



Lehigh Valley Planning Commission

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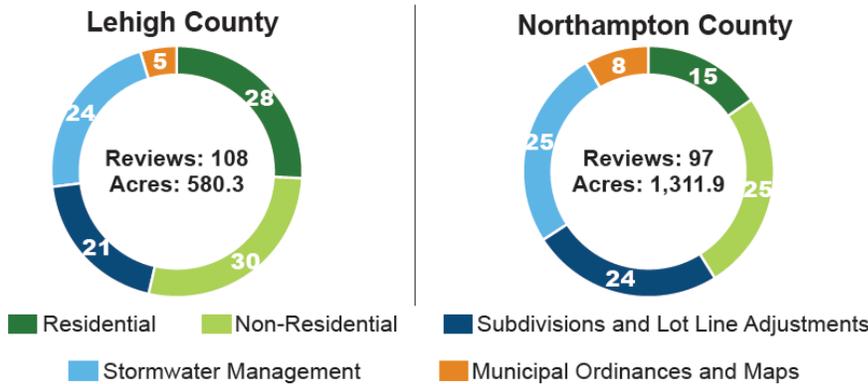
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BECKY A. BRADLEY, AICP
Executive Director



Plan Activity



Regional Totals*

Subdivision/Lot Line Adjustments	45
Development	98
Stormwater Management	49
Municipal Ordinances and Maps	13
Total Acres	1,892.2

* Includes preliminary and final plans

Development Surges As Communities Take Action

Dozens of communities are changing their official maps or zoning laws, 31 are making plans to work together to control development and the Leigh Valley is now working with four neighboring regions on a plan to control freight as it moves through Eastern Pennsylvania.

These are the responses to a Lehigh Valley development landscape that shows no signs of slowing, according to the first quarter data compiled by the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission.

In the first three months of the year, the LVPC reviewed plans for more than 1,300 new homes and 3.5 million square feet of non-residential proposals – most of it for new warehouse space. That puts the region on pace to match a 2021 development year that saw the most new home plan reviews since 2007 and more than 11 million square feet of new warehouse proposals.

The region’s growing place in our online shopping-driven economy has spurred the Lehigh Valley’s warehouse boom, while a monumental shortage in new homes for sale has developers racing to fill the void.

And rushing to meet them all are municipalities working to manage the growth coming their way.

“The number of businesses and people that want to move here has brought this region to a tipping point that forces us to make some difficult decisions about how we want to grow,” said LVPC Executive Director Becky Bradley. “I’m so encouraged by the number of municipal partners who are working with us to take a proactive approach toward deciding their future.”

Though the growth pressure on the region's 62 municipalities continued in the first quarter, there was plenty of reason for encouragement, particularly on the residential side. After a 2021 LVPC analysis showed the region about 10,000 available homes short of a healthy housing market, the 1,332 proposed in the first three months, and their diverse nature, will be welcome additions to the inventory. Single-family detached homes remain a staple, with 194 proposed, but the first quarter also included 735 apartments, 201 townhomes, 110 assisted-living units and 42 condominiums. That's more assisted living and condo units than were proposed in all of 2021.

The non-residential proposals included 2.87 million square feet of industrial, 95% of which was for warehouse space. Also proposed were 333,040 square feet of public/quasi public space – primarily for hospital expansions – 174,493 of commercial, 37,548 of office and 35,945 of retail space.

"This year is picking up right where 2021 left off, particularly for housing and industrial development," said LVPC Director of Regional Planning Dean Severson. "With the population and business growth this region is seeing, we expect that will continue through 2022 and beyond."

To help manage all that growth Lehigh Valley municipal leaders are organizing:

- **Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plans** – Four separate multi-municipal plans are underway, involving 31 communities who are working with the LVPC. Planning together will help them advance common priorities and find regional efficiency, but the greatest benefit may be taking greater control over development. By joining together, they can collectively share the responsibility of satisfying Pennsylvania's legal requirement to make room for every potential land use, rather than each community shouldering that burden. Therefore, if one part of the multi-municipal region is appropriate for warehouses, or office or any use, a municipality or group of municipalities can amend their zoning to allow them, while other can legally avoid them.
- **Municipal Ordinance and Map Changes** – Lehigh Valley communities made 52 amendments or changes to their planning and zoning laws, or officials maps in 2021 and another 13 changes were set in motion already in 2022. Those sometimes-complex amendments are being done to better manage the growth pressure each community is facing.
- **The Eastern Pennsylvania Freight Infrastructure Plan** -- The LVPC is spearheading the creation of the Eastern Pennsylvania Freight Alliance to build a multi-regional coalition to work with state and federal agencies to create a strategy to reduce freight's impact on the transportation network, land use, environment and ultimately quality of life in nearly 400 municipalities in the alliance. The five Metropolitan Planning Organizations joining together on the project are the Lehigh Valley Transportation Study (LVTS), Lackawanna-Luzerne Transportation Study (LLTS), Lebanon County Metropolitan Planning Organization (LEBCO), Northeast Pennsylvania Alliance (NEPA) and Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS).

Community and municipal leaders are also developing a plan to convince state legislators to modernize the Pennsylvania Municipalities Code to give municipalities more flexibility and

authority to manage development. That effort includes planners, attorneys, judges and community leaders from across the Lehigh Valley.