

The Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan for the SLATE BELT

June 2, 2021 – 7 PM, Weona Park Community Center, 25 S. Main Street, Pen Argyl, PA 18072

Steering Committee Attendees:

Bangor: Nathaniel Dysard, James Kresge
East Bangor: Jason Huggan
L. Mt. Bethel: Jen Smethers, Susan Disidore, Sandra Newman
Pen Argyl: Robin Zmoda, Janell Connolly, Jeffrey Fox
Plainfield: Tom Petrucci, Stephen Hurni, Terry Kleintop
Portland: Lance Prator, Stephanie Steele
Roseto: Cathy Martino
U. Mt. Bethel: Ed Nelson
Washington: Justin Huratiak
Wind Gap: Louise Firestone, George Hinton

Members of the Public in Attendance:

Judith Henckel – Upper Mount Bethel Township
Scott Minnich – Upper Mount Bethel Township
David Friedman – Upper Mount Bethel Township
Jane Mellert – Plainfield Township

Planning Partners in Attendance:

Becky Bradley – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
Tracy Oscavich – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
Sue Rockwell – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
Brian Hite – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
Stephen Reider – Slate Belt Rising
Mark Hartney – Northampton County
Marc Blau – Quarry Heritage Park & Trail Network

Roll Call

Ms. Rockwell took roll. All municipalities were in attendance.

Minutes from the November 4, 2020 Meeting

Mr. Petrucci called for a vote on the November 4, 2020 meeting minutes, which are attached to the agenda. Mr. Prator made a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Firestone said the minutes show Wind Gap was not in attendance, however, all three representatives attended the meeting. Mr. Prator amended his motion to include the change to show Wind Gap in attendance. Mr. Kleintop made a motion to defer the minutes because he thought they were incomplete regarding what he said on the high cube warehouse guide. Mr. Kresge noted that the minutes are just a summary of the meeting. Since a motion was already on the table, Mr. Petrucci called for a second. Mr. Dysard seconded the motion. The approval of the minutes must be unanimous among the municipalities. Since Mr. Petrucci and Mr. Hurni voted to approve the minutes, the vote was deemed unanimous. The minutes were approved with the change in Wind Gap attendance.

General Issues and Opportunities Discussion

- Known Plan Activity in Slate Belt Communities

Ms. Rockwell reviewed the plans and ordinances listed, which covered a five-month period from December 2020 to April 2021. Ms. Bradley said we bring this information to the committee to inform the committee on activities in the Slate Belt.

Old Business

1. Administrative

- Meeting Schedule Going Forward

Ms. Bradley discussed the schedule timeline. A draft plan is scheduled to be completed by the end of the year. Mr. Petrucci asked if there were any funding deadlines. Ms. Bradley said the agreement gives a lot of flexibility. There is no set timeline or date. The LVPC has no issue meeting the timeline but said we could slow it down if the committee needs more time. She asked, since the shared services and infrastructure roundtables were paused due to the Pandemic, if the committee wanted to hold them at the July meeting. The group agreed to hold them as part of the next meeting.

New Business

1. Programmatic

- Emerging from the Pandemic Re-energized and Next Steps

Ms. Oscavich asked if any additional engagement on the process was needed with the communities and boards. Mr. Petrucci said we might not know the answer to that question until we get moving forward. Would we send representatives to each community? Ms. Bradley said yes, there may have been changes on the boards. We could provide a general overview of the process again. Ms. Zmoda said she would not mind having someone coming to Pen Argyl to reignite the discussion. Ms. Steele, Portland Borough, and Mr. Huratiak, Washington Township, also would not mind if someone came to their communities.

Ms. Bradley reviewed the Mission and Process statement from the Issues and Opportunities report with the committee. Mr. Hite asked how the Pandemic has changed the thinking in the communities. How have the six goals changed? Mr. Prator thinks they look fine. It is the same Slate Belt but just post-Pandemic. Mr. Fox said it is too early to tell how the Pandemic changed things. Ms. Connolly said we may need to look at the economic conditions again. Mr. Petrucci asked, with respect to Goal 4, if there is any updated data on truck traffic during the Pandemic. Mr. Hite said the Route 33 counter is currently broken, but truck traffic is up everywhere due to increased e-commerce. Mr. Petrucci said we should tie in the increased reliance on trucks. A question was asked about the availability of data showing changes over the Delaware River Joint Toll Bridge. Mr. Hite said we can request that data. They can pull data from the past 20 years. Mr. Fox asked if drones are being addressed related to transportation of goods and services. He thinks they will be an issue. Mr. Hite said PennDOT is studying the use of drones. Their use is emerging very quickly. They use drones to view bridge conditions. Ms. Bradley said there are several future forces we could look into. Mr. Kleintop asked if we are following infrastructure upgrades and delays, such as the bridge in Stockertown. Ms. Bradley said yes, we can find out what PennDOT's plan is. They will

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probably handle it the same as the Route 33 Bridge work; they will not shut it down completely.

Ms. Zmoda said housing sales are going crazy in her community. There are lots of developers rehabbing then renting out homes. They are concerned about investors from outside the region. Housing prices have soared, and they are losing even more low-income housing. They are worried about whether they are being inclusive. They need new housing and new multi-family homes to handle the projected population growth. Ms. Bradley said we did some work on that, and the county is also doing some work. Mr. Hartney said they are working on a plan with a market value analysis and seeing a 50% increase in housing prices. It is an issue that has changed and become worse since the Pandemic.

- **Community Survey/Engagement Timing**

Mr. Hite said we will craft a list of survey questions and bring them to the committee next month for review. Ms. Bradley said we need to figure out the mechanics of the survey. We typically have an online survey that the municipalities can help distribute and promote. We will also have a paper survey. The survey will let people know what is happening. Mr. Huggan suggested including the plan summary that was attached to tonight's agenda with the survey. Mr. Kleintop asked how targeted the survey will be related to infrastructure, warehousing and jobs. Ms. Bradley said they are not usually targeted to a specific industry. We want to keep the questions tight to keep the survey under 15 minutes.

Mr. Huratiak said the steering committee is here to guide the plan. Everyone needs to be more open to discussion. Mr. Kresge said how the Slate Belt adapts and overcomes is the purpose of this forum; it is about how we deal with the issues. Mr. Nelson said nobody is prepared for the truck traffic. Route 33 took a lot of vehicles off Route 611; you cannot blame farmland. Mr. Huratiak said we need to educate people. We need to look at sharing infrastructure. We need to guide the process. Ms. Henckel asked the LVPC to come to the Township. The information from these meetings is not getting back to the community. The Township is at war with itself because they are not talking with each other. Mr. Petrucci said we need to identify infrastructure needs for individual uses, etc. We do not have the infrastructure to handle it. Mr. Huratiak said the economic development community needs to be recruiting small manufacturers. Zoning is flexible enough to allow it. If you make zoning so strict to protect yourself, you will limit and make it difficult to get the development you want. We need to build the community we want to live in. You are going to get a small machine shop, not a large manufacturer. Mr. Kleintop noted that we all sit here and complain about the traffic and truck traffic.

Ms. Mellert asked how we get the six boroughs and four townships to agree on a plan. Mr. Hartney said he commends everyone for being at the table. It is about having these conversations. It is part of the process. Not everyone is going to be happy with everything in the plan. But we cannot do it individually; it is better when done together. Mr. Kleintop said we all need to be honest and speak up. You cannot go home and say you do not want to participate anymore. Mr. Petrucci said the boroughs are focused on revitalization, and the township focused on growth. We need to look at the big picture, build on our history. Mr. Kresge said the biggest lesson from the Pandemic is that the Slate Belt needs to be an independent entity. Our families should not have to drive far to go to the larger stores. Mr. Kleintop said Bangor needs to figure out how much it will tolerate with traffic, etc. Mr. Huratiak said truck traffic will be no matter what. It is the walkability and foot traffic and how

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we promote downtown businesses. Mr. Hinton said the big problem is nobody communicates. We cannot just tax the next guy. We need to communicate with our neighbors on what is happening and what is being planned. Mr. Huratiak said we want to protect the streams and water, but the cost is so high.

Mr. Blau said he has not heard anything about the rich traditions of textiles and slate. Center a Slate fest somewhere in the region and people will come. You bring in businesses that relate to these traditions. The Quarry project meets all six goals. It is all about slate history and connecting trails in the county. He said they will speak about it at the next meeting and answer any questions the committee may have.

Mr. Minnich said we have a heritage that connects us and infrastructure that connects us. You need infrastructure to support what you want. What does resilient infrastructure mean to each community? What are our infrastructure needs and how do they impact other communities? The biggest lift will be identifying what we need now and in the future. Ms. Connolly said we did not build in options for infrastructure. While infrastructure is number 4 in the list of goals, it should be number 1 based on this conversation.

Ms. Mellert asked if the goal for the Slate Belt was to be a good place to live/work or be a tourist destination. Tourism will bring traffic. You need to figure out what you want. Mr. Kleintop said we have some examples of communities in the Lehigh Valley that have sold their souls to e-commerce and logistics. We need to get something out of it. Mr. Huratiak said tourism is the only way to support redevelopment, wineries, etc. Mr. Kresge said Route 512 is a chokepoint in Bangor. It is already a problem, so more traffic is still going to be an issue. Manufacturing does not mean less trucks. Mr. Huratiak said to look to Easton at the redevelopment and restaurant scene. Mr. Prator said Slate Belt Rising and the Slate Belt Chamber are airing ads on the radio highlighting the whole Slate Belt. The county has been doing a lot for the area also.

Courtesy of the Floor

None

Adjourn

Mr. Petrucci called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Kresge made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Prator seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.

Attachments

- November 4, 2020 Steering Committee Minutes
- Slate Belt Communities' Activity Log (December 2020 – April 2021)
- Plan Slate Belt Project Schedule
- Mission, Process and Future Vision
- Plan Slate Belt Steering Committee Meeting Notice

Minutes prepared and respectfully transmitted by the LVPC.