



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

**Conference Planning Committee #2 - Minutes**

Thursday, November 13, 2025

**In Attendance:** David Zipf, Matt Assad, Craig Peiffer, Hannah Milagio, Evan Gardi, Molly Wood, Sean Ziller, Christian Martinez, Mackenzie Geisner, Jillian Seitz, Steven Schrayner, Mary Grace Collins, Samantha McLean, Chris Stroller, Laura Mursch, David Manhardt, David Cohen, Samantha Pearson, Robert Gates, Thiago Almeida, Taylor Lawrence, Cathy Fletcher, Matt Sprung, Jennifer Gomez, Susan Myerov, Corey Gray, Meredith Keller

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

Craig B. welcomed everyone who attended and thanked them for volunteering to help for the conference.

Craig B. introduced the official co-chairs for next year's conference: Molly Wood and Craig Peiffer. Craig Beavers will serve as a third "as needed" co-chair to help with any administrative items to support Molly and Craig P.

Molly welcomed everyone and thanked Craig B. for his help. She acknowledged the need for everyone's help for a successful conference, especially in organizing subcommittee meetings to get started. The more ideas, the better.

Craig P. seconded Molly's comments, and recognized that this is a relatively new process for many of us. Fundraising will be a critical component as we move forward, and he is looking forward to coordinating with everyone.

**2. Overview of Conference Planning and Timeline**

Craig B. reminded everyone that the conference will be October 18-20, 2026 at Wind Creek Bethlehem. The major planning efforts will start in January, but this is an important time to lay a solid foundation for our endeavors. Our major priorities now will be formalizing our subcommittees, as well as selecting a Conference Theme. Starting next year, each subcommittee will be involved in more planning for their respective area.

**3. Members**

Craig B. mentioned that we will aim to organize regular standing meetings of each subcommittee during the next month or two, as well as select a point person to serve as the head of each subcommittee. This role will be helping to coordinate the activities of the subcommittee and communications with the co-chairs.

Molly also mentioned that Kim Gusic, who was unable to attend today, is the Chapter Administrator and will help facilitate many of the more difficult activities, such as contracting and transferring funds.

David Manhardt volunteered to serve as head of the Fundraising Subcommittee. Molly mentioned that this is one of the most important subcommittees, so everyone will need to help pitch in.

Susan Myerov and Chris Stroehler volunteered to help head the Program Subcommittee, with Chris focusing on coordinating mobile tour events. Molly clarified that Kim G. will help with the call for proposals process and with coordinating AICP credits, but the major ask will be drafting the call for proposals, then reviewing the submissions. Craig B. mentioned that APA will be looking for 45 to 48 concurrent sessions for 2026.

(Via email after the meeting, Isabella Fiume volunteered to head the Special Events Subcommittee. Thanks Bella!)

**[Action Item: We are still looking for a volunteer to serve as head of the Speakers Subcommittee]**

#### 4. Conference Theme

Craig B. said that the second most important action item for this meeting was trying to select a Conference Theme. Typically, these are related to the host city, a major trend in planning at the time, or some other symbolic element to tie into the conference. With Bethlehem, there are several great possibilities to choose from.

Matt Assad suggested that something around the idea of adaptive reuse and rebirth might be a good idea.

David Manhardt also suggested that it could tie into America250. With Bethlehem and the Valley's extensive history, maybe a theme around preserving history for the next 250 years would be appropriate. There's also the potential for a historic preservation track for sessions, or even Technology in Planning.

Matt Sprung agreed with David, and said that our theme should embrace the SteelStacks as an iconic symbol of the past, while looking ahead at the bright future and redevelopment of the area.

Rob Gates suggested that the UNESCO World Heritage Site should also be factored into the theme or conference in some way.

Sean Ziller agreed with these ideas. Tying in the idea of the previous 250, recognizing the amazing adaptive reuse and preservation around South Bethlehem since the closure of Bethlehem Steel is a great opportunity, from manufacturing, education, and other investments to look towards the next 250 years.

Susan Myerov asked if there were any active America250 committees who might want to get involved. Sean said he has a connection with Lehigh Valley 250 and would be willing to reach out. There's a large committee involved, including ArtsQuest and other major entities in the region.

Christian Martinez agreed with everyone, and also suggested incorporating some other great elements of Bethlehem's culture, such as MusikFest, or something similar throughout the conference. The idea of having an APA mug as a goodie was suggested; Craig P. said he could talk to ArtsQuest to see what they can do.

Molly offered a logo idea of having railroad tracks, symbolizing the different "session tracks" leading to the SteelStacks, with the keywords of each track on the railroad. Craig B. also suggested ways to incorporate some other of the historical elements, like the Moravian Star, and more modern/reuse elements, like the South Bethlehem Greenway or new construction, to incorporate both the past and next 250 years.

Laura Mursch said that Berks County PC would be willing to design a logo. She will invite their graphic designer to be on the next call, as well as prepare potential sketch options based on the conversations.

Craig B. said it sounds like we all agree with a theme involving America250, and celebrating Bethlehem's historic past and looking forwards its future. Elements of historic preservation and technology also emerged as common themes.

**[Action Item: We will need to consolidate all these great ideas into a concise tagline for our theme; please brainstorm ideas for our next meeting]**

## 5. Subcommittees

Craig B. sent out emails to each subcommittee, asking them to start scheduling standing meeting times. By the next conference planning committee meeting, he hopes that they will be able to meet once or at least start communicating over email

**[Action Item: We will need to coordinate subcommittee meetings before our next meeting]**

### a. Fundraising Subcommittee

The fundraising committee is one of the most important subcommittees and is in charge of raising funds for the conference. They coordinate the budget with the Chapter, solicit sponsorships, advertisements, and exhibitors, and make sure the conference is in good financial condition. They also help coordinate the basket raffle for the Chapter Scholarship fund.

Craig B. said the major goal for this subcommittee will be to solicit sponsorships. There are several sponsors that will be guaranteed, such as Temple, HRG, etc., but we will also want to incorporate our local partners, firms, and organizations from the Lehigh Valley. This also should include our local schools as well.

Molly asked about the process about reaching out to firms. Craig B. said Kim will coordinate the fund transfers and the official end of the process; the local committee is asked to help secure “pledges” from these organizations.

David M. said he will start to coordinate with the Fundraising Subcommittee a list of potential sponsors and track them on a spreadsheet; this will make sure specific people are assigned to ask for sponsors from a firm to prevent double asks.

Craig P. asked about sponsorship levels and if there were forms to hand out to potential sponsors. Craig B. said yes, and showed a previous year’s sponsorship form. Kim G. will help update it for us for 2026 in the coming months before we send requests out. We should be aiming for around \$50,000 in sponsorships, but if we receive more, then we can obviously spend more on the conference.

### b. Speakers Subcommittee

The speakers subcommittee coordinates and selects the main speakers for the conference. This includes an Opening Keynote, the Tuesday morning Speaker/Panel, and the Tuesday Pitkin Lecture.

Molly talked about a potential speaker that she has lined up: Veronica Davis. She is a transportation planner with several national awards and has a new book on inclusive transportation. Veronica is currently available, but instead of pay for herself, she would instead request honorarium for book purchases.

David M. mentioned an idea of planning for the future and leveraging technology. He has some connections for speakers from previous conferences that could be good for the conference. ESRI also has been pushing community development, and that might also be a good speaker.

Craig B. also mentioned that we should prepare “first and second” choices for speakers, just in the event that someone we would like to bring in either is unavailable or out of our price range. We should be looking for \$1000-2500 per speaker.

Craig B. also suggested maybe there's opportunity to have some form of historic preservation panel, or maybe highlight the UNESCO World Heritage Site as a speaker. Sean Z. said he has connections for that and would be happy to reach out to have them involved with the conference in any way.

### **c. Program Subcommittee**

The program subcommittee manages the call for presenters, session selection, and any CM credit coordination. They also help with mobile tours, which may be an additional focus area of subcommittee if needed.

Craig B. reiterated some of the previous points, that we will be looking for 45 to 48 sessions. We have several great volunteers for this subcommittee. The process will begin in January for the call for proposals, then evaluating them when they come in. There are enough people to also have a sub-subcommittee focused on mobile tours.

Sean Z. said he has a contact with Wind Creek to provide tours of the Bethlehem Steel site, which they have done for other events as well. Craig P. echoed that they have something similar scheduled for the Brownfields Conference in early 2026, which could potentially be recycled as a mobile tour for our conference.

Chris Stroehler mentioned that the Greenways and Trails Conference is happening in Bethlehem in September, so there will be some potential overlap in mobile tours. However, it could be easy to tweak them to make them different for anyone who would be attending both conferences. Additionally, coordinating with LANTA, there might be good possibilities for other potential mobile workshops and incorporating inclusive transportation like Veronica Davis will speak about.

Molly agreed, and said LANTA will very likely be able to help once we confirm what will be needed. AJ Knee would also have many great ideas for LANTA and EBS workshops and other tours.

Craig B. also said bike tours would be a great idea, with the South Bethlehem Greenway next to the site. He also volunteered a tour for the Palmer Bikeway and other areas of the Two River Trailway as a potential site. We can coordinate with CAT, DLNHC, and THE LINK for other ideas.

Molly also mentioned the Hoover Mason Trestle as a potential tour. Craig P. agreed, and also suggested the National Museum for Industrial History, which could also be a potential venue for an event. Craig B. also suggested Historic Bethlehem for tour ideas.

### **d. Special Events Subcommittee**

The special events subcommittee organizes the two evening receptions: the Welcome Reception (200-250) and the Planners Social (100).

Craig B. said that we obtained pricing for the MusikFest Café if we wanted to go that route, which might offer a nice location for the Sunday Welcome Reception. Craig P. also said there were dozens of excellent venues nearby as well if we wanted something different than ArtsQuest.

## **6. Open Discussion and Brainstorming**

David Zipf introduced himself from Bucks County Planning Commission. He has been involved in several conference planning processes for state and national APA, and also grew up in Allentown. He would love to help out in anyway possible.

## **7. Next Meeting – December 11<sup>th</sup> at 11 AM**

Craig B. suggested the next meeting for Thursday, December 11<sup>th</sup> at 11 AM, unless there were any major objections.

## **8. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:01 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Craig Beavers