

The Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan for the SLATE BELT

November 4, 2020 – 7 PM, Virtual Steering Committee Meeting

Steering Committee Attendees:

Bangor: Brooke Kerzner, Nathaniel Dysard, James Kresge
East Bangor: Jason Huggan
L. Mt. Bethel: Jen Smethers, Susan Disidore, Sandra Newman
Pen Argyl: Robin Zmoda, Janell Connolly
Plainfield: Tom Petrucci, Stephen Hurni, Terry Kleintop
Portland: Lance Prator, Stephanie Steele
Roseto: Joe Angelini
U. Mt. Bethel: David Due, Anthony DeFranco
Washington: Robert Smith
Wind Gap: Louise Firestone, George Hinton, David Hess

Members of the Public in Attendance:

Judith Henckel – Upper Mount Bethel Township
Don Moore – Plainfield Township
Gina Kormanik – Workforce Board Lehigh Valley
Andrew Kleiner – Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation
Jane Mellert – Plainfield Township
Marc Blau – Slate Belt Heritage Center
Adrienne Fors – Waste Management

Planning Partners in Attendance:

Becky Bradley – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
Tracy Oscavich – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
Sue Rockwell – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
David Towsey – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
Simon Okumu – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
Mahdis Modaresi – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
Stephen Reider – Slate Belt Rising
Mark Hartney – Northampton County
Melissa Hough – Slate Belt Heritage Center
Ellen Neises - PennPraxis

Roll Call

Mr. Petrucci asked for roll call to identify the communities that are participating in the meeting tonight. Ms. Rockwell took roll call. Wind Gap Borough is not represented at the meeting.

Courtesy of the Floor

Mr. Petrucci asked if anyone would like to make a statement. Mr. Moore said he would like to provide additional comments on the two topics he discussed at the October meeting: The Upper Mt. Bethel industrial park zoning amendments and the Grand Central Landfill expansion in Plainfield Township. Mr. Moore reiterated his comments from last month regarding the Upper Mt. Bethel zoning amendments. He said the comments provided by the Township engineer and the LVPC have been ignored. He sees no interest by the Township in partnering with anyone, even its own citizens, in the development of proper planning and regulations for its I-2 and I-3 Districts. He believes the Board of

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Supervisors is failing its citizens and has concerns about what this means for all communities in the Slate Belt. He also commented last month that the provision of a solid waste use should be included in the future land use plan as Mr. Petrucci had verified that the Board of Supervisors were not interested in extending the landfill beyond the current designated areas. The landfill will be full by 2028, and the future land use plan should extend beyond seven years. He said this would be an opportunity for one of the other members of Plan Slate Belt. Since Upper Mt. Bethel is not concerned about truck traffic, they may wish to get in on the opportunity.

Ms. Fors said she attended the meeting to address any questions or concerns about the landfill. She said there is a Grand Central Landfill YouTube page that explains the expansion project and the need for the facility. She is available by email or phone if anyone has any questions.

Mr. Prator said an issue that will affect the whole region is the I-80 Rockfall in New Jersey. There will be a lot more traffic that will affect not only Routes 611 and 512, but the whole area. Portland Borough Council adopted a resolution to support NJDOT to fix the s-curve problem. Upper Mt. Bethel and Lower Mt. Bethel townships also adopted a resolution. He is asking if every municipality could adopt a resolution since there is strength in numbers. He said transportation is one of the topics in the regional comprehensive plan, and this will affect us over the next ten years or so. Mr. Petrucci said he will put it on the next agenda for Plainfield Township.

Ms. Henckel thanked the LVPC for its new High Cube Guidelines.

Ms. Mellert commented that the landfill proposal was not just an expansion that was requested, but a request to rezone and create an entirely new solid waste district in the Township. Mr. Moore reiterated that Mr. Petrucci made it clear at last month's meeting that the Board of Supervisors have no interest in expanding the solid waste zoning district.

Minutes from the April 1, 2020 Meeting

Mr. Petrucci called for a vote on the April 1, 2020 meeting minutes, which are attached to the agenda. Mr. Prator made a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Hurni seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Minutes from the October 7, 2020 Meeting

Mr. Petrucci called for a vote on the October 7, 2020 meeting minutes, which are attached to the agenda. Ms. Zmoda made a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Hurni seconded the motion. The motion passed, with Roseto Borough abstaining.

Mr. Kleintop asked if he could talk about the High Cube Warehouse Guidelines now. Mr. Petrucci said he could go ahead. Mr. Kleintop asked where the need for this came from based on what's going on in the Lehigh Valley. Ms. Bradley showed a slide of three examples in the Lehigh Valley that have been proposed for this type of land use in under 6 months, including Upper Mt. Bethel, Hanover (Lehigh County) and Upper Macungie townships. She said the LVPC investigates new trends and puts together guidance. Also, under Pennsylvania land use law, a community needs at least two parcels to accommodate every conceivable land use. Local governments will have to look at their zoning codes. The guide will help begin the dialogue with communities. Ms. Bradley reviewed the three examples. Mr. Kleintop asked Mr. Hartney, based on what he sees going on in Upper Mt. Bethel with the industrial park zoning amendments and that the Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA) program was put in place to establish significant economic development in the Township, if there has been any consideration given for a conversation with Executive McClure to possibly rescind the resolution

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that established LERTA. He said he is not impressed with his tax dollars going to this LERTA. Mr. Hartney said he will bring Mr. Kleintop's concerns to Ms. Smith and Executive McClure, however, if Northampton County pulls out, it doesn't end the LERTA benefit. It is up to the taxing bodies (the school district and local municipality) to decide if they want to participate. Mr. Angelini commented that this was not the place for this discussion and thinks the meeting should move on. Mr. Petrucci said, looking at the agenda, he agreed.

General Issues and Opportunities Discussion

Ms. Bradley said it was suggested by members of the committee to discuss what is going on in the Slate Belt each month. Beginning with last month, a monthly report of activity will be prepared and provided to the group that includes subdivision and land development plans, municipal ordinances, plans and maps sent to the LVPC for review. She reviewed each activity listed and noted the variety of activity taking place in the Slate Belt. Mr. Huggan thought the report was very informative. Mr. Kleintop said they need to know what is happening within the ten communities.

Old Business

1. Programmatic

- Zoning Diagnosis Discussion

Ms. Bradley said that the scope of work for the Plan Slate Belt effort includes a zoning diagnosis. To do this work, we need to know what's in each municipal zoning ordinance and where everything is located. We created an interactive mapping analysis tool based on municipal zoning, which will help with the discussion on land use and in development of the general land use plan. Mr. Towsey demonstrated the mapping analysis tool. Ms. Bradley said we want to send a link to the tool to each municipality, instead of placing it on the public website since it is in draft form. Additional layers can be added later to help support policy decisions. Mr. Petrucci asked what is needed from each community. Ms. Bradley said each municipality should spend time with it, verify the information and look at how their neighbors' districts and uses relate to their zoning.

2. Partnership

- Heritage and Nature-based Placemaking/Economic Development – Adaptive Quarry Reuse Initiative Presentation

Ms. Hough said that they have shown this presentation to the municipalities most directly impacted and received good feedback. They have talked to the Chamber of Commerce and local legislators. Ms. Neises provided an overview of the quarry project, which included the final visualization that was developed through the subcommittee meetings. After the presentation, Ms. Neises asked if there were any questions or comments. Mr. Hartney asked if the site is for sale and if there is an asking price. Ms. Hough said it is not on the market, but they do have a price from the owner, which is not public. They will be getting a certified appraisal first and are working with Wildlands Conservancy on a land acquisition plan, then they will have firm numbers.

Mr. Moore asked if there are any partnerships with Northampton County, Wildlands and PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Ms. Neises said they are talking with the county, Wildlands, LVPC and Slate Belt Heritage Center. There is a lot of interest in partnerships, however, they want to make sure the Plan Slate Belt group was excited about it first. They are ready to move forward with potential collaborators.

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Mr. Hartney asked if the site was no longer active. Ms. Hough said it has not been active since 2011, but it is relatively untouched. Mr. Hartney said it seems there are not a lot of other uses than what is being proposed. Site control is step one in the process. Ms. Hough said Wildlands is helping with the acquisition process. Mr. Hartney said that maybe LVEDC can help later with environmental assessment funding. Mr. Kleiner said he has spoken with Wildlands and is aware of the project.

Ms. Mellert asked who will own this land. Ms. Hough said they are working on this now. They are currently doing some feasibility work. There are a number of different options, but they need time to work out what they are going to do. Ms. Mellert asked if there is an inventory of existing parks, recreation facilities and trails already within the ten municipalities that have to be maintained. Ms. Bradley said yes, this information was provided to PennPraxis early on. Ms. Mellert said her concern is that businesses in the Slate Belt are trying to hang on and if this project will take business away from them. She also asked who will continue to fund and own this site. Ms. Neises said that a revenue generation plan needs to be further developed. The focus of the project is how to stimulate more people to come to the Slate Belt and increase the revenue of existing businesses. They want to develop a sustainable economic plan that doesn't take away from businesses.

Mr. Moore asked if they would buy the property without the commitment of the municipalities. Ms. Neises said they are hoping that the municipalities would be excited enough about it that it could be a goal for Plan Slate Belt as an economic development strategy for the region as it ties into the larger planning effort. Ms. Hough said it is not like anyplace else. Opportunities to preserve and utilize the site for a positive purpose are narrowing as time goes on.

Mr. Kleintop noted that the site is in the watershed for the Greenwalk fish hatchery, which is an Exceptional Value stream, as well as Nestle's water supply source. He thinks the fish hatchery and Nestle would probably be interested in the project. It is in their best interest to protect the watershed. Ms. Hough said they have spoken with both entities, and Mr. Bartosh from the fish hatchery is on the subcommittee. Mr. Kleintop also noted that to become sustainable, the project needs the attention of national funding in the area such as the D&L Corridor, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and Cherry Valley National Wildlife Refuge. Their influence might help in getting funding. Ms. Bradley said they are already at the table. Our thought is to take some of this work and see where things can start to connect.

Mr. Kleintop asked what the timetable is for the project. Ms. Hough said the next 18 months for the initial phase. Ms. Mellert said it seems that this is moving forward despite what the municipalities think. Ms. Hough said no, but they have to do some things, such as an appraisal and feasibility work, or they'll lose the opportunity. She would like it to be part of Plan Slate Belt. Part of their hope with this presentation is to iron out any problems or conflicts and what are the opportunities to pursue to be part of the plan. Ms. Mellert asked where the funding for this project has come from to date. Ms. Hough said Slate Belt Heritage Center received the funding from Northampton County Department of Community and Economic Development and then they engaged with PennPraxis.

Mr. Petrucci said he thinks the municipalities need more information before they say they support the project. The concern is the cost and future operation and maintenance. He asked if they could get that information. Ms. Hough said they can get some of those numbers. They are getting estimates at this time. Ms. Mellert said she would like to hear from the other Slate Belt municipalities besides Plainfield Township. Mr. Huggan said he supports it and thinks it would be great for the area.

New Business

1. Project Discussion

Mr. Petrucci asked the committee if we should continue with virtual meetings or wait until the group can meet in person. Ms. Zmoda said that it is difficult to keep focus under this virtual format. The on-line format does not work for deep discussions. Ms. Smethers agreed and said it is too distracting with the noise. She can see the public getting frustrated because of the distractions. The Lower Mt. Bethel Township Supervisors indicated they are interested in waiting until the group can meet in person. Mr. Petrucci called for a motion. Mr. Kleintop made a motion that the group wait until they can meet in person. Ms. Zmoda seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. Mr. Petrucci said we will have to stay in touch to keep the plan moving along, and he will touch base with Ms. Bradley and Ms. Oscavich on how to do that. Ms. Bradley said there are some things we can continue to do in the background. We can also continue to send the monthly activity report. She asked Mr. Petrucci about coming up with a time extension to circulate to everyone. Mr. Petrucci said yes, he can do that.

Adjourn

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

Attachments

- April 1, 2020 Steering Committee Minutes
- October 7, 2020 Steering Committee Minutes
- Slate Belt Communities' Activity Log

Minutes prepared and respectfully transmitted by the LVPC.