

The Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan for the SLATE BELT

Steering Committee Meeting

September 4, 2019 – 7 PM, Weona Park Community Center, 25 S. Main Street, Pen Argyl, PA 18072

Steering Committee Attendees:

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

Members of the Public in Attendance:

Judith Henckel – Upper Mount Bethel Township
Justin Huratiak – Washington Township
Paul Levits – Plainfield Township

Planning Partners in Attendance:

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

Minutes:

Roll Call

Mr. Petrucci took roll call.

Minutes from the August 7th Meeting

Mr. Petrucci called for a vote on the August 7, 2019 meeting minutes, which are attached to the agenda. Ms. Connolly made a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Angelini seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Contract Signings

Mr. Petrucci noted that several municipalities still need to initial the change made to the contracts and should do so prior to leaving this evening.

Upper Mount Bethel Township Sewage Facilities Plan

Mr. Reese explained that the LVPC reviews Act 537 Plans as required by the state. According to Act 537, all municipalities are responsible for the sewer systems within their borders. The Township submitted a draft plan for LVPC review, which is due out by the end of September. Mr. Reese provided an overview of the plan.

The plan identifies nine areas of concern (displayed on a PowerPoint slide) within the Township that were studied in detail. In addition, the Township has three Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA) areas that were included in the study. The plan recommends on-lot sewage disposal and a sewage management program for all areas except Area of Concern (AOC)-A, AOC-C and AOC-C1, which have been identified as having immediate sewage needs due to malfunctioning on-lot systems. AOC-A is proposed to connect to the Portland Sewage Treatment Plant, and both AOC-C and C-1 are proposed to be served by the Bangor Borough Authority Sewage Treatment Plant. Mr. Reese discussed a soil suitability map (displayed on a PowerPoint slide), which is important to help determine areas where soils should be suitable for on-lot systems.

Mr. Kleintop asked about septic system pumping requirements as part of the sewage management program. Mr. Reese said it is typically every three years and is done by ordinance. Ms. Kerzner asked if there was a requirement to connect to the sewer system. Mr. Reese said that would need to be decided by the municipality.

Analysis Presentation

Mr. Barnard stated that, at last month's committee meeting the PowerPoint presentation covered a great deal of economic and housing data, but there was a lot of interest in the housing affordability data. The presentation tonight will cover more of that information. Other analyses will be presented next month.

The housing demand data slides were updated based on the difference between the price of properties that sold in the last five years and assessment values. The assessed value on average is about one-third of the sale price. The affordability analysis was recalculated based on the difference. The data shows that, on the supply side, there is still a large cluster in the middle, with not enough on the low and high ends. The maximum housing cost slide was updated to reflect over 30% of income being cost-burdened. Cost burden is high for low and middle incomes; it falls off with over \$75,000 median income. Mr. Hartney commented that, when an assessment is older, the state's common level ratio is a way to assess new construction and asked if that could be used for as the most current data. Mr. Barnard thought it probably couldn't be used since we're looking at the data in aggregate. Mr. Hartney asked if we could look at the age of housing versus the price. Mr. Barnard said that might be possible based on what has sold recently. A market analysis slide was added that shows over ten years of housing sales. For the region, single-family detached units make up 94% of sales, with a median sales price of \$160,000. Units sold by municipality from 2008-2018 were also shown. The data was obtained from Northampton County sales records.

During the discussion on approved development, Mr. Petrucci asked if individual lots with single unit construction should be included. Mr. Barnard said they should and that the municipalities should inform the LVPC if they have those instances. Mr. Hartney asked if the approved units were constructed yet, Mr. Barnard said that information is unknown. If municipalities believe the

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data is incorrect, let staff know. He said both PowerPoint presentations from the August and September steering committee meetings will be sent out to committee members. The August presentation was not sent out previously since some of the data was being revised.

Mr. Barnard discussed median sales price data. The data indicates an overall dip in price after the recession and that prices still have not returned to pre-recession levels, but individual municipalities had more erratic changes over the past ten years. Mr. Angelini asked if the data reflects sheriff sales, tax sales and foreclosures. Mr. Barnard said he would need to check on that.

Mr. Barnard discussed population growth within the region. The PA Municipalities Planning Code requires municipalities to plan for growth. Mr. Petrucci asked if that factors in municipalities that have preserved large areas of farmland. Mr. Barnard said that, as part of the planning process, the group will have to think about how to accommodate growth with the boroughs mostly developed and the townships with large farmland preservation areas.

The Development map was revised from the August PowerPoint to show only approved development over the past ten years and does not include proposals at the preliminary stage. The map does not indicate what was built. Several new maps have been prepared, including a School map and two Live/Work maps. The first Live/Work map shows where people who live in the Slate Belt and work in the Lehigh Valley. People are mostly working in Upper Mt. Bethel and Pen Argyl. The second map shows where Slate Belt residents work outside of the Lehigh Valley. A data table could possibly be included that shows where everybody works. The location is where the job is based. Mr. Petrucci asked if we could show the percentage of people in the workforce for each municipality. Mr. Barnard said we could include a chart with that information but that it would be rather large. We do have live/work data for each municipality that can be provided also. Mr. Hurni asked if we knew the age of people by housing unit. Mr. Barnard didn't think we could obtain that information. Mr. Hartney asked if staff looked at HMDA data, which identifies bank lending activity and includes a public data set. Mr. Barnard said staff would check on that. Ms. Zmoda commented that they need more time to digest all the data, and it should be distributed ahead of time. Committee members asked what they should do with the data. Mr. Barnard said they need to understand the data and then, based on the findings, the group will collectively develop policies. Ms. Kerzner asked if we are planning for things that will no longer be around in the future, such as shopping malls. Mr. Barnard said that as part of this work, we will be looking at where the market is going. There will be a lot of change with the retail market, and understanding that and having a plan in place will be important so that shopping malls and strip commerce continue to provide value to their community. Mr. Petrucci asked if we could look at the impacts of gentrification. Mr. Barnard said we could, but thought that should be done during a later stage of the planning process. Mr. Hartney suggested that each municipality review the data once received to ensure that it is accurate.

Next Steps

Mr. Barnard noted that six priorities, listed on the slide, were identified at the August meeting. The priorities were more action-oriented, so they were reworded to be more goal-oriented, as shown on the slide and listed below.

1. A balance between growth and preservation.
2. A high regional quality of life.
3. An efficient local and regional government.

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4. A resilient transportation and infrastructure network.
5. A strong farming community.
6. A prepared student body and workforce.

Mr. Petrucci called for a motion to approve the goals. Ms. Zmoda made the motion, and Mr. Hurni seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Mr. Barnard informed the group that the LVPC will be looking for additional community input at the Slate Belt Bash on September 29 at Weona Park from 11 am – 4 pm. He requested two things from the group: T-shirts will be ordered for committee members, so we need their t-shirt size. A sheet is being passed around where you can provide that information. Also, we are looking for committee members to help staff the booth during the event, and he asked them to let us know if they could help. Ms. Putvinski asked if there will be a handout for people explaining what the project is about. Mr. Barnard said we may be able to provide something.

Adjourn

Mr. Petrucci called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Powell made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Angelini seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Attachments

- August 7, 2019 Steering Committee Minutes

Minutes prepared and respectfully transmitted by the LVPC.