website Report. The LVPC website is one of our best tools in getting all of the important data and information to the public. The short answer for why our web traffic is staying strong is DataLV and FutureLV. DataLV had over 6,200 views and FutureLV garnered more than 1,900 page views. The DataLV Housing page had the most page views for a landing page with just over 2,500 views, thanks to the Jobs + Housing At Risk analysis in partnership with the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia. We also updated the Lehigh Valley housing attainability and impacts to Lehigh Valley School Districts. Finally, the 48 updates of the regional housing market report, which not includes the latest Housing and Sales rental activity, rounded out the new data released in early 2021. Other pages in the top 10 list of most views include two of our new pages, Subdivision + Land Development Online Application page and the About Us landing page, along with old standards like our staff listing – which is how people reach us by phone and email. There are also likely quite a few hits that we don't see here. I'm quite certain that Becky's monthly column gets hundreds and maybe thousands of hits every month, but those are collected by the Morning Call's website, rather than ours. Mr. Zebrowski asks the Commission if there are any questions, no questions.

INFORMATION ITEM: Morning Call Business Cycle Column

Mr. Assad summarized the last Business Cycle column, which published Sunday, July 18. He explained that the column, by Ms. Bradley, detailed how targeted investments such as the \$1.4 million in Transportation Alternative Set-Aside (TASA) grants and taking the Local Technical Assistance Program into the field to help municipalities can have a big impact in the community by educating students, improving safety and promoting a healthy community. Mr. Assad also explained that the programs were designed to foster a linkage between health and transportation and the column gives readers details on how they could help the region earn a \$23 million federal grant to

help build a key three-mile commuter trail and road from the Allentown's waterfront to Whitehall Township.

INFORMATION ITEM: Monthly, Plan Lehigh Valley Talk Show on WDIY, Lehigh Valley Public Radio, 88.1!

Mr. Assad summarized the LVPC's recent Plan Lehigh Valley WDIY radio show that aired July 5. The show covering the LVPC's TASA and Tech Assist programs, and how they provide an important investment in the new vision for a healthy transportation system. Joining Ms. Bradley and Mr. Assad on the show were LVPC Transportation Planner Brian Hite, who provided expertise on the tech assist program, and Coalition for Appropriate Transportation Executive Director Scott Slingerland, who talked about using the TASA grant to provide bicycle safety and maintenance education to thousands of children across the region. Mr. Assad stated that the next Plan Lehigh Valley show will cover the BuildLV: Mid-Year development report, and will air August 2, on WDIY 88.1 FM. All of the past shows are currently streaming at wdiy.org.

INFORMATION ITEMS: Engagement and Participation

Mr. Assad announced that:

1. Local Technical Assistance Program - LTAP has a full schedule of virtual classes right into September, beginning July 27 with its Roadside Vegetation Control class. PennDOT has sort of settled into a rhythm with these virtual classes, scheduling about one a week. Most of them are from 8 am to noon, but you can see a few there are one-hour classes. As always, they're all free and you can still sign up at lvpc.org/ltap. Or call Brian Hite.
2. Two Transformative Talks scheduled for August. The first is something you all got a preview of tonight, the BuildLV Mid-Year Report: The Pressure of Development. It will be a deep dive into the rush of new housing and industrial development proposed in the first six months of the year, how it compares to recent years, and what it all means. We're scheduling that one for Friday, August 6, from noon to 1 pm, and you can sign up at lvpc.org/events. Transformative Talk titled Today's Planning: What Local Governments Need to Know. This is really something that can benefit every community, developers, engineers and really anyone who has to navigate the planning process. This will also be Thursday August 26, from noon to 1 p.m., and anyone can sign up for the virtual webinar at lvpc.org/events.
3. Lehigh Valley Government Academy: These will be our first in-person training of the year, so there will be social distancing and much smaller classes than we're used to having. Seating will be a max of 18, so seating is extremely limited. But we know these are very popular and it's really important that our next generation of community leaders have a place to learn how planning, development, zoning and local government work. We're starting with two classes. Community Planning will be on three consecutive Mondays, September 13, 20 and 27. And Zoning Administration will be three consecutive Wednesdays October 13, 20 and 27. All the classes tend to run from 5:30 pm to 9 pm, each evening. You can sign up online at LVPC.ORG.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Zebrowski stated that the next LVPC meeting is set to be virtual. Mr. Zebrowski asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting; Mr. Harakal made the motion. Ms. Moore seconded the motion. Mr. Zebrowski then adjourned the meeting.

Submitted by:
Becky Bradley, AICP, Executive Director and
Yvonne Amofah, Secretary

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