

The Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan for the SLATE BELT

February 2, 2022 – 7 PM, Virtual Steering Committee Meeting

Steering Committee Attendees:

Bangor:	James Kresge
East Bangor:	Jason Huggan
Lower Mount Bethel:	Susan Disidore, Jennifer Smethers, Sandra Newman
Pen Argyl:	Robin Zmoda, Janell Connolly
Plainfield:	Tom Petrucci, Stephen Hurni, Terry Kleintop
Portland:	Lance Prator, Stephanie Steele
Roseto:	Cathy Martino
Upper Mount Bethel:	Ed Nelson
Washington:	Justin Huratiak
Wind Gap:	Louise Firestone

Members of the Public in Attendance:

Judith Henckel – Upper Mount Bethel
Scott Minnich - Upper Mount Bethel
Jane Mellert – Plainfield
Don Moore – Plainfield
Heather Fischer - Portland

Planning Partners in Attendance:

Tracy Oscavich – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
Becky Bradley – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
Sue Rockwell – Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
Mark Hartney – Northampton County
Marc Blau – Quarry Heritage Park & Trail Network

Roll Call

Ms. Rockwell called roll. All municipalities were in attendance at roll call except Upper Mount Bethel.

Minutes from the January 5, 2022 Meeting

Mr. Petrucci asked if the committee should table the minutes since all municipalities were not in attendance. Several members felt the minutes should be tabled. Mr. Petrucci asked for a motion to table the minutes. Mr. Hurni made the motion, and Ms. Newman seconded the motion. The motion passed with Mr. Prator and Ms. Martino opposed.

General Issues and Opportunities Discussion

- Known Plan Activity in Slate Belt Communities

Ms. Rockwell reviewed the plans listed, which covered a 3-month period from November 2021 through January 2022. Mr. Kleintop asked if they are supposed to comment on these letters for land uses of regional significance or discuss them during the committee meeting. Ms. Bradley said there is no legal requirement to copy other municipalities. We provide copies since the group is working together on this joint planning effort, and it is important for everyone to know what is happening in the other communities. Ms. Bradley said last year the LVPC began scheduling coordination meetings with all the regulatory agencies to discuss land uses of regional significance. She informed the committee that the PA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is holding a public hearing on the NPDES permit application for 303 Demi Road this evening that began at 6 pm. There is no NPDES

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permit application for the larger River Pointe site plan or the RPL East project, however, DEP is lumping them in with the Demi Road hearing. We reviewed the Demi Road land development proposal last year; however, we have not reviewed the larger site plan at this time. She said the overall project lacks the infrastructure needed to make it work, and the railroad bridge on River Road is too low for tractor trailers. It is important to discuss these projects, but it is up to the committee.

Mr. Petrucci asked how they would know about the DEP hearing. Ms. Bradley said she learned about the hearing after the deadline to register, but informed DEP we were entitled to listen. Formal comments are due by February 16, 2022, and anyone can comment. Ms. Bradley said she would forward the notice to the group upon receipt from DEP. Mr. Kleintop asked what the official role of the municipalities would be if the municipalities had an adopted multi-municipal plan. Ms. Bradley said it is normal to have numerous comments on major projects. Once a plan is adopted, all municipalities must sign an intermunicipal cooperative agreement that would identify how to handle developments like this. Mr. Kleintop asked if they should wait to discuss this after the plan is adopted. Ms. Bradley said there are no rules about when to discuss how these issues are handled. She said we could talk to other municipalities with an adopted multi-municipal plan and ask if we could listen in on one of their meetings and report back to the group.

Regarding the Lower Mount Bethel Zoning Ordinance Update, Mr. Petrucci asked if the LVPC or Lower Mount Bethel is looking to confirm there are no land use conflicts with adjacent municipalities and if the municipalities should hold off on these updates until the comprehensive plan process is complete. Ms. Bradley said ideally yes, but it is not always practical for the municipality. In the end, the Township will need to make certain their zoning ordinance is consistent with the comprehensive plan. Municipalities should send any comments directly to the Township and copy the LVPC. She asked if Lower Mount Bethel would be willing to present the ordinance at the next steering committee meeting. Ms. Smethers responded that they would present to the committee.

Old Business

1. Coordinating Zoning Workshop

Ms. Bradley informed the group that the workshops were recorded, and once we receive the recordings from Environmental Planning and Design and do some edits on the audio, we will send them out to the committee. The workshops were developed to discuss what happens when municipalities adopt a multi-municipal plan and explain the difference between joint zoning and coordinated zoning. Ms. Zmoda thought the workshop was a little overwhelming and would like to see the presentation again. Mr. Kleintop asked if, once they reviewed the presentation and came up with specific questions, if we could get Environmental Planning to talk to the group. Ms. Bradley said we had a contract with them to do the workshops and will have to check with them. Mr. Moore said there was a lot of content, and he couldn't understand the concept of transects. Ms. Bradley said transects will be discussed at the April meeting. Mr. Hartney said that it would be easier to coordinate and enforce the zoning ordinance if all the municipalities set them up the same way using the same terminology. He noted that, in one of the examples shown, the municipalities had 100 different zoning districts. They were the same but were just called something different. Ms. Bradley said the Slate Belt has 50 different districts, but we need to see how different they really are. Mr. Petrucci said they will need to coordinate how this will be construed in the intermunicipal agreement and start discussions sooner rather than later. Ms. Bradley said discussions could begin in the May to June timeframe if the plan stays on schedule.

2. Draft Goals, Policies and Actions – Continued Discussion

Mr. Petrucci asked the group how we should handle the discussion. Ms. Bradley said we will mark up the policies and actions based on the comments received using track changes. We created a spreadsheet of the comments received to date and will contact commentors if we have any questions on their comments. Ms. Rockwell noted that comments were received from Plainfield, Wind Gap, Lower Mount Bethel, Portland, Slate Belt Heritage Center and Northampton County. Ms. Oscavich displayed an example of Policy 1.4 that shows track changes made based on the Quarry policy discussion meeting held in January. Mr. Kleintop asked if we received any comments from Eric Andreus from Nestle. Ms. Rockwell responded that we did not. Ms. Oscavich said we would follow up with him. Mr. Kleintop said during that meeting the focus was primarily on environmental issues, but we overlooked the safety issues around quarries. We need to make sure we put an emphasis on that as well.

Ms. Bradley said once we get the policies and actions in a good place, we will create a timeline associated with the actions and list of project partners. Also, now that we have draft policies, we have to make sure they align with the maps. At the March meeting, we will present draft Natural Resources, Farmland Preservation, and Parks, Recreation and Open Space plans. At the April meeting, we will present the draft Transportation Plan as well as transects, which are place types. In May, we will be moving toward finalization of the plan, and by June we should have a draft plan.

Mr. Moore asked when the General Land Use Plan will be done. Ms. Bradley said not until the four maps and the goals, policies and actions are completed, which is dependent on receiving comments from everyone. If we receive comments and stay on schedule, we should have a draft plan by June. Ms. Oscavich displayed a revised plan schedule. Mr. Moore asked that if it would be during the May to June timeframe that negotiations would begin amongst the municipalities on who is going to host certain land uses. Ms. Bradley said that is done after the comprehensive plan is adopted. It is not part of the comprehensive plan. He asked about what happens when the landfill in Plainfield Township closes and whether that use will still have to be provided somewhere. Ms. Bradley said municipalities do not have to provide for all uses infinitely according to case law.

Mr. Huratiak commented about scenic views and drives throughout the municipalities and thought some of those should be highlighted for tourism with a focus on Routes 512, 611 and 191. However, some properties along those routes are not welcoming and are areas for improvement. A high priority should be placed on improving blighted properties. Ms. Bradley said she would like to further discuss specific places with him and identify gateways to destinations and report to the group. She said we can work on a policy for that. Mr. Kleintop asked if this was a zoning officer issue. Mr. Huratiak said generally yes, however, he thinks this is something to look at as a group. They need to steer the overall perception of the region in the right direction. Ms. Bradley asked about the potential for the Delaware Water Gap going from a National Recreation Area designation to a National Park designation and what would that mean and how would it relate to the policies in the plan. Mr. Hartney said that a contact related to National Parks is Sharon Davis. Her role is community outreach. There may be a connection there.

Ms. Mellert said there is concern about the traffic that tourism would bring in. The group needs to discuss how to handle that. Ms. Zmoda noted that the difference between job and tourism traffic is that tourism will spend money in the region, and jobs do not always spend in the area. The question is what is “beneficial” traffic versus bedroom community traffic? Mr. Hartney said tourism supports shops in downtowns, and we cannot have a thriving downtown economy

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without it. Ms. Mellert said jobs do spend money in downtowns. We just need to plan for tourism. Ms. Connolly said tourism will change how we move around in the Slate Belt. We will need to be conscious of traffic. Mr. Petrucci said the other concern is parking when redeveloping downtowns. There is a lack of parking, and we need to think of ways to manage that. Mr. Huratiak said he sees parking as a huge problem in some of the projects he is working on. We need to at parking in downtowns. Ms. Zmoda said parking is extremely important to the Borough and its residents. There are many places without off-street parking. They have talked about shared parking and finding a suitable lot. Ms. Connolly said they are at a point where they need to start looking at the feasibility of razing older housing stock. Ms. Bradley said we could include something about parking in the plan, however, they should conduct a parking study. The LVPC prepared a parking analysis for both Catasauqua and Bath boroughs through the transportation program. We may be able to help Pen Argyl with a parking analysis. Ms. Bradley will look into it and report back. Ms. Connolly noted that they have a nearly complete revitalization plan that included a parking analysis, which they will provide to the LVPC. Mr. Huratiak said as part of a proposed master zoning plan for some properties they were redeveloping, they looked at parking and helped redesign shared parking so they could put in a garage. Ms. Bradley said she would follow-up with him about that work. Ms. Bradley asked if any other municipalities had a revitalization plan. Mr. Prator said yes for Portland. They will provide a copy as well.

Next Steps

Ms. Oscavich displayed the project schedule and briefly discussed the timeline with the group. The next two meetings will cover the four maps as previously mentioned. The zoning diagnosis would be completed after feedback on the policies and maps. The draft comprehensive plan is scheduled for June. She noted that the overall timeline is dependent on getting feedback from the municipalities. Mr. Kleintop asked what happens in post-adoption coordination. Ms. Bradley said that is what goes into the intermunicipal cooperative agreement, which should take place during May-June.

Mr. Petrucci asked the committee if they would like to meet in-person or virtually next month. The committee decided to have a virtual meeting.

Courtesy of the Floor

Adjourn

Mr. Petrucci called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Nelson made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Zmoda seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.

Attachments

- January 5, 2022 Steering Committee Minutes
- Slate Belt Communities' Activity Log (November-December 2021, January 2022)

Minutes prepared and respectfully transmitted by the LVPC.