

MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman McKeon called the monthly meeting of the Berks County Planning Commission to order at 3:00 p.m. The meeting was held on Wednesday, July 14, 2021 as a virtual meeting using the platform Microsoft Teams.

The following members were present:

Thomas C. McKeon, Chair  
Jodi L. Gauker, Vice-Chair  
James A. Adams, Secretary  
Glenn R. Knoblauch  
James C. McCarthy  
Douglas P. Rauch, Esq.  
David H. Turner

Not in Attendance:

Lee C. Olsen, AIA, NCARB  
Christopher J. Spohn

Also Attending:

Cheryl A. Auchenbach, Planner III  
Beth A. Burkovich, GISP, GIS Analyst  
Shanice E. Ellison, Planning Technician  
Michelle D. Franklin, Subdivision Planner III  
Michael D. Golembiewski, Trans. Modeler  
Devon B. Hain, Trans. Planner II  
David N. Hunter, Sr., AICP, Executive Director  
Matthew F. McGough, Intergovernmental Planner  
Laura F. Mursch, Planner II  
Jamie L. Passon, Planner II  
Ashley J. Showers, Assistant Director  
Amanda M. Timochenko, Planner II  
Pauline R. Klopp, Office Support IV  
Mike Gombar, Masano Bradley  
Malcolm Townes, IS  
Information System Production  
Jessica Blausner, Admin. Assist. to Commissioner Barnhardt  
Aaron Gantz, Economic Development Director, GRCA  
Deb Millman, GRCA  
Jeremy Zaborowski, BCIDA  
Two viewers on YouTube (1 from Reading Eagle, Heather Berger - IS)

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

3. REPORTS OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEES

A. Executive Director's Report

David Hunter informed the Commission of the PA Downtown Center Conference being held in Reading at the DoubleTree from September 12<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup>. He mentioned that Jillian Magee, Main Street Manager of Boyertown Borough and Deena Kershner, Main Street Manager of Hamburg Borough will be participating in that conference.

He informed the Commission that the PPA State Conference is being held this October in Pittsburgh.

He stated that the Smart Growth Alliance Housing Committee will be meeting two weeks from today. He will send an invite out to the Commission members if they choose to attend.

Mr. Hunter informed the Commission that PennDOT has approved funding for a regional freight study which includes five MPO's: Reading Area Transportation Study, Lehigh Valley Planning Commission, Lebanon County, Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance (NEPA) and Lackawanna/Luzerne Counties. That will be under way in the Fall.

4. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of Minutes of June 9, 2021

B. Ontelaunee Twp.- Application for DCED MTF

Staff received a request for a letter of compliance from Ontelaunee Township for their application to the PA Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) Multimodal Transportation Fund for areawide improvements. The proposed project consists of multiple road and intersection improvements that would enhance capacity to coordinate with several proposed land developments in the vicinity of the intersections of Pottsville Pike (S.R. 0061) and Lakeshore Drive (S.R. 0073) and Lakeshore Drive (S.R. 0073) and Ontelaunee Drive (S.R. 4029/T-752). The proposed road and intersection improvements at the intersection of Pottsville Pike (S.R. 0061) and Lakeshore Drive (S.R. 0073) include: widening the southbound approach to provide 400 foot dual left turn lanes, extending the left-turn lane on the northwest approach to provide 200 feet of storage, widening the southwest approach of to provide 425 foot dual left turn lanes and a 450 foot right turn lane, constructing a 4 foot wide concrete median on the northeast and southwest approaches, and improving the traffic signalization at this intersection. The proposed road and intersection improvements at the intersection of Lakeshore Drive (S.R. 0073) and Ontelaunee Drive (S.R. 4029/T-752) include: widening the northbound and southbound approaches to provide a 125 foot left turn lane in both directions and a 150 foot southbound right turn lane, widening the eastbound and westbound approaches to provide 125

foot left turn lanes in both directions and a 150 foot eastbound right turn lane, and improving the traffic signalization at this intersection. These road and intersection improvements will increase road capacity for the proposed two industrial developments consisting of 463,782 S.F. and 652,080 S.F., a 10,000 S.F. retail service establishment, a 5,585 S.F. retail development, a 5,015 S.F. fast food development, and a 3,680 S.F. car wash in this area within Ontelaunee Township, Berks County. The Township is requesting a grant in support of these improvements.

The grant will help facilitate the development of this area. The improvements proposed as a part of this project coordinate with several land developments proposed in the vicinity of the two above mentioned intersections. The proposed 463,782 S.F. industrial development is the Reitnauer production facility along the south side of Lakeshore Drive between Pottsville Pike and Ontelaunee Drive. Access to this site will be provided along the west side of Ontelaunee Drive and the east side of Pottsville Pike. The proposed 652,080 S.F. industrial development is the Heffner site along the east side of Pottsville Pike south of the Reitnauer site. Access to this site will be provided along the west side of Ontelaunee Drive. The proposed 10,000 S.F. retail service establishment is located on the northwest corner of the Pottsville Pike and Lakeshore Drive intersection behind the existing Rutter's convenience market/gas station. Access will be provided via a driveway to Pottsville Pike and to Lakeshore Drive. The proposed 5,585 S.F. retail space is a Wawa located at the northeast corner of the Pottsville Pike and Lakeshore Drive intersection. Access to the site will be provided by two shared, right-turn-in/right-turn-out-only driveways on Pottsville Pike and one full movement driveway via a shared on-site road at the site of the existing driveway to the Ozzy's Fun Center on Lakeshore Drive. The proposed 5,015 S.F. fast food development is located just north of the proposed Wawa at the intersection of Pottsville Pike and Lakeshore Drive using the same access as the proposed Wawa. The proposed 3,680 S.F. car wash is located just north of the proposed fast-food development at the intersection of Pottsville Pike and Lakeshore driving using the same access as the proposed Wawa and fast-food development.

The Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030 identifies this area as Future and Designated Growth Areas in Ontelaunee Township. Within this area, the plan notes that:

“Designated Growth and Future Growth Areas are intended to be multi-purpose activity areas characterized by concentrated density and suburban/urban development. These areas are currently suitable for medium/high density development due to the presence of the necessary public infrastructure services in place.”

The Plan specifically identifies this area as highly suitable for commercial/industrial growth. Development of these areas is important to growing the job base and expanding the tax base in support of the economic health of Berks County.

Additionally, the six proposed land developments are within areas the Plan identifies as Economic Development Areas (EDAs). EDAs within the county were identified to support “a more coordinated approach to economic development within the county.” These EDAs were carefully evaluated using factors including land without environmental/land use constraint, and proximity to interchanges, major roads, public sewer, and public water.

Staff prepared a letter of support stating compliance with the Berks County Comprehensive Plan.

C. Boyertown Borough – Application for DCED MTF

Staff received a request for a letter of compliance from Boyertown Borough for their application to the PA Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) Multimodal Transportation Fund for Streetscape Improvements Phase II. The proposed project consists of three sections of sidewalk and intersection improvements that expand upon work already supported by the BCPC in 2019 and 2020. The locations are along East Philadelphia Avenue (SR 0073) between the Colebrookdale Railroad tracks and Washington Street, along S. Reading Avenue (SR 0562) between 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and the access to the Town Center public parking area and along N. Reading Avenue (SR 2067) between 5<sup>th</sup> Street and 4<sup>th</sup> Street. Additionally, Boyertown Borough has requested funding for the on-road portions of the Inner Loop Trail (as part of the proposed Secret Valley Trail) to link neighboring Colebrookdale Township residents with the downtown streetscape improvements in the Borough. The location for the Inner Loop portion of the project is within the right-of-way of Washington Street, Front Street, Englesville Road, Mill Street, Warwick Street, Oley Street, Chestnut Street, and E. Philadelphia Avenue. There is no required match, and Boyertown is requesting funding for \$1,182,372, the projected cost of the improvements.

This grant will help facilitate the downtown revitalization and connectivity of Boyertown and the surrounding area.

Phase I of this project was previously funded in 2009 using a Transportation Enhancement Program earmark, and construction followed in 2011. This grant will allow the Borough to extend pedestrian improvements beyond Phase I limits. The proposed improvements include the replacement of damaged curbs and sidewalk, construction of a decorative brick border, the addition of pedestrian lighting, delineation of on-street parking with decorative meters, and other streetscape appurtenances. These improvements are intended to provide a safer and more inviting destination for residents and visitors of the area. The on-road portions of the Inner Loop Trail, totaling 2.75 miles will consist of bike lanes and/or sharrows and will include pedestrian signage improvements determined during the design phase of the project if awarded. This addition will connect the neighboring residents of Colebrookdale Township utilizing active modes of transportation.

The Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030 identifies this area as an Existing Development Area in Boyertown Borough. Within this area, the plan calls for:

“A variety of reinvestment, rehabilitation, and revitalization efforts will be promoted to take advantage of the existing infrastructure network, and to improve the tax base of urban centers. These areas should function as multi-purpose centers providing for livable communities. Strategies should enhance the character of the existing community and be consistent with the historical heritage, scale, and density of the area.”

Additionally, this project supports the Berks County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan’s vision:

“Healthy, vibrant, and economically strong communities encourage and value transportation connectivity. Berks County will be a place where people of all ages and abilities can safely, comfortably, and conveniently walk or bicycle everywhere.”

The Streetscape Phase II project meets the County’s goals to protect and maintain the current bicycle and pedestrian network, connect communities in ways that support walking and bicycling as viable transportation options, create and maintain safe bicycling and walking infrastructure and support walking and biking options as ways to grow a vibrant local economy.

The intent of this project is to provide improved bicycle and pedestrian access to the existing facilities and amenities of the downtown area and is therefore consistent with the land use and transportation goals of the Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030.

Colebrookdale Township formally supports this project as well.

Staff prepared a letter of support stating compliance with the Berks County Comprehensive Plan.

D. Reports for Approval

- Land Development & Subdivision Activity Report & Summary
- 2020 Annual Housing and Non-Residential Reports, 2021 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Housing Unit Report, 2021 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Non-Residential Report
- Endorsed Land Development & Subdivision Activity Report

MOTION: David Turner made a motion to approve the consent agenda. The motion was seconded by Doug Rauch and passed unanimously.

5. STAFF AND STAKEHOLDER REPORTS

A. Jillian Magee, Main Street Manager, Boyertown Borough

Jillian Magee spoke about some of the upcoming events happening in the Borough of Boyertown and the walking tour/train ride scheduled during the PA Downtown Conference in September. She also mentioned that Boyertown has received National Accreditation from the Mainstreet Center annually since 2015. She mentioned that they are working on their Designation which is very similar to Accreditation although Designation last five years instead of only one year.

Ms. Magee described two of the biggest needs for the Borough is funding and more businesses are needed to open up downtown.

B. Deena Kershner, Main Street Manager, Hamburg Borough

Ms. Kershner informed the Commission that Hamburg’s Main Street Program has existed for 19 years and she has been the one and only Executive Director. She mentioned that Hamburg Borough is also Accredited and is working on getting re-designated as well. She stated that

when you are Designated you have a higher priority of getting grant funds. She feels that it seems harder for the non-profits to get grant funding over the businesses.

Ms. Kershner spoke about upcoming events and projects in the Borough of Hamburg. She stated that the Borough's needs are staffing, volunteers and funding.

C. 2020/2021 Housing and Non-Residential Development Reports Overview

Ashley Showers showed a power point presentation summarizing the data that was approved in the above consent agenda. She stated that the majority of new developments in the County for 2020 were apartments. The majority of those apartments are located in Spring Township and Wyomissing Borough. The next largest category of development for 2020 was single family detached and the majority of those homes were built in Ontelaunee and Washington Townships. When looking at the impact on the school districts from these new developments the majority of the total housing units were developed in Wilson School District first, Wyomissing Area School District second and Boyertown Area School District third. She then went over the new housing units for the first quarter of 2021 in which single family detached housing was the largest category with 97 homes being built.

Looking back through the quarters over the last five years, the highest quarter for development was the third quarter of 2019, with 243 units.

There was a total of 3,689,034 square feet of non-residential development for 2020 broken down as follows:

Commercial Development: 286,034 square feet  
Warehouse and Storage: 3,274,841 square feet  
Industrial Development: 95,070 square feet  
Public & Quasi-Public Development: 33,080 square feet  
Agricultural – consisted of 7 poultry barns

D. Alan Piper, Pennsylvania State Transportation Commission's Public Survey Results

Alan Piper stated that we work extensively with the State Transportation Commission early in the process of updating the State's 12-year programs which also then provides input to us for our update to the Four Year TIP and additional input we use in our Long Range Transportation Plan. In the Pennsylvania State Transportation Commission's (STC's) effort to gain public input for the 2023 Twelve Year Program/Transportation Improvement Program (TYP/TIP), they opened a six-week public comment period in Spring, 2021. We forwarded their survey to all of the municipalities in Berks as well as shared it with all County employees. This public outreach allowed over 2,500 transportation issues to be identified statewide, with 153 of these located within Berks County. We separated these results by responses focused on highways and bridges and to those focused on bicycle/pedestrian and public transportation. The STC system flagged comments that they feel are addressed by 2021 TYP/TIP projects. Examining the data from the 153 valid responses has provided us with the following information.

A majority of the highway and bridge comments showed public concern with congestion and safety along the Allentown Pike and Kutztown Road portions of S.R. 0222 through Maiden creek, Richmond, and Maxatawny Townships. Intersections along this portion of S.R. 0222 that showed the most concern were located at Main Street (S.R. 0073), Genesis Drive, Richmond Road and Long Lane. Other congested areas include 3 major intersections along Pricetown Road (S.R. 0012), located at Elizabeth Avenue, Skyline Road, and Blandon Road (S.R. 0073). These locations along S.R. 0222 and S.R. 0012 are all covered under TYP/TIP projects. Multiple intersections along Penn Avenue in Wernersville Borough with North and South Church Roads, its intersection with State Hill Road in Wyomissing Borough, its intersection with Mull Road and (S.R.0724) Shillington Road in Sinking Spring, as well as West Wyomissing Boulevard in Spring Township continue to provide concerns with congestion and safety.

The West Shore Bypass (S.R. 0422) was identified as having entrance and exit issues adding to congestion and safety concerns. These problem areas were identified at the Lancaster Avenue and Interstate 176 interchanges, which will be addressed through TYP/TIP projects. The interchange area in Wyomissing Borough where S.R. 0222, S.R. 0422, and S.R. 0012 come together received comments concerned with safety due to high congestion and design.

The only bicycle comment requested wider shoulders to allow bicycle access on Kennedy Avenue in Longswamp Township. Pedestrian concerns were focused on missing links of sidewalk in Kutztown Borough. The other 3 pedestrian comments looked at the safety of the railroad underpass on Heisters Lane in Reading, the safety of users of Antietam Lake Park, and along S.R. 422 in St. Lawrence. Public Transportation comments consisted of 1 request for passenger rail and the addition of a BARTA bus stop in the area of Flying Hills.

E. Paul Janssen, Director, CELG

David Hunter mentioned that the Governor had just released an amendment to the Sunshine Act and the amendment affects virtual meetings. Part of that amendment is that municipalities must have a hybrid meeting option starting in September. That means that September's BCPC meeting will be in person, with a virtual option, but Mr. Hunter wasn't sure if the meeting would be held in the Planning Commission Offices or in the Commissioner's Boardroom on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor as they are outfitting their boardroom to accommodate hybrid meetings. We will have more details at the August BCPC meeting.

Discussion also took place on the other items contained in the Sunshine Act Amendment.

Paul Janssen extended an invitation to the Planning Commission to attend their Municipal Picnic being held at Dietrich Park on September 30<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Janssen stated that CELG is involved in two major initiatives at this time. One of them is trying to prepare the municipalities for the rollout of the new economic development plan the County is doing. He mentioned that they want to include housing and development but municipalities are concerned about housing because as we went through the early 2000's housing meant more children, which meant schools expanded and that meant that taxes went up. Now taxes are going up, but it is because of state funding cuts. He mentioned that the school

districts have been asked to participate, through the Berks Municipal Partnership, to discuss these issues. There are 11 school officials who are currently interested to participate and possibly more school districts will want to join in. The concern is that you can do all the economic development you want but if you don't have the right process in place for housing and for community benefits, people will not build facilities if there are not enough people to bring in to work at them. It is noted that there is a critical housing shortage and we believe there is a capacity issue for school districts. Over the last 15 years families became smaller and people have grown older, so the school districts generated a capacity. Part of the process is to really determine what the capacity for school districts is and how can that match up with sewer and water capacity and also with locations that are ripe for economic development. This will assist in recruiting businesses to come in. And if that happens, school districts will get the benefit of the EIT and all the other taxes that come along with it. On July 22<sup>nd</sup> there will be a discussion with these school districts and the BCIU.

Paul Janssen then mentioned that CELG will begin to restart teaching the Master Planner Program. They were able to keep the Advanced Master Planner Program going over the last year. They will be offering a new Advanced Master Planner Session on county assessments.

He also mentioned that CELG will be teaching a fourth session for newly elected municipal officials that was previously taught in 2019 and 2020 and had been suspended due to COVID.

He informed the Commission of the Berks County Water and Sewer Assoc. Annual Conference was being held virtually on July 28<sup>th</sup>. He mentioned that registration is free if anyone wants to join in.

He mentioned that CELG has been doing a lot of consulting for the municipalities with the financial distressed program that Berks County funded.

CELG also assists municipalities in filling vacancies in municipal managers. There are currently two municipalities looking for a manager: West Reading Borough and Womelsdorf Borough.

Paul Janssen asked the Commission to think about issues they may see where CELG can assist in providing training or workshops to identify programs that could help in Berks County.

He also stated that it looks like CELG will be able to hold their Open House this year on Tuesday, October 19<sup>th</sup>. They are working on the details for this.

6. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: David Turner made a motion to adjourn and the meeting adjourned at 4:22 p.m.

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Thomas C. McKeon, Chairman

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James A. Adams, Secretary