

The Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan for the SLATE BELT

Steering Committee Meeting

August 7, 2019 – 7 PM, Weona Park Community Center, 25 S. Main Street, Pen Argyl, PA 18072

Steering Committee Attendees:

Bangor: Brooke Kerzner, James Kresge
East Bangor: Derek Powell, Jason Huggan
L. Mt. Bethel: Jen Smethers, Sandra Newman, Susan Disidore
Pen Argyl: Robin Zmoda, Janell Connolly
Plainfield: Stephen Hurni, Terry Kleintop
Portland: Lance Prator, Stephanie Steele
Roseto: Joseph Angelini, Carl Renna
U. Mt. Bethel: Richard Fisher, Anthony DeFranco
Washington: Robert Smith, Gail Putvinski
Wind Gap: George Hinton, Louise Firestone

Members of the Public in Attendance:

Judith Henckel – Upper Mount Bethel Township
Tracy DeFranco – Upper Mt. Bethel Township
Joe LeDonne – Pen Argyl
Justin Huratiak – Washington Township
Jeff Fox – Pen Argyl
Brian Fenstermaker – Senator Scavello
Paul Levits – Plainfield Township

Planning Partners in Attendance:

Peter Barnard – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission (LVPC)
Sue Rockwell – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission (LVPC)
Stephen Reider – Slate Belt Rising
Mark Hartney – Northampton County

Minutes:

Roll Call

Ms. Rockwell took roll call.

Minutes from the July 17th Meeting

Ms. Smethers called for a vote on the July 17, 2019 Meeting Minutes, which are attached to the agenda. Mr. DeFranco requested the minutes be revised to include him on the list of Steering Committee Attendees. Mr. Prator made a motion to approve the minutes with the revision. Ms. Newman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Contract Signings

Mr. Barnard informed the committee that Northampton County had made one revision to the signed contracts. Each municipal representative that originally signed the contracts would need to initial the revised page. The revision was previously discussed, but was not incorporated in the contracts before they were signed.

Call for Data Follow-Up

Mr. Barnard requested copies of municipal budgets and millage rates as soon as possible to assist in the completion of the redevelopment analysis.

Steering Committee Charrette

Mr. Barnard presented the digitized version of the potential redevelopment sites and transportation concerns that were received during the July 17th Steering Committee charrettes. From the mapping, many of the transportation concerns were along Routes 512 and 611.

Analysis Presentation

Mr. Barnard informed the committee that the PowerPoint presentation will be sent to committee members and will be available on the Slate Belt webpage. The presentation includes the survey results and data and mapping analyses.

Mr. Barnard presented the results of the on-line survey that was created for Steering Committee members, identified stakeholders and charrette attendees. There were 62 full responses to the survey and 6 partial responses. The partial responses were not factored into the survey results. Mr. Barnard described the process used for ranking the priorities and reviewed the ranking results with the committee. The ten priorities are ranked as follows:

1. Balancing land preservation, development, redevelopment, industry and jobs
2. Preserving the quality of life: safety, heritage, rural character, open space
3. Improving governmental efficiency and reducing tax burdens
4. Ensuring public schools prepare students for the future job market
5. Sustaining farming as a business and way of life
6. Improving municipal financial sustainability
7. Reducing barriers to housing and business development
8. Enhancing access to current and future technology infrastructure
9. Managing social, economic, cultural and demographic changes in the community
10. Enhancing transportation infrastructure

Most respondents agreed with the ten priorities. A number of unique responses were received, including smart growth and shared services, which were mentioned the most. Only three mentioned warehouses. Mr. Kresge was surprised that farming was ranked number five and transportation was number ten. Mr. Barnard noted that transportation will be covered in the plan regardless of the ranking since the MPC requires it. He also noted that, if the partial responses were included, the top five priorities would have remained the same and in the same order, but

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transportation would have been ranked sixth instead of tenth. Mr. Huggan recommended that the report include a note that the incomplete responses resulted in the lower ranking for transportation.

Mr. Barnard presented the housing analysis, including supply, demand, affordability and future need. He provided baseline data on housing by type and housing tenure. The majority of the region's housing is single-family detached, and 72% of residents own their homes. As a whole region, the median household income is pretty high at \$65,000. However, construction of higher priced homes is decreasing, lowering the supply of homes available for higher income people and increasing competition for moderately priced homes. The majority of the homes in the region were built before 1939. In general, older homes can be expensive to rehabilitate, meaning many homes that may be "attainable" are too expensive to own for many families. Mr. Barnard reviewed the rental costs for units in the region. The maximum monthly rent includes all expenses. He noted that comprehensive plans must consider projected growth over 20 years. The region is projected to receive over 14,000 new residents by 2040.

Mr. Barnard presented the economic analysis, which includes location quotient and shift share. The location quotient analysis measures the concentration of an industry in a region. The region was compared to Northampton County, the Lehigh Valley and the nation. The analysis is based on zip codes, not municipal boundaries. The boundaries of the zip codes do not match perfectly with the region. Portions of Plainfield Township were not included in the study. The Township has five different zip codes, with large portions of the zip codes in other municipalities. The zip code that included Bushkill Township was included, however, the southern zip codes were not included. Based on the analysis, a small number of industries are considered baseline industries, including apparel, mining and agriculture. The region has a narrowly focused economy and is not capturing growing sectors in the Lehigh Valley and nation. He noted that many people live in the region but work elsewhere. The shift share analysis focuses on the change in industry over a ten-year period. Most industries are declining in the region. The Utilities sector was expected to grow, however, the region lost 107 people since 2007. Manufacturing lost 38% of its jobs. Mr. Barnard noted that the loss of one employer can really impact the numbers because of how employment is estimated. The next step is to create a map showing where people live and work.

The mapping analysis included natural resources, farmland preservation, parks and recreation, sewer and water service, zoning, existing land use and multimodal transportation facilities. Mr. Barnard reviewed the maps with the committee. The parks and recreation mapping will be in the FutureLV plan. Scenic by-ways and character-defining areas were added to the map. Sewer service areas are primarily located in the boroughs and adjacent areas in the townships. The zoning map shows generalized zoning. Only one community, Lower Mt. Bethel Township, has agricultural zoning that meets the LVPC criteria for high quality agricultural zoning. Washington Township zoning actually allows suburban density development in their agricultural district.

Draft Goals and Vision

Mr. Barnard began the group discussion on the goals and vision. A good place to start is with the top five identified priorities. He asked the committee if anything was missing. Ms. Newman said that transportation needs to be added to the list. Ms. Kerzner added that transportation is necessary to have jobs. Mr. Barnard noted that transportation could be added to the first priority if the group wanted to just work with the top five. Ms. Zmoda thought transportation should be its

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own category, however, it might not be the same priority for each municipality. Ms. Kerzner suggested combining the second and fifth priority (preserving the quality of life and sustaining farming), then add transportation as a category. Lower Mt. Bethel thought priority number 4 should be removed from the top five since municipalities have limited power over education. Washington Township noted that until education is improved, the quality of life won't be improved in the region. Upper Mt. Bethel thought that number 4 was a contradiction to number 3 (improving governmental efficiency and reducing tax burdens). Roseto thought the problem could be solved with good public transit. Mr. Hartney added that the goal should be to have a transportation system to support desired land uses. Mr. Barnard reviewed the options: add transportation as a sixth goal, link transportation to the first goal, or replace either goal number 3 or 4. The group asked what the transportation goal would involve. Mr. Barnard said that it could be a transportation and infrastructure goal, which would include sewer and water. Mr. Hartney agreed with that as a goal. Ms. Putvinski made a motion to keep transportation and infrastructure as standalone goal. Mr. Prator seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. Mr. Kresge made a motion to move transportation and infrastructure to the number 4 spot. Ms. Newman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. Mr. Kresge then amended the motion to remove number 4. Ms. Newman seconded the motion. After continued discussion, Mr. Kresge made a motion to move transportation into the top five and number 4 (education) to the bottom five. Ms. Newman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Pen Argyl recommended that number 3 should include regional and shared services. Mr. Barnard thought that was implied, but it could be stated more explicitly. Mr. Kresge made a motion to add shared services to number 3. Mr. Fisher seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Next Steps

Mr. Barnard said that, for the next meeting, goals will be developed from the top five priorities, the redevelopment and land capacity analyses will be completed, and a draft, unformatted report may be presented for committee review.

Adjourn

Ms. Smethers called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Prator made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Newman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Attachments

- July 17, 2019 Steering Committee Minutes

Minutes prepared and respectfully transmitted by the LVPC.