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LV Outlook 2022: Steady Growth Through 2050 and the Need to Manage It

The Lehigh Valley will continue decades of consistent growth, even as regions across Pennsylvania and the nation shrink. That’s going to bring more people, more development, more vehicles, and that always means more emissions.

That usually strengthens the economy, but it also means we’ll have to work even harder to manage our growth, create attainable housing, evolve our infrastructure and ultimately reduce our emissions. That was the story told by a raft of data released at our 9th Annual Lehigh Valley Outlook + Awards event, Nov. 15 at Lehigh University’s Iacocca Conference Center.

The first in-person Outlook since it went virtual during the COVID-19 Pandemic also crowned Easton as the 2022 Community of Distinction, given every year since 2014 to one municipality that demonstrates a strong commitment to planning excellence that is consistent with *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*. North Whitehall and Upper Saucon were honorees for Community of Distinction.

Also at the event, Lehigh Gap Nature Center interns Sherlyn Martinez and Donna Hanna were named the 2022 FutureLV Heroes, given each year to individuals or groups that show a commitment to FutureLV's environmental policies.

"We've all been through a lot these past three years – and even though we went through it together -- I'm so happy to finally be in the same room with you all again," LVPC Executive Director Becky Bradley said to more than 180 developers, engineers, municipal officials and community leaders from across the Lehigh Valley, during the event at Lehigh University's Iacocca Conference Center. "We've really missed doing this... It's all part of showing just how this region is evolving – something the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission, and its sister organization, the Lehigh Valley Transportation Study, have been doing since 1961."

Formerly an evening event, the Outlook went virtual the past two years to allow social distancing during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The 2022 event still included awards from the past, but also several data releases.

"Through data, [staff] are going to talk about why we have reason for such optimism, why we continue to grow, and why we're all going to have to work very hard to maintain the Lehigh Valley as one of the best places in the nation to grow a family or business," LVPC Board Chairman Steven L. Glickman said as he helped open the event.

The 2022 LV Outlook + Awards Included:

- **FutureLV Heroes Awards** -- Martinez and Hanna worked in the Lehigh Gap Nature Center's Color of Nature program on projects to protect the environment and promote conservation to elementary and middle school students. Both are pursuing careers in environmental conservation.
- **Community of Distinction** – Easton was crowned the 2022 Community of Distinction, with North Whitehall and Upper Saucon recognized as Honorees. Easton joins past winners Bethlehem, Bushkill Township, South Whitehall Township, Catasauqua Borough, Macungie Township and Plainfield township.
- **Population Data** – The Lehigh Valley will grow by 99,243 people by 2050, an increase of about 3,300 new residents a year, even as the reduction of the Baby Boomer generation causes other regions to shrink, according to an analysis by LVPC Economist and Data Scientist David Jan.
- **Development Data** -- Developers are on pace to propose more than 6,000 new homes and 25 million square feet of non-residential development, making this the busiest development year since 2006, according to LVPC Chief Community and Regional Planner Steve Neratko.
- **Housing Data** – Despite developers racing to build more homes, the Lehigh Valley housing shortage grew over the past two years, driving up prices, and assuring that prices will not fall as quickly as in other markets as the market cools. But rising interest rates are making it more difficult to afford a home in the region, as the same buyer who could afford a \$272,000 home last year at 2.65% interest, can only afford one costing \$160,000 today at 7.3%, according to analysis by LVPC Senior Community Planner Jill Seitz.
- **Traffic Data** – Route 22 is now used by more than 106,000 vehicles a day, making it easily the region's busiest highway. Interstate-78 with roughly 71,000 vehicles a day still carries the bulk of the region's trucks – more than 21,000 daily – but that will change as

more warehouse and housing development happens north of Route 22, according to analysis by Transportation Planner Brian Hite and Executive Director Bradley.

- **Greenhouse Gas Emissions** – The Lehigh Valley emits nearly 10 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) emissions, with 60% coming from industrial electricity and natural gas operations, and transportation and mobility sources. That's an average of roughly 14.6 metrics by every resident of the region. The region's growing population means total emission will go up, unless measures are taken soon to reduce emissions in every sector, according to an analysis by LVPC Regional Planner Julie Benco, in partnership with Moravian College and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.

That is just a fraction of the data released during the two-hour event, but more information, data and photos from the 2022 Lehigh Valley Outlook + Awards are available on the event page at lvpc.org/lv-awards.