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To the Lehighon Borough Council Members –

Five years ago, my Main Street® teammate Doug Loescher and I came into Lehighon to conduct an assessment of the downtown district. That Assessment Visit was funded through a National Association of Realtors (NAR) grant with matching financial support from the Borough, as was the Main Street® Specialist Visit I made to Lehighon on October 22-25. The attached report documents the activities that occurred during the Specialist Visit and provides guidance and recommendations geared to moving Lehighon further down its path to revitalization of the community's center.

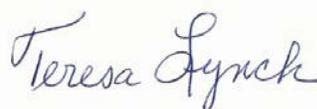
I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Borough Council for its continuing philosophical and financial support of Lehighon's downtown revitalization efforts and for the help you and your staff gave me during my recent visit. I would also like to particularly thank the following for their assistance during my visit:

- Town Manager Nicole Beckett -- for the way in which she organized and coordinated all visit activities, which made the process move smoothly, greatly adding to the visit's effectiveness. Nicole also garnered an impressive group of volunteers to serve on the Main Street® Steering Committee.
- Matthew Marks, Government Affairs Director for Greater Lehigh Valley Realtors (GLVR). Matt was there from the start – submitting GLVR's grant application to the NAR – and then working with Nicole and myself during the two months of planning for the visit as well as attending on-site visit meetings.
- Lehighon Downtown Initiative (LDI) members who have been essential to past downtown achievements and who were very much the key players for bringing LDI volunteers into all aspects of the visit.
- Jerry McAward, Lehighon Outdoor Center owner, who contributed his facility's space for the Community Forum and Main Street® training sessions. Jerry's exemplar attitude during those meetings will be crucial for bringing more business owner volunteers into the Main Street® downtown revitalization program.

I appreciate the willingness of everyone I interacted with over my three-day visit who shared their ideas on ways in which the revitalization process could move forward. Lehighon is a town in which its local residents feel a true sense of commitment to restoring the commercial district to its rightful place as the center of community life.

Please let me know if you have any questions on the attached report.

Best regards,



Teresa Lynch
Commercial Revitalization Specialist

Teresa Lynch
Main Street® Specialist Report
Borough of Lehigh
Downtown Revitalization Visit
October 22-25, 2018

Section I

Visit Summary

Visit Background

In 2013, the Borough of Lehigh Council and the Carbon County Association of Realtors were awarded funding, through a National Association of Realtors (NAR) Smart Growth grant, to bring to Lehigh a team of Main Street® specialists for the purposes of developing a Community Assessment Study focusing on revitalization of the downtown business district. The resulting Assessment Report provided a roadmap for pursuing Lehigh's downtown revitalization process.

Over the next five years, Borough officials and staff, community volunteers, and members of local community-based organizations, followed guidance and recommendations from the Assessment Report as they developed strategies and implemented projects that resulted in major improvements to the economic, physical, and social vitality of Lehigh's downtown district and surrounding environs.

In May 2018, the Borough Council determined that additional Main Street® specialist technical assistance and training was needed to move Lehigh's downtown revitalization process onto a higher level – particularly in the areas of: downtown marketing, business/property development strategies, building improvements, and urban design enhancements. Most particularly, specialist guidance was needed in the area of organizational development so that volunteer capacity could be increased and a more comprehensive work plan structured.

In June, 2018, the Greater Lehigh Valley Realtors® (GLVR) and the Borough of Lehigh Council submitted a grant application to the National Association of Realtors (NAR) for funding to bring in Main Street® Specialist training and technical assistance to provide guidance on generating activities that would:

- Market the downtown district; expand business opportunities; encourage building improvements; and develop urban design plans to better connect the downtown commercial district to riverfront parkland.
- Build capacity in the community for establishing a comprehensive volunteer-driven organization and work plans to facilitate projects leading to improved social, cultural, economic, and physical conditions in the downtown district.

In August, 2018, the NAR awarded a Smart Growth grant to the GLVR to help underwrite a portion of the funding needed to bring a Main Street® Specialist into Lehigh's downtown. The Lehigh Borough Council contributed matching funds to the Smart Growth grant and planning for a Main Street® Specialist Visit began. The Visit took place over a three-day period – from October 22 – 25, 2018. Visit components and recommendations based on findings from the visit are outlined below.

Visit Components

Teresa Lynch, one of the two Main Street® team members who led the 2013 Main Street® Community Assessment Visit to Lehighton and author of the follow-up Assessment Report, arrived in Lehighton on October 22nd to begin the three-day Downtown Revitalization Visit.

The first day of the visit was comprised of:

- Meetings with the Borough Manager and available members of the Main Street® Steering Committee to discussing primary issues to be covered during the on-site visit.

- Tours of the downtown district and immediate environs: to visit successful public and private projects; and to review activities that have blossomed throughout the district in the past five years. The tours were also used to identify additional opportunities as well as define further strategies for issues described in the 2013 Assessment Report that have not yet been resolved.

- An evening Community Forum that was structured to:
 - Describe the present status of revitalization efforts in Lehighton.
 - Discuss successes that have occurred in the business district and immediate environs over the past five years and identify challenges that still exist.
 - Introduce the concept of building a volunteer organization through a power point presentation that gave an overview of the Main Street Four Point Approach® to downtown revitalization as developed by the National Main Street Center more than 35 years ago.
 - Respond to questions and comments from the forum audience.

The Community Forum was very well attended, with more than 50 individuals coming from a broad spectrum of the community – business owners, property owners, Lehighton Downtown Initiative (LDI) members, Borough Council members, Realtors®, and supportive statewide officials.

The second day of the visit was comprised of:

- Specialist training with Borough Manager and Steering Committee members on development of rudimentary work plans in each of the Four Main Street® areas: Organization, Design, Promotion, and Economic Vitality.

- Four Point Training for Lehighton’s Main Street® Steering Committee members and other members of the community who expressed interest in learning more about the four work areas of the Main Street® approach.

The third day of the visit was comprised of:

- A wrap-up meeting which included the Main Street Specialist, the Borough Manager, the GLVR Government Affairs Director, and representatives from the Steering Committee for the purposes of:
 - reviewing activities from the past two days; and
 - providing guidance on Next Steps to be taken

Visit Purposes

Over the past five years, downtown revitalization efforts led by Borough Council members, the Borough Manager, Lehighton Downtown Initiative (LDI) members, and other community volunteers have been praiseworthy. As stated earlier in this report, a primary purpose of the Specialist Visit was to identify activities

that could expand on those successful projects and to suggest implementation strategies so that a more comprehensive work plan could evolve.

Thus, the underlying goal of the visit and this report is to provide step-by-step guidance for harnessing a much broader coalition of the community so that the Lehighton revitalization 'movement' can begin the trek toward creating a volunteer-based organization that can competently handle a much broader implementation-oriented work plan.

It is important to note that the recommendations in this report do not go toward defining an exact framework for a fully-functioning Lehighton downtown revitalization organization -- with Board members named, four-point committees in place, one-year comprehensive work plans established, a non-profit organizational tax status decided upon, and a fundraising plan prepared that is capable of financing the organization and hiring staff.

It is recognized that the Lehighton Borough Council and the Greater Lehigh Valley Realtors will be following up on the recommendations in this Specialist Report to apply to the NAR for a supplementary technical assistance grant so that additional Main Street® specialist services can be brought into Lehighton in early spring, 2019. If such a grant is funded, the work that is done during that visit will be dedicated toward moving Lehighton's nascent downtown revitalization framework into an organizational structure that best fits the needs of the community.

The recommendations below provide guidance for the Steering Committee and the Four Standing Committees. They are made for the purpose of accelerating Lehighton's downtown revitalization movement through careful planning of upcoming projects and a step-by-step process for establishing a downtown organization that utilizes the Main Street Four Point Approach® in its revitalization program of work.

Section II

Next Steps for the Steering Committee

At the time of the Main Street® Specialist's visit, 13 individuals (who are a broad-based representation of the Lehighton community) had agreed to serve as members of a Main Street® Steering Committee. This Steering Committee will work on helping to structure an organizational entity for downtown Lehighton that utilizes the comprehensive Main Street® Four Point Approach in planning and facilitating revitalization projects and activities.

During the Community Forum event described above, several individuals in the audience indicated to the Borough Manager that they might also want to be included as a member of the Steering Committee so the composition of the Committee will be expanded.

The following are step-by-step recommendations for getting the Steering Committee from its initial development stage to a fully-functioning entity that will provide oversight, governance and direction to the four standing committees of Design, Promotion, Economic Vitality and Organization.

Recommendations for the Steering Committee

1. The Steering Committee Chair (Borough Manager) should complete the member composition of the Steering Committee.

2. The Steering Committee Chair should set a day and time that will accommodate the needs of most members for the first Steering Committee meeting.

At that first Steering Committee Meeting:

- A. A convenient (to most) monthly meeting day/time/place for future Steering Committee meetings should be determined.
- B. The Steering Committee Chair should then set a date/time for the next monthly Steering Committee meeting.
- C. Each Steering Committee member should be asked to select one of the four standing committees on which to serve.
- D. Chairs for each of the four standing committees should be assigned.
- E. In order to gain additional needed volunteers for each standing committee, two Steering Committee members should agree to assume the responsibility for developing a plan to recruit new volunteers. *(Since the Organization Committee is responsible for volunteer development, it is likely that these two Steering Committee members should be on the Organization standing committee)*
- F. Each Standing Committee Chair should be given one month to get their committee's membership rosters fully composed and to report their committee roster back to the Steering Committee Chair.
- G. After the above essential first steps have been taken, the Steering Committee Chair should open the meeting to a 15-minute discussion that allows comments and responds to questions Committee members might have.

Within a week of the first Steering Committee meeting, the four standing committee chairs should:

- A. Assemble a list of volunteers who have indicated an interest in serving on the Design, Organization, Economic Vitality, and Promotion Committees.
- B. Confer with the two Steering Committee members who have taken responsibility for recruiting new volunteers to relay their needs for additional volunteers

One month from the first Steering Committee meeting:

- A. Membership on each of the four standing committees should be fully composed.
- B. The second Steering Committee meeting will take place. The agenda for that meeting will revolve around an understanding of the objectives for each committee's work area.

Section III

Recommendations for Four-Point Committees

Some of the following recommendations for projects to be undertaken within the four work areas of Main Street® will take long-term planning before implementation can begin. These long-term projects are included here to make each committee aware of areas that will need attention in the future. The expectation is that individual committees will make the decision of all how far to proceed along any of these paths and to create work plans that do not stress the current capabilities.

Each committee will see that among the following recommendations are two or three short term projects which can be implemented over the next few months and that these projects can start to build momentum

and interest in the community for developing a full scale Main Street® program. Implementation of tasks for each of the projects that are selected should be detailed on work plan forms which have been provided to the Steering Committee.

Design Committee

Committee Work Areas

- Delivering Design Education & Assistance
- Providing Guidance on Building Improvements
- Planning Public Improvements
- Becoming Involved in Downtown Zoning & Planning Issues
- Motivating others to make changes

Design Committee Recommendations

Short Term

1. Begin the information-gathering stage for the potential development of a National Register Historic District nomination for the downtown business district. Perhaps the Lehigh Historical Society could assist in making initial inquiries with the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office to ascertain whether such a district could be established for downtown Lehigh and to define exactly the steps for getting to that designation. Establishment of a National Register Historic District could take a couple of years. But the economic benefits of such a District are immense for the redevelopment and reuse of large historic commercial buildings that are now vacant or underutilized.
2. Put together a team of Design Committee members that can begin a program of visitations to business and property owners to encourage rehab and improvements to buildings and storefronts.
3. Select one short-term Design project in which the committee can complete get visible results over the next few months -- either in the public spaces or within the private domain of the downtown business district. The project could relate to window displays, improved signage, making more attractive gateways, helping a business owner improve their storefront.

Long Term

1. Begin investigating the potential for a major property development project (working with the Economic Vitality Committee) that is in a visible 1st Street location for the rehab and reuse of the property to be developed as a small inn or B&B. The property identified would require a property owner who would be receptive to undertaking such a project.
2. Working with the Economic Vitality Committee, start an internal dialogue (not for public consumption) that identifies a critical mass of buildings in a visible location on 1st Street on which the Design and Economic Vitality Committees can concentrate attention for rehab and reuse in the future.
3. Working with the Economic Vitality Committee, begin assembling a Building and Business inventory of all commercial buildings in the downtown district. (*A Building/Business Inventory form has been given to the Steering Committee.*) Collecting all of the information needed for the Building/Business Inventory might

require the Economic Vitality and Design Committee to look to other volunteer resources within the community as this is a project that will require a dedicated team to properly complete.

4. There are many physical issues within Lehighton's downtown public spaces that need to be addressed. These challenges relate to visual pollution along the byway, unattractive entranceways leading to the downtown district, un-landscaped and unmarked gateways into the district, limited linkages for moving pedestrians and vehicles easily into the business district, lack of wayfinding signs throughout, and needed enhancements to the public areas along 1st Street.

It is imperative that the Borough of Lehighton begin working toward a comprehensive plan for improvements to these public areas. To make further patchwork improvements to the urban landscape in and around downtown Lehighton may only add to confusion about how Lehighton is viewed by local residents, newcomers to the community, and visitors passing through who might otherwise be tempted to stop in the downtown. The original Assessment Report spoke to these issues in depth.

It is recommended that the Borough begin the steps for finding funding sources that would underwrite a Master Urban Design Plan and it will be the Design Committee that will play a primary role in assisting and supporting the Borough in its efforts to get such a plan in place.

Promotion Committee

Committee Work Areas

- Creating Image Building Activities for the Downtown District
- Establishing a Program of Business Promotions/Marketing Activities
- Organizing and Managing Special Events that Target Markets Appropriate to the District

Promotion Committee Recommendations

The Lehighton Downtown Initiative (LDI) has been conducting a very effective promotional program, focusing on initiating and managing highly successful special events, such as:

- The Lehighton Farmers Market, which has become a beloved downtown 'happening' (about to expand to a Winter Market)
- An outstanding 2-day Rocktoberfest that benefits the PA Breast Cancer Coalition

LDI has also taken the lead on hosting Movie Night at the Lehighton Park Amphitheater. And the group is now busy at work on initiating a Trail Towns Program designation for the Borough. That Trail Towns project could really become an image-changer for downtown Lehighton.

The Borough's Parks and Recreation department has ramped up downtown promotional activities by managing several special events that have brought enjoyment to community residents and their families such as:

- The "Adopt a Park Holiday Tree" program in which groups, individuals, or families adopt and decorate Christmas Trees placed in the park. The Holiday Tree weekend festivities include food and drink vendors in the park along with Christmas music. A tree lighting ceremony takes place at the end of the weekend, with the trees illuminated through the month of December.

- Heritage Weekend in July, which includes food vendors, kid's activities, craft vendors, an antiques appraisal clinic, and music. The weekend culminates in a major Fireworks Display.

Because there are already a full slate of special events taking place in downtown Lehigh, the recommendations below are geared to promotional activities that directly assist in marketing businesses within the downtown district.

Short Term

1. Work with the Organization Committee to recruit more business owners to the committee. It is essential that the Promotion Committee represent the interests, insights of the downtown business community. The best way to do this is to invite their participation on the Promotion Committee
2. Select a couple of short-term, small projects that either augment existing LDI or Parks and Rec promotional events or act independently as new activities that directly market downtown business owners and help to bring new customers into those establishments. These business-related promotional activities would go toward 'ringing the cash register.'

Long Term

Begin visitations to downtown business owners so that the Committee gains a better understanding of what business owners think of the downtown district, what is it like for them to conduct business in the downtown, and what constitutes their unmet needs and concerns. Small groups of two or three members of the Committee (or individuals on the committee) can utilize the Business Owner Survey as a means of getting out into the business community (*A copy of the Business Owner Survey has been given to the Steering Committee*).

The responses to questions on the survey will lead to increasing awareness of business owners' needs and provide insight on how to structure future business marketing/promotional campaigns. The Promotion Committee members who are working on the Business Owner Survey project should not just drop the survey off at a business and expect a completed survey to be returned; but should confer with, and help, the business owner complete the survey.

This Visitation/Business Owner Survey project will lead to the Promotion Committee gaining credibility for the work it is undertaking and will provide ideas for how the Committee can plan business promotional activities that will most benefit existing business owners.

Economic Vitality Committee

Committee Work Areas

- Gathering Data for Market Analysis
- Leading the Business Retention and Recruitment Efforts for the District
- Becoming involved in Property Development Projects with the Design Committee
- Creating Incentives that Increase Opportunities for Economic Vitality in the District
- Monitoring Economic Performance in the District

This committee often has to work on projects that are long-term in the implementation stage and, as a result, does not have the opportunity to tout the work that its members are doing. However, its data-gathering tasks

are essential to getting essential marketing information to: the Promotion Committee so that it can successfully attract customers in the downtown's target markets; the Design Committee so that it can move correctly on major redevelopment projects as it recruits businesses that can be supported by the available markets; and the Organization Committee so that it can broadcast the accomplishments of the volunteers in the organization to a broader audience.

The following are recommendations for short-term and long-term projects in which the Economic Vitality Committee can become involved:

Economic Vitality Committee Recommendations

Short Term

1. Review existing market studies/demographics/and other existing sources of information such as the Census of Retail Trade, Consumer Expenditure Survey, Sales Tax Reports; and gather data from original research that provides information about the district's building, its businesses, its customers, and the types of businesses the district could support.
2. Begin to survey the local customer base. This can be done via an intercept survey, focus groups, door-to-door canvassing of local residents. *(A sample Customer Intercept Survey has been given to the Steering Committee)*
3. Begin investigating the potential for a major property development project (working with the Design Committee) that is in a visible 1st Street location for the rehab and reuse of the property to be developed as a small inn or B&B. The property identified would require a property owner who would be receptive to undertaking such a project.
4. Working with the Design Committee, start an internal dialogue (not for public consumption) that identifies a critical mass of buildings in a visible location on 1st Street on which the Design and Economic Vitality Committees can concentrate attention for rehab and reuse in the future.

Long Term

1. Working with the Design Committee, begin assembling a Building and Business inventory of all commercial buildings in the downtown district. *(A Building/Business Inventory form has been given to the Steering Committee.)* Collecting all of the information needed for the Building/Business Inventory might require the Economic Vitality and Design Committee to look to other volunteer resources within the community as this is a project that will require a dedicated team to properly complete.
2. Create a program of incentives that can help in the expansion of existing businesses and can act as a recruitment tool for new businesses. The Promotion Committee will be working on a Business Owner Survey, the results from which can give some background on needed incentives.

Organization Committee

Committee Work Areas

- Enacting a program of Public Relations activities that promotes the organization
- Establishing a process for Volunteer Development that includes recruitment, recognition and retention practices
- Assisting the Board in facilitating a Fundraising plan that builds financial support for the revitalization organization

In order to adequately perform the activities related to the above purposes, the Organization Committee must be able to provide the rationale for why community members would want to volunteer for the organization and why public institutions and private individuals would want to contribute financially to the organization's support. A document entitled, "Benefits of a Main Street Program" has been given to the Steering Committee for distribution to the Organization Committee members. The document explains the benefits that would inure to the groups being solicited for support, such as:

- Property Owners
- Local Residents/Consumers
- Business Owners
- Financial Institutions
- Utility Companies
- Local Government
- County Government
- Preservationists

The recommendations below do not include any suggestions for Fundraising activities. The Organization Committee's role in helping to establish a Fundraising campaign will come AFTER the early stages of Public Relations and Volunteer Development have been initiated and at a time when a comprehensive, fully-composed Main Street® organization is in place.

Organization Committee Recommendations

Public Relations

As a first step in "Enacting a program of Public Relations activities that promotes the organization," the Organization Committee should utilize the "Benefits of a Main Street Program" document to identify the groups/individuals in the Lehighton community which the Committee wants to attract as supporters/volunteers/financial donors to the downtown revitalization program.

The "Benefits" document will lead the Committee to select vehicles by which it can best communicate the nascent organization's multi-faceted messages. The messages that describe how Lehighton's downtown revitalization movement serves the community at large may vary depending on the individual/group the Committee is attempting to attract.

There are many ways to get these messages out to the public. Here are some suggestions:

1. Chairs of the Steering Committee and the four Standing Committees can begin speaking about Lehighton's Main Street® downtown revitalization movement at group meetings held by other community organizations.

2. Through printed materials, such as:
 - A 'Fact Sheet' that describes what the Lehighon Main Street® movement is about.
 - Articles/features on downtown revitalization activities contributed to the Borough's quarterly newsletter
 - Inserts placed in Utility bills and Shopping bags
 - Regular press releases provided to media
3. Through existing on-line platforms, such as:
 - The Borough's website; LDI's Facebook Page; other Lehighon community organizations' websites/Facebook pages.Through new online entries, such as:
 - Eblasts sent to known supporters of Lehighon's Main Street® downtown revitalization efforts
 - The utilization of all social media outlets that can get to the various audiences identified as important to the downtown revitalization movement
4. By taking advantage of all other P.R. opportunities, such as:
 - Appearances on TV/Radio to spread the word
 - Having a presence at all special events held in the downtown district.

Volunteer Development

If the above Public Relations campaign is put into an active mode, the Organization Committee will be greatly assisted in its efforts to gain more volunteers for the Main Street® downtown revitalization program.

However, it is worthwhile to state here, that there are several other ways to recruit volunteers:

- Ask them directly/word of mouth
- Use online tools
- Give presentations to service clubs
- Run "help wanted" ads in newsletters/on websites
- Prepare articles in local media praising volunteers
- Seek out members of Green Thumb, AmeriCorps, Senior Groups
- Look to corporations that foster community service
- Find volunteers through Churches/Schools
- Attempt to sign up volunteers at Festivals