



10 East Church Street  
Bethlehem, Pa. 18018  
eacbethlehempa@gmail.com

April 16, 2019

Mr. Eric Evans  
Business Administrator  
10 East Church Street  
Bethlehem, PA 18018

Dear Mr. Evans,

The Bethlehem Environmental Advisory Council was established under Article 146 to be advisory to and to coordinate its activities with elected officials, the planning commission and other such local governmental agencies. One of the powers included in the Article states:

- Make recommendations as to the possible use of open land areas and/or environmentally sensitive lands within the City of Bethlehem and its surrounding areas.

Bethlehem Backyards for Wildlife (BBFW), a subcommittee of the EAC, has a shared interest in the value of open space and wildlife habitat. BBFW has composed the following comments for the City's consideration.

Green spaces are vital to the health of our community. Bethlehem Backyards for Wildlife (BBFW) urges the Bethlehem City Council and Administration to reconsider selling any existing green spaces owned by the City of Bethlehem, including public parks, woodlands, and meadows. Green spaces will play a vital role in the formation and implementation of the city's Climate Action Plan.

It has come to the attention of BBFW that the city plans to sell 12 properties of varying sizes, from a small parcel on an urban street to a sizable public park. ([https://www.lehighvalleylive.com/bethlehem/2018/10/12\\_pieces\\_of\\_bethlehem\\_that\\_ma.html](https://www.lehighvalleylive.com/bethlehem/2018/10/12_pieces_of_bethlehem_that_ma.html)) All of these properties contribute to the quality of life in Bethlehem and should not be sold at this time.

There are very few green oases in South Bethlehem. In light of the recent increase of development on the South Side, it is imperative to save what green spaces the city can control. Ullman Park is an essential green space on the south side. It should be

developed into a more attractive park for neighborhood families to use. On the north side, 201 Spring Street is an example of open space in a crowded neighborhood. Development right next to Rte. 378, which will be undergoing construction shortly, seems inappropriate.

Green Infrastructure Guidelines produced by the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission (LVPC) in 2017 clearly outlines the value of green spaces. Green spaces provide social, environmental and economic benefits to the community. Open lands contribute vital services free of charge. Once lost, these natural system services are costly and difficult or even impossible to replace. The LVPC states that “the protection of natural resources should be a top priority for communities to maintain the services nature provides at no cost.”

Social benefits of open spaces include:

- \*places for families to gather, children to play, and people to meet
- \*community pride
- \*natural beauty
- \*health benefits such as clean air, the opportunity for physical activity, and
- \*improved mental health

Environmental benefits of open spaces include:

- \*climate change mitigation
- \*energy conservation
- \*stormwater management
- \*wildlife habitat
- \*pollination

Economic benefits of open spaces include:

- \*avoidance of costs for flood mitigation, biological control & soil retention
- \*less damage to building facades due to better air quality
- \*proximity to natural areas yields increased property values

Several properties owned and maintained by the city called “elbow lots” are under consideration for sale to adjacent landowners in order to reduce city maintenance costs. We recommend that the city explore planting these lots with low-growing native plants, such as native sedges, mosses, low bush blueberries, bearberry, or native creeping juniper. These plantings, after the initial efforts of creating, would require minimal maintenance. They would provide shelter and food for birds and pollinators. They would also serve as a model for residents who wish to reduce their lawns, and thereby their carbon footprint.

“The natural environment provides a variety of essential functions, including flood protection, stormwater management, clean air and water, wildlife habitat, food, and recreational opportunities, among others, and are vital to the health and well-being of a community.” (LVPC Green Infrastructure Guidelines, 2017, page 11). Therefore, BFFW recommends the city not sell any open lands that it owns. Once open land is

sold it is impossible to get back. The quality of life in Bethlehem is dependent on wise stewardship of existing public lands.

We respectfully request that we be notified of the City Council agenda when the sale of public lands will be discussed or voted upon.

Respectfully yours,

*Lynn Rothman*

Lynn Rothman, Chair, EAC

On behalf of the Bethlehem EAC and BBFW

EAC Members

Elizabeth Behrend

Elisabeth Cichonski

Kathy Fox

Brian Hillard

Mike Topping

BBFW Members

Roseanne Amano

Martha Christine

Jane Cook

Suzanne Drake

Christine Roysdon

Ilse Stoll

cc: Mayor Donchez  
City Council