



Lehigh Valley Planning Commission

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## Multi-Municipal Strength In Numbers

Some are seizing on money-savings and efficiency that comes with working together, while others are looking for better ways to protect their farmland and open space.

Twenty-six Lehigh Valley communities representing more than 120,000 people are working on multi-municipal plans designed to manage their futures together, enabling them to save tax dollars and ultimately better handle the development pressure facing all of them.

“This kind of regional planning fosters cooperation between neighboring municipalities, enabling them to share services and giving them the tools they need to manage development impacts that cross municipal borders,” said Lehigh Valley Planning Commission Executive Director Becky Bradley. “Multi-Municipal Plans benefit everyone involved, including the residents in each community.”

By joining together, communities can take advantage of their geographic similarities and address common priorities, while maintaining local autonomy and control. In some cases that means banding together to share costs for goods and services. In others it means making regional plans on things that have impacts spanning many municipalities, such as roads or economic development.

Perhaps the biggest benefit is the ability to take greater control of development. Under current state law, every municipality must have zoning that allows every possible land use. But communities in a multi-municipal plan need only plan for every use within their regional boundary. It not only allows them to manage their growth together, but it enables them to better handle large developments, such as warehouses or industrial parks. For example, if one municipality already has several warehouses, or has zoning where they make sense, another community in the plan can deny warehouse developers access without danger of losing a challenge in court.

“In many ways, this gives [them] a chance to control their future,” said Northampton County Executive Lamont McClure. “These communities have a chance to decide where business and growth will be located, and where they should preserve farmland and open space.”

Kick-offs for the 10-municipality Nazareth Area Plan, the six-municipality Northern Lehigh plan and the 10-municipality Slate Belt Plan happened earlier this year:

- **NazPlan** – Representing about 54,000 people in the Boroughs of Bath, Chapman, Nazareth, Stockertown and Tatamy, and the Townships of Bushkill, Hanover, Lower Nazareth, Moore and Upper Nazareth, community leaders embarked on a project to update the multi-municipal plan that was adopted in 2006. The plan is being paid for by the 10 municipalities, the Pennsylvania Department of Economic Development

(PADCED) and the LVPC. During meetings with stakeholders the Nazareth Area Plan Steering Committee determined that the top issues are truck traffic, warehouses, development stress, attainable housing, maintaining open space, air and water quality, and balancing preservation and development.

“We get along so well. It just makes sense to plan as a region,” said NazPlan Steering Committee Chairman Brien Kocher. “We already share services like the animal control officer and the Building Code Appeals Board, and this also gives us an added advantage of shared zoning.”

More information is available at <https://nazplan.org/>

- **Northern Lehigh Plan** – Representing about 29,000 people in the Borough of Slatington and the Townships of Heidelberg, Lynn, Lowhill, Washington and Weisenberg, community leaders embarked on a project to update the area’s 2004 plan. The project is paid for by the municipalities, the PADCED and the LVPC. The communities are currently holding meetings to set their priorities for the future.

“Land use and development are very contentious issues in this area, but this multi-municipal plan can protect us from land use that doesn’t really make sense in our community,” said Steering Committee Member Jason Ruff, during a kick-off event at Olde Homestead Golf Course May 29. “It allows us to create communities we are proud of, and with the help of everyone working as a team, to build sustainable communities.”

More information is available at <http://plannl.org/>

- **Plan Slate Belt** – Representing about 38,000 people in the Boroughs of Bangor, East Bangor, Portland, Roseto and Wind Gap, and the Townships of Lower Mount Bethel, Plainfield, Upper Mount Bethel and Washington, community leader have embarked on a project to draft the first ever Slate Belt Multi-Municipal Plan. The project is paid for by the municipalities, the Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley’s Slate Belt Rising, Lafayette Ambassador Bank, Northampton County, PADCED and the LVPC.

“The collaboration between the urban boroughs and the predominantly agrarian townships will provide a structure for the communities to plan judiciously in the areas of land use, transportation, providing recreational facilities, the conservation of natural and scenic resources, the preservation of farmland, and fostering economic development,” Slate Belt Steering Committee Chairman Tom Petrucci said during the June 5 kick-off at Lafayette Ambassador Bank near Pen Argyl. “The multi-municipal planning effort will also identify and facilitate opportunities for the communities to share both resources and the delivery of efficient and effective public services.”

The communities are currently holding meetings to set their priorities for the future.

More information is available at <http://planslatebelt.org/>

Crafting each plan will involve monthly Steering Committee meetings, a detailed housing, economic, demographics and land use analysis, and a community survey. All three plans are scheduled to be completed by the close of 2020.

“At the end of the day, this helps these communities reinforce the high quality of life they have all worked so hard to build,” Bradley said. “These communities have some of the best environmental assets, some of the best wildland resources, some of the best housing diversity, and some of the best and strongest clusters of local business. This is a great way to maintain that high quality of life.”