



Southwest Lehigh Public Engagement

Eric C. McAfee, AICP, LEED AP, Director of Community Planning

The LVPC has been working intently with a steering committee on the Southwest Lehigh (SWL) intermunicipal agreement, which includes the townships of Lower Macungie, Upper Milford and Lower Milford, and the boroughs of Alburtis, Emmaus and Macungie. In 2014, this steering committee, consisting of managers and key officials from each of the six municipalities, reaffirmed its desire to work cooperatively as a region through their intermunicipal comprehensive plan. They contracted with the LVPC to coordinate and lead the update to the plan, which was last adopted in 2005. The LVPC started meeting regularly with the SWL steering committee in 2013, and, in the last months of 2015 and early 2016, the public engagement aspect of the process escalated considerably, culminating in a series of events that took place in January 2016.

The LVPC and the SWL steering committee collaborated to bring these events to fruition. First, the steering committee built a list of over 300 stakeholders across the six municipalities, then it categorized these individuals according to their subjects of expertise, which spanned seven different topics referenced in the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. These topics included the following:

- Land Use and Future Development
- Housing
- Transportation
- Natural and Historic Resources
- Community Facilities and Utilities
- Economic Development
- Civic Leadership

In December 2015, the LVPC invited the 300+ stakeholders to a series of roundtable discussions, tailoring each invitation based on the recipient's subject matters of expertise. A two-day planning charrette took place on January 5th and 6th, with over 100 individuals attending. The charrette offered multiple sessions over the course of two days to maximize the likelihood of attendance. At the start of each session, LVPC Executive Director Becky Bradley offered a brief "state of Southwest Lehigh" presentation offering key details on demographics, land development, transportation data and character-defining imagery. The participants then broke into multiple roundtable discussions based on the aforementioned seven topics, where a member of the LVPC led an open-ended discussion that allowed the participants to offer considerable feedback on key issues over the course of 90 minutes.

After the charrette was complete, the entire LVPC staff convened to share notes and assemble a list of the top five identified issues within each topic. Over the course of the next week, the

staff assembled these findings into a new presentation that took place on January 14th from 7pm to 9pm at the Lower Macungie Community Center, open to the public in general. This community-wide listening session attracted 75 people, who, after listening to a brief introduction, organized themselves according to the same seven topics as the two-day event. However, LVPC staff decided to split the topics of natural resources and historic resources, resulting in eight themed tables instead of seven. After looking at the five key issues identified at their respective table, each participant was given five “votes” by which he or she could visually indicate how critical that issue was. After voting was completed, the participants organized in a very lightly moderated discussion by LVPC staff, in which they voiced their opinions about the results of the votes, as well as address other key concerns that might have otherwise gone unidentified up to this point.

Through the filtering of issues across these meetings, the LVPC is now working on a broader public survey open to anyone who chooses to participate. The results of this series of public engagements will help to inform the development of the update to the SWL multimunicipal comprehensive plan, which will be released to the steering community in the early summer of 2016.

Key data, photographs and a calendar of upcoming events are all available on PlanSWL, the Southwestern Lehigh multimunicipal steering committee’s personalized website: <http://planswl.org>. Through the website, visitors are encouraged to offer their own feedback to the reports and the overall planning process.