

Bethlehem zoners advance plan for 2 new warehouses just off city's eastern gateway

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Two new industrial buildings across 26 acres at 2141 Commerce Center Blvd. wouldn't be out of place considering current, nearby land uses at Lehigh Valley Industrial Park VII, project officials told the city Zoning Hearing Board on Wednesday, Oct. 23, 2024.

BETHLEHEM, Pa. — Wawa on the left, warehouses on the right.

Two new industrial buildings across 26 acres at 2141 Commerce Center Blvd. wouldn't be out of place considering current, nearby land uses at Lehigh Valley Industrial Park VII, project officials told the city Zoning Hearing Board on Wednesday.

The zoning panel unanimously approved a special exception request for a 216,000-square-foot warehouse distribution building, and a smaller industrial facility sized at 101,000 square feet for a nearby plot.

The land, just east of Route 412, is part of the city's Industrial Redevelopment district.

The board also signed off on requested parking relief for a lot at the latter building, with 58 spaces proposed versus 101 usually required under city ordinance. The city Planning Commission this month gave unanimous support for a sketch plan of the proposal and associated parking relief.

Cold storage tenant on deck

Developer JERC Partners XCII, LLC — an entity of J.G. Petrucci Co. — and LVIP have a local cold storage tenant lined up for the larger building.

The smaller facility currently has no tenant, but it would be developed on a speculative basis to attract a proper business use in time, officials said.

Dominic Baker, project executive with J.G. Petrucci Co., said that's a common practice across some of the group's other projects, and he saw no impending issues in finding a tenant for the building.

J.G. Petrucci Co. has developed almost 50% of the industrial park's projects since their first partnership in the late 1980s, according to LVIP Chief Executive Officer Kerry Wrobel.



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A long time coming

Wrobel said land uses near the lots in question include a concrete batching plant, an adjacent rail yard and intermodal getting one inbound train and one outbound train each day.

Also, a liquefied natural gas plant, among other manufacturing and warehousing uses.

"We gravitate toward industrial because the site, it's the entryway to 1,200 acres of industrial uses," Wrobel said.

"It's 600 feet from an operating intermodal, it's served by a six-lane road and four of those lanes lead right to the border of the property."

John Wichner, branch manager with Bowman Consulting — who said he specializes in transportation engineering — testified that the nearby area's roadway infrastructure would be able to handle the development as proposed.

LVIP VII was developed on 1,000 acres of former Bethlehem Steel land.

Wrobel said many years have gone by with not a whole lot of success in securing retail, office or institutional uses to fill out this vacant space — leading to the push for an industrial use at this point.

"We're here 20 years later because we greatly overestimated the demand for those parcels running on the 412," he said.