



**Lehigh Valley/Berks Section of
APA Pennsylvania**

Section Council Monthly Meeting

Thursday, March 13, 2025
South Whitehall Township

Section Council in Attendance: Craig Beavers, Samantha McLean, Steven Schray, Molly Wood

Guest/Members in Attendance: Mary Grace Collins, Ben Dinkel, Joseph Dotta, Isabella Fiume, Evan Gardi, Robert Gates, Scott Greenly, Brian Hite, Taylor Lawrence, David Manhardt, Kevin Murphy, Tina Roseberry, Jillian Seitz, April Wilk

1. Welcome

Craig Beavers opened the meeting at 12:03PM and thanked everyone for coming. Everyone went around and introduced themselves, and the section welcomed Kevin Murphy (Township Planner, North Whitehall) and April Wilk (Land Development Coordinator, South Whitehall).

2. Minutes Approval

Craig Beavers asked if there were any corrections to the February minutes. There were none. The minutes stand approved.

3. Treasurer's Report

Rick Roseberry was unable to attend; there is no Treasurer's Report. Craig Beavers noted that the only recent transactions were an expense line item for \$128.00 (today's lunch) and a revenue line item for \$776.33 (yearly section allocation).

4. Planning Partner Reports

a. Berks County Planning Commission

Taylor Lawrence provided an update for the Berks County Planning Commission.

BCPC is working on both their 2024 Annual Report and the County Comprehensive Plan Update. They anticipate a kickoff with the Berks County Commissioners in the coming month. Taylor asked members of LVPC if they would be willing to share data related to their monthly plan reviews, specifically the number of residential proposals and total number of plans reviewed. Jill Seitz said she would be happy to share.

Taylor mentioned that on April 1st, BCPC will be relocating to their new offices at 400 E Wyomissing Ave, Mohnton, PA 19540. Staff are busy preparing for that move.

BCPC, along with APA PA LVB and Albright College, will be hosting the [PA Land Use Institute on Saturday, April 5th](#) and will feature a legislative update and discussion on agricultural planning.

Lastly, BCPC continues to coordinate with municipalities on several multi-municipal planning efforts.

b. Lehigh Valley Planning Commission

Ben Dinkel and Joey Dotta provided an update for the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission.

LVPC is continuing to work on the Functional Classification Update for roadways, as well as updates to the Safety Action Plan.

On Monday, March 24 at 9 AM, LVTS Technical Committee will hold a public workshop to determine criteria for Transportation Set-Aside and Carbon Reduction regional funding allocations. It will be held in person at their offices.

The [Slate Belt Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan](#) has been adopted by all municipalities, and they are now working on the next steps for implementation.

LVPC is hosting several upcoming classes for PMPEI and LTAP trainings, [available on their website](#).

LVPC will be hosting focus groups for the Housing Supply and Attainability Strategy on March 27 and 28.

Lastly, LVPC will be hosting the second [WorkshopLV: Environment meeting](#) for the Regional Climate Action Plan on March 26.

c. State Planning Board / Office of Community Planning

Tina Roseberry provided an update for the State Planning Board.

The SPB is wrapping up on collecting input for the 2025 State Land Use and Growth Management Report. They have been reaching out to all county planning commissions to update land use information across the state.

There has been discussion to create a state planning document based on more local initiatives, so that grant programs can be more flexible for eligible applications. The SPB will be meeting next week to decide on their plan of action for 2025.

5. Pennsylvania Chapter Reports

a. Legislative Committee

Craig Beavers provided an update for the Legislative Committee.

The LC met a few weeks back to discuss their plan of action for 2025. The biggest push is a focus on communication with the members. They will be working to create a regular legislative update for APA PA members and explore different advocacy areas like transportation and climate action.

Additionally, the LC is working to proposed legislation for local permitting reform. A report was published by the State Planning Board a few years back with several recommendations, and the LC will be analyzing them to identify reform options, develop a work plan, and potentially draft legislation for Harrisburg.

Tina shared [The Gap – a housing study by the National Low Income Housing Coalition](#) that was circulated by the PA Housing Alliance and the State Planning Board that may be of interest.

b. Professional Development Committee

Samantha McLean provided an update for the Professional Development Committee.

The Spring 2025 AICP Exam Prep session was held on March 8th with a great turnout. Samantha thanked Craig for sharing his experience as a recent test taker at the event.

Webinar Wednesday will be held on April 2nd, called “Blowing Up Your Boards and Other Bold Ideas to Bring Your Comp Plan to Life”. It will be based on a session from the Erie conference. These are free to attend and held monthly at noon.

Samantha is looking for a presenter for the June Webinar Wednesday. If anyone has a presentation they’d like to share, please let her know.

As a reminder: the Call for Proposals Deadline for the 2025 APA PA Conference is tomorrow, so if you are interested, please make sure they are submitted by the deadline.

The Call for Nominees for the APA PA Annual Awards is also open until May 16th for anyone wishing to nominate any plan or organization.

6. Section Updates

a. AICP Exam Scholarship

Craig Beavers provided an overview of this item.

The Lehigh Valley/Berks Section of APA Pennsylvania is offering one need-based financial assistance scholarship for the Spring 2025 AICP exam cycle to supplement the cost of the exam registration fee (\$305) for section members who are currently students, recent graduates, or professionals. There are currently no applicants, so the deadline was extended until March 31st. If there are no awardees, then the funds will be utilized for the Fall Scholarship cycle.

b. Education Committee – Molly Wood

Molly Wood Education Committee report this month.

The Education Committee may be working with Temple University to hold an educational session about their Masters in City Planning program this year. We would invite all of our interested planners, as well as the local colleges and universities. Molly suggested that this would be better to hold in the Fall, so there’s time to plan after school is over and before applications are due for the next school year.

Lehigh University recently started a student-run Urban Planning Club. LANTA invited them on a tour of their facilities and transit centers, and the students were very receptive. Blaise Richburg is the organizer of the club, and Molly asked if he might be interested about attending the Temple event. He said that he is on a path for the Fellowship Program, and it would be more advantageous to stay at Lehigh for his Masters for that.

Joey Dotta gave an overview of the Community Fellowship Program at Lehigh. Community Fellows work for a participating agency for fifteen hours per week while taking classes toward a graduate degree in Environmental Policy, Political Science, or Public Policy. Fellows receive academic credit for their agency work, making it possible for them to earn their master’s degree in just one year. Karen Beck Pooley is the Director. The program has led to several new planners around the Lehigh Valley, including at LVPC.

Craig said both the Urban Planning Club and the Community Fellowship Program could be fantastic first steps for the Education Committee. He noted that we should let them know they are eligible for a free APA membership as a student.

Craig mentioned that he was connected with Mark Crain at Lafayette College, who directs their Policy Studies program, and he was interested in working with the Section. He also recently met Nicole Beckett from the Meyner Center for the Study of State and Local Government, and Becky Bradley also teaches at Lafayette, so there are several “ins” when we are ready.

To find out more or get involved with our Education Committee, please reach out to Chair Molly Wood at mwood@lantabus-pa.gov.

c. Events Committee – Samantha McLean

Samantha McLean provided updates of the Events Committee.

The Committee met a few weeks back to discuss a Land Planning 101 class, which would be a basic overview of the planning process for community members. They’ve engaged PennFuture to help with planning, as well as LVPC and DCED. The goal now is to put together an outline, finalize speakers, and host a pilot session at South Whitehall. Depending on how that goes, it can be scaled to other locations in the Lehigh Valley or the state,

The Agricultural Panel event might be pushed to fall due to timing and evaluation. There is further discussion needed on how to tie the concept into planning. Craig suggested they can talk about the SWT Landscapes Plan implementation, and Samantha suggested reaching out to Berks County’s Agriculture Department. Taylor said he can help provide that connection.

To find out more or get involved with our Education Committee, please reach out to Chair Samantha McLean at samantha.mclean@mbakerintl.com

7. South Whitehall Presentation

David Manhardt gave a short presentation about South Whitehall’s approach to Comprehensive Planning.

Dave provided an overview of their Comprehensive Plan. To help keep the document living, it was created with implementation in mind. Their previous plan was criticized for not being implemented, and there was not an easy way to evaluate how successful the plan ultimately was.

To solve this issue, the new Comprehensive Plan was crafted in a way that continually reinforces goals, strategies, and implementation while achieving all the MPC required elements. The Implementation Section of the plan, rather than a short table like others, consists of a full Implementation Framework and Action for every suggested item, consisting of goals fulfilled, key action items to complete, funding sources, partners, how to measure success, and a priority timeline.

The new Comprehensive Plan was designed to be used daily as a policy manual for the community, not to sit on a shelf. To measure its impact and track progress, the township created a process for a Reexamination Report. This report summarizes all progress to date, highlights the status of specific action, and evaluates any changes that might need to be made. This is reviewed annually by the Planning Commission, Board of Commissioners, and Community Development department to ensure priorities are aligned across all levels of government, and it serves to complement their Annual Report.

Talking about the results of this process, Dave said it has helped on several different levels. It creates an opportunity to have the Planning Commission review the Comprehensive Plan on an annual basis for a continual planning process for thinking about opportunities and priorities for South Whitehall. At the Board of Commissioners, staff can utilize the specific implementation action sheets to propose new projects and

demonstrate how it was previously approved and discussed by the Township and the community through public engagement. Currently, the Community Development department is working on several implementation projects, such as a Transportation Plan, a Historic Resource Survey, and a Jordan Valley Open Space Overlay.

Craig praised the work of South Whitehall and how usable the documents are, as it promotes accountability for the planning process. Dave said it was helpful and forces the Township to continually analyze their planning efforts.

Tina thought the process was very smart and well-designed. She noted that many other states have mandatory reexamination and implementation requirements, and she wished Pennsylvania might consider ways to promote this level of planning. A process like this one may help convince people that this isn't such a daunting task if done regularly instead of every 10 years.

Craig asked if there was any specific inspiration that other communities can look at if they wanted to try something like this? Dave said New Jersey's planning regulations were a major influence, as they allow for providing a Reexamination Report instead of a full Comprehensive Plan update every six years. Using this concept under PA's requirements, it made sense to utilize it as an annual tool that could help prepare for the plan update every 10 years. Dave also noted that this process is helpful to bring the public into the planning process. After a controversial development project, the town was upset and wanted to know how to get involved. Since the Comprehensive Plan update was being done at the same time, it was a great opportunity to educate people on what the Comp Plan is and how to get involved in developing and implementing it.

8. Open Floor and Updates

Samantha McLean talked about Easton's Safe Streets for All Action Plan. There is a survey open now to gather public feedback for areas that might need safety improvements.

Dave Manhardt talked about their upcoming RFP for a Road Safety Audit on Hamilton Boulevard between I-78 and Haines Mill Road by Dorney Park, which will hopefully start in May.

Kevin Murphy introduced himself and thanked everyone for the work welcome. He started last month after working for Chester County for three years. If anyone needs connections for North Whitehall, feel free to reach out to him.

Molly Wood said they are staying busy with numerous planning efforts. They are participating in numerous steering committees across the region, including the Blue Zones initiatives in the three major cities. She also thanked everyone for sending land development plans to her office for review and comments. They are continuing to work on bus shelter projects, but notes that progress may be slowing if there are changes at the federal level with funding.

LANTA will be hosting their [2025 Open House and Annual Meeting](#) on Friday, March 21st at 6 PM online and at Bethlehem Town Hall.

9. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on Thursday, April 10th Virtually

10. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:59 PM.