

Heidelberg Township  
Lowhill Township  
Lynn Township



# NORTHERN LEHIGH PLAN

Slatington Borough  
Washington Township  
Weisenberg Township

## The Northern Lehigh Multimunicipal Comprehensive Plan

March 2, 2021 at 5:30 pm

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic the meeting was held virtually.

### Steering Committee Attendees:

Dawn Didra – Heidelberg Township  
Janice Meyers – Heidelberg Township  
Steve Bachman – Heidelberg Township  
Robb A. Werley – Lowhill Township  
Brian Carl – Lowhill & Weisenberg Townships  
Jason Ruff – Slatington Borough  
Todd Weidman – Washington Township  
Linda Gorgas – Weisenberg Township  
Tony Werley – Weisenberg Township

### Planning Partners in Attendance:

Bethany Vazquez – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission  
Charlie Doyle – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission  
Samantha Smith – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission  
Becky Bradley – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission

### Minutes:

#### Introductions

Steering Committee attendees took roll call.

#### Courtesy of the Floor

Mr. Carl discussed increasing warehouse activity in Lowhill and Weisenberg Townships. Ms. Bradley stated that Upper Macungie Township – in partnership with Jaindl, NFI and others – are moving along with the Adam Road / I-78 Interchange and Point of Access (POA) study. This will have profound impacts on Weisenberg Township and Route 100. Mr. Bachman inquired into the responsible party for payment of the interchange. Ms. Bradley stated that I-78 was being widened from Route 100 to Burks County through state and federal sources. State funding for the Adams Road Bridge replacement prioritized with funds already set aside. Ms. Bradley also noted that if the interchange moves forward, the bridge will need more than two lanes and the impact of that increase is unknown as well as the funds needed for that increase.

#### Committee Deliverables – Municipal Budgets and Capital Improvement Plans

Charlie Doyle thanked the committee for sending their budgets and capital improvement plans and reminded others to send this information to the team.

Ms. Bradley asked the Committee how their municipal budgets have changed, if there were any changes related to the COVID-19 Pandemic and how this may impact budgeting for future years.

- Mr. Weidman stated that Washington Township has been stable and there was a conservative approach to the budget due to Pandemic-related uncertainty that resulted in the stability.
- Ms. Meyers stated that Heidelberg Township's budget has remained the same over the years

and that COVID-19 has no effect on the submission of SALDO applications or receipt of ETI and real estate taxes. Ms. Meyers continued, stating that SALDO applications have increased over the years and through the County's CARES Act funding, the Township was able to get a secure entrance for their facility and laptops for their remote-working staff.

- Mr. Ruff stated that Slatinton Borough was also not really impacted by COVID-19 and taxes were being paid. Mr. Ruff noted that the only difference in expenses occurred in Slatinton's insurance premiums, which increased, and the lack of received insurance rebate. Mr. Ruff continued by stating that non-COVID related changes to the budget were specific to discussions about MS-4 and the creation of a line item for such funds.

Ms. Bradley thanked the Committee for their input and inquired about how the communities planned for capital improvements.

- Mr. Ruff stated that Slatinton assesses its needs on an annual basis, however, if the Borough notes an immediate need it will look at how to get those costs covered in the following year's budget.
- Mr. Werley stated that Lowhill Township currently functions similarly to Slatinton, however the Township is in the process of developing a 5-year plan.
- Mr. Bachman echoed the sentiments of Mr. Werley and Mr. Ruff.
- Ms. Meyers stated that though Heidelberg does not have a formal 5- or 10-year plan, the Township does give monthly reports. When an issue is identified the Township will begin to plan to fund repairs. Planning for future expansion of Township facilities. Ms. Meyers also noted that regarding open space, the Township has a separate fund and plan for such initiatives. Ms. Didra was also highlighted for her work in Heidelberg Township on zoning assessment and how to make property values more profitable for residents.
- Mr. Weidman stated that Washington Township does not have a formal capital improvement plan, but that the Township's supervisors do keep a list of items they would like to accomplish. Mr. Weidman noted that most of the desired accomplishments rely heavily on grants, including at Slatedale Park, and that receipt of grant funding drives project progress.
- Mr. Carl stated that Weisenberg Township also does not have a formal capital improvement plan, but the Township does project out its expenses, especially for infrastructure costs and the needs of the fire department, which are projected out 20 years for apparatus replacement.

Ms. Bradley thanked the Committee for their dialogue and moved on to the next agenda item.

#### Reuse and Revitalization – Goals, Policies and Actions Draft

Ms. Bradley began the presentation by reviewing revitalization- and reuse-related strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

##### *Strengths*

- *Historic character*
- *Common sense of pride*
- *Prosperous surrounding communities (largely in the townships)*
- *Varied incomes (largely in the borough)*
- *Building and land asset rich*
- *Major recreational assets*
- *Affordable property (borough)*

##### *Weaknesses*

- *Lack of parking (borough)*

- *Public relations is lacking (borough)*
- *Code enforcement*
- *Some affordable/attainable housing shortages*
- *Lack of packaged community and economic development incentives*
- *No sense of steady/future employment opportunities locally (largely borough, relevant to townships too)*
- *High property taxes (school districts)*
- *No coordinated agritourism, outdoor recreational, cultural destination*

#### *Opportunities*

- *Identification and marketing of property opportunities (largely in the borough)*
- *Revision of Zoning/SALDO as a marketing and growth management tool (largely in the borough)*
- *Leveraging intersection of historic, natural, agricultural and recreational assets as an identify and economic driver*
- *Marketing area as a multi-faceted destination with agritourism, historic, cultural, recreational assets*
- *Establishment and growth of a formal agricultural and outdoor recreational incubator (townships (ag and some outdoor) and borough (outdoor farm-to-market connector))*
- *Establishment of a “Trail Town” hub that is interconnected to other outdoor, historic, cultural and agritourism resources (borough as primary hub, connected to the farm-to-market townships)*
- *Establishment of a series of marketing and community/economic development incentives*

#### *Threats*

- *Lack of comprehensive marketing and community/economic development incentives strategy/package*
- *Poor business retention/lack of widespread knowledge of existing businesses (largely in the borough but also townships)*
- *Limited municipal budgets for significant capital investments/deteriorating infrastructure*
- *Perception of local capacity as limiting/pervasive negativity about economic success (borough)*
- *Inconsistent police presence*
- *Development pressure (townships) and undesired investment or disinvestment in existing buildings/properties (borough)*
- *Perception and reality of poverty (largely in the borough)*
- *Cost to remain in or beginning businesses*

Committee discussion of revisions and/or additions to:

- Weaknesses – Parking in Heidelberg Heights
- Opportunities – The value of Slatington with the D+L and Appalachian Trails in serving needs of users
- Opportunities – Game lands, hunting and fishing as marketing tool (LV Sporting Clays as example)

#### Emerging Policy Opportunities

Ms. Bradley reviewed emerging policy opportunities with the Committee.

The Committee gave consensus of approval of the emerging policy opportunities.

### Community and Economic Development Policy

Ms. Bradley began to review proposed Community and Economic Development Policy themes. Ms. Bradley covered the first four themes, noted that with time constraints the presentation would continue into the April meeting.

The Committee gave general consensus of agreement with the presented information.

### Review of Planning Schedule and Scope of Work

Mr. Smith reviewed the meeting schedule and upcoming presentations, as well as the scope of work, work completed, work underway and future tasks.

### Adjournment