

Part I: History and Plan Development

South Bethlehem: A History of Multi-Culturalism

South Bethlehem, a subset of the City of Bethlehem, has a rich, culturally diverse history dating back prior to its incorporation in May 1865. To this day, despite struggles, south Bethlehem has retained its cultural diversity, distinct identity, and sense of place while, concurrently, making progress to revitalize and increase opportunity throughout its community. To better understand why south Bethlehem's residents are so invested in and have such strong ties to south Bethlehem, it is pertinent to understand how this collective voice, advocating for its community, is nothing new to south Bethlehem; rather, it is seen consistently over the past 150+ years. In a community where approximately 65.1% (excluding census tract 111 – where Lehigh University resides) of the population is comprised of Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino/Latina residents, in addition to a poverty rate of 27.6%, there is an extensive history of south Bethlehem that has led to where it is today, one rooted in multi-culturalism, hope, and hard work.

Bethlehem was founded in 1741 at the juncture of the Lehigh River and the Monocacy Creek by immigrant Moravian missionaries. The location proved ideal for creating one of North America's first industrial complexes, which included a saw mill, tannery, blacksmith shop, and a brass foundry. This spirit of industrialism foreshadowed what was to come. By the late 1800s, the City had become an industrial powerhouse with the formation of the Lehigh Valley Railroad and Bethlehem Iron Company, which became Bethlehem Steel in 1902, ultimately becoming the second largest steel producer in the United States. Due, much in part, to the growth of Bethlehem Iron Company, came a need for more workers. Bringing blast furnaces, factories, railroads, foreigners, various religions, and much else to city required Bethlehem to expand, despite the Moravian leaders wanting to preserve the old way of life. Bethlehem had now become caught up in the financial-industrial complex of the big Eastern cities.

In 1845, the Moravians abandoned the policy of exclusivity and permitted others to buy property in Bethlehem, leading to the development of the area now known as south Bethlehem, neighboring Bethlehem Steel. The Bethlehem Steel drew immigrants from all over not only to America, but specifically south Bethlehem. By 1865, the population of south Bethlehem was probably between 1,500 and 2,000, which lead citizens to petition for incorporation of the community as a borough of Bethlehem and the subsequent incorporation in May of 1865. The economic opportunity that the Bethlehem Iron Company (later Bethlehem Steel) offered, lead to south Bethlehem as a cultural hub for working-class families seeking a better life with greater opportunities.

Bethlehem Steel workers lived within walking distance of the plant. While they did not live in want, they were poor and without social standing. Thus, south Bethlehem took on the contradictory symbol: possibly the richest spot in the valley in terms of industrial capital, it was perhaps also the poorest in terms of prestige. In 1862, results from a local census extrapolated that of the 178 families living in south Bethlehem, many were Roman Catholic and Protestants and of Belgian, Irish and German descent. In addition to these permanent residents, south Bethlehem found itself with a floating population which consisted primarily of destitute immigrants who moved through the valley. Due to this growing "floating population," a Station House was established to provide temporary lodging and an occasional meal to these unemployed workers who found their way from Europe to south Bethlehem with the promise of being fed and lodged at the borough's expense. At this time, while there was not much intermingling within south Bethlehem, it is understood that nationalities lived side by side in relative peace.

Due to the Lehigh Valley Railroad providing a means of transportation within the North East and the economic opportunity offered by Bethlehem Steel, south Bethlehem's population increased ten-fold from

947 in 1861 to 10,302 in 1890. The majority of growth at this time was that of the middle class, which at any given time during the period comprised probably around ninety percent of the inhabitants. In the 1870s, south Bethlehem began to see immigration from Central and Southern Europe, such as Slovaks and Hungarians, due to the Bethlehem Steel's encouragement of in-migration due to the need of unskilled or semi-skilled workers. Ukrainians and those of Polish descent, including a few Jews, appeared in south Bethlehem in the late 1880s. In 1895, from forty to fifty Italians arrived, having come to America from the central and northern provinces of the peninsula. In the early 1900s, minorities arrived from Russia, Greece, Croatia, and Lithuania as well as a few other nationalities. The rapid increase of numbers in the working-class led to a nearly constant housing shortage with houses intended for one family often housing two or even three families. The Daily Times stated in January 1870, "we hope capitalists will cast their eyes South Bethlehem-ward as the demand for houses is steadily on the increase." By 1893, 168 houses were built and Third Street, which was to become the core of the borough's business district, was especially busy. Workers and their families – primarily at this time, Germans, Pennsylvania-Germans and the Irish – were the people who ultimately spelled success or failure for various enterprises. They made the market house on Third Street an important part of borough life. Later, when Old Bethlehem (what is now known as north Bethlehem) obtained a market house, the enterprise never flourished to the extent that its counterpart did in south Bethlehem.

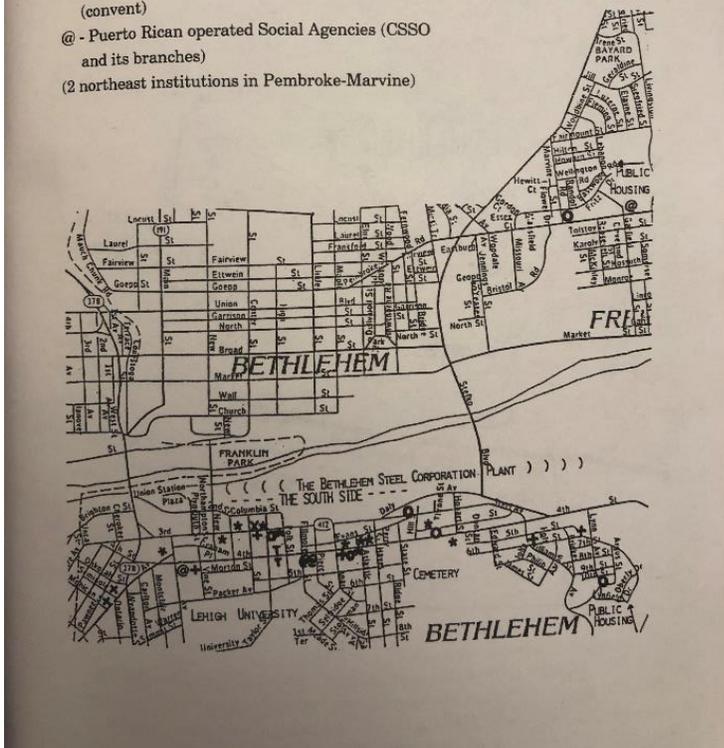
While much of the immigration to south Bethlehem that occurred in the mid- to late-nineteenth century was by Europeans, the Census of 1910 identified 128 Black/African American individuals in south Bethlehem, which later grew to 344 in 1920, though an unofficial estimate puts the number at about 1,000. Despite being native Americans, Black/African Americans individuals enjoyed few more civil rights than did the laboring classes immigrating from Central, Southern and Eastern Europe. It was not until 1917, as immigration from Europe dwindled, that many Black/African Americans were able to find employment at the Bethlehem Steel.

As the twentieth century progressed, with it came more migration to south Bethlehem, but of a largely different nationality, which we continue to see today. Puerto Ricans began arriving in the late 1940s with a second wave arriving in the mid-1970s. The first wave of Puerto Ricans came to south Bethlehem for many of the same reasons European immigrants came before them – due to the attraction of employment opportunities in the area textile and steel mills that far outweighed employment opportunities in disadvantaged rural farming areas of Puerto Rico. The employment opportunities granted by area textile and steel mills allowed Puerto Ricans to obtain moderate upward social and economic mobility as a result of their ability to earn stable incomes as blue-collar workers. Furthermore, Puerto Ricans were attracted to south Bethlehem due to its relative proximity to Puerto Rico. In 1970, a trip to Puerto Rico from Bethlehem required only an hour and a half drive to Newark Airport and a relatively low fare of just under \$50. The ability to easily return to one's country of origin provided for the Puerto Rican community a reinforcement of culture that European immigrants lacked.

The growth of the Puerto Rican community in south Bethlehem followed patterns of previous immigrants before them who clustered in their own neighborhoods filled with their own businesses and social clubs. By the 1950s, the Puerto Rican community in south Bethlehem had begun to fully take form with the Puerto Rican Beneficial Society; the first Latino/Latina churches, such as Holy Infancy's Spanish Apostolate and the First Spanish Baptist Church; as well as the first bodega, La Famosa, serving the growing community. The function of each ethnicity's grocery stores and other businesses was similar for

MAP 1: BETHLEHEM'S PUERTO RICAN INSTITUTIONS - 1992

- O - Puerto Rican owned bodegas (grocery stores)
- * - Other Puerto Rican owned businesses
- X - Puerto Rican Beneficial Society (PRBS)
- + - Puerto Rican Protestant Churches (Pentecostal and Baptist)
- T - Holy Infancy Spanish Apostolate and Casa Belén (convent)
- @ - Puerto Rican operated Social Agencies (CSSO and its branches)
- (2 northeast institutions in Pembroke-Marvine)



most immigrant communities. South Bethlehem's bodegas functioned for many as a home away from home. The small size of these businesses, the offerings of typical Puerto Rican foods, as well as the fact that they were owned and operated by community residents, added to the familiar and friendly atmosphere of south Bethlehem. The opening of many of these businesses was a key part in the process of building institutions that defined a community, which remains true to this day.

By 1970, south Bethlehem was home to an even greater mix of ethnic groups including those of the following descents: Puerto Rican, Hungarian, Slovak, Polish, Italian, Irish, Portuguese, native English-speaking residents and Lehigh University students. By 1990, south Bethlehem was 28.2% Hispanic/Latino/Latina with Puerto Ricans comprising the largest single ethnic group. The Puerto Rican community stretched from the very east end of south Bethlehem all the way to the west end, with concentrations of individuals varying from block to block

between 20-100%.

Largely due to the variety of nationalities and cultures, south Bethlehem became known for its rich and varied culture. It became a mix of each nationality's culture from the "Old Country" but also that of American culture. There was nothing like it that had already been established in Bethlehem or anything like it, for that matter, in the European countries in which so many of the immigrants came from. The immigrants were influenced not only by American ways but also by the different manners, customs and dialects which existed amongst themselves. Even within the membership of a group, such as that of the Polish, there was a blurring of cultural differences which in Poland would have remained distinct. This created a sort of hybrid way of life which had no counterpart anywhere else in the world.

The foreign populations provided the City of Bethlehem with an element which longstanding families in north Bethlehem failed to understand. These longstanding families in north Bethlehem allowed themselves to be clouded with an oversimplification and false image of south Bethlehem, also known as the "South Side." This image included an idea of Bethlehem Steel with its noise, fire and smoke and its multi-lingual crew which fed the furnaces, tended the molten metal and worked the hammers and presses. This image also embraced a number of negative stereotypes. According to the image, south Bethlehem was a world of foreign workers, priests, politicians, small shop keepers and hoodlums – one which consisted of blight to be hidden from public view. The only principal speaker at the Semi-Centennial Celebration of South Bethlehem to take the immigrant residents seriously was the Reverend A. D. Thaeler

when he said: “There are few towns in all the length and breadth of the United States that present as large a co-mingling of men and women who, having crossed the ocean to find a home in the New World, we still call ‘foreign.’ Nevertheless they are eager to align themselves with American Institutions... South Bethlehem has peculiarly before it the huge task of transmuted these streams of human life and impulse into the solid elements which constitute a strong republic and which lay hold upon the best that is possible for human striving.”

In 1943, at the height of World War II, Bethlehem Steel employed over 31,000 people in the City and nearly 300,000 nationwide. Today, many south Bethlehem families, as well as families throughout the Lehigh Valley, still have ties to Bethlehem Steel, as many of their ancestors were employed by Bethlehem Steel or found their way to south Bethlehem with the promise of greater employment opportunity. South Bethlehem was a key commercial destination; throughout the 1900s the streets were bustling with shoppers. When the company ceased production in 1995 (and declared bankruptcy in 2001), it left a community in crisis as high-paying manufacturing jobs were replaced by low-paying retail and service jobs, particularly in south Bethlehem.

Today, south Bethlehem continues to remain a community of diverse income and ethnicity. Residents and visitors alike value its diversity in people, offerings, culture and history. However, **recently**, housing costs and development in south Bethlehem have begun to rise along with a decrease in the availability of affordable housing options, which has caused strain on low- to moderate-income residents who worry that they may no longer be able afford their rent or **mortgage payments** or have the proper amenities that correspond with their wants and needs. This furthers the concern that the interconnectedness of the community may be lost if there is not a focus and emphasis placed upon **community-centered expansion**, which ensures that new neighbors and visitors are encouraged while paying mind to the needs and wants of current south Bethlehem residents.

Southside Vision: The First 20 Years

Project History

In 2001 and then again in 2014, Community Action Development Corporation of Bethlehem (CADCB) applied for, and was recognized as, a Neighborhood Partnership Program through the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Department of Community and Economic Development. The most recent six-year program implemented the "Southside Vision Master Plan 2014-2024" which was developed by CADCB in partnership with the City of Bethlehem, members of the community, the CADCB board of directors, and the Southside Vision Steering Committee.

The preparation of that Plan was grounded in various community development planning initiatives at the time. Those efforts, while still ongoing, helped provide the framework for this initiative. They were informed by the review of existing plans at the time; a written survey, available in both English and Spanish, which was completed by 186 residents and 53 small business owners; key informant interviews conducted with 40 residents, community leaders, and other stakeholders; input from Southside Vision's existing standing committees; and five public meetings that were organized in local parks and attended by 83 south Bethlehem residents and 32 non-residents who work or go to school in south Bethlehem. The plan identified goals and strategies in five areas: economic sustainability, housing, public spaces, safety and wellbeing, and community engagement and communication.

To implement Southside Vision 20/20, a steering committee and five subcommittees were created in 2014. Each subcommittee was chartered by at least one steering committee member and received staff support from CADCB. All of the committees included residents, funders, and representatives from business and community-based organizations.

Project Accomplishments

Through strategic partnerships, Southside Vision has made a lot of progress toward transforming the south Bethlehem community since 2001. In addition to \$3,042,602 contributed by corporate partners, Southside Vision has leveraged over \$15,192,121 in private and public funds. These resources were used to impact the community in the following ways:

- Educated over 495 entrepreneurs – creating over 161 jobs, retaining over 148 more, and resulting in the opening of 106 new businesses in south Bethlehem and 63 in other areas of Bethlehem
- Held eight (8) business networking events to help develop relationships between south Bethlehem's small businesses
- Led a neighborhood visioning process to brand the business district in the 500-800 blocks of East 4th Street, now known as Four Blocks International. Southside Vision developed marketing initiatives including creating a website, a video, street festivals, and a commercial signage program
- **Invested \$304,440 in commercial façade improvements, creating 10 new storefronts in Four Blocks International. More than 70% of this investment came from building owners; the vacancy rate in this neighborhood dropped from 41% to 14% between 2002 and 2013.**
- Developed master plans for revitalization of the Four Blocks International neighborhood and the Eastern Gateway have been completed and implemented
- Co-sponsored the design of the linear park known as South Bethlehem Greenway; public artwork; native plants and a playground was installed. Later, under Southside Vision 2014,

- new signage was completed for the South Bethlehem Greenway and connecting smaller pathways on or leading to the Southside
- Built the world-class Bethlehem Skateplaza, in part, with \$167,210 from Southside Vision 2014
 - Installed a splash park at Yosko Park, improved ball fields at Saucon Park, and created a new pocket park – Tranquility Park – on East Fourth Street
 - Created the infrastructure for an interactive community performance designed to explore the history and continuing impact of the steel industry in south Bethlehem
 - Transformed a busy corner that had once been a dumping ground into Lopes International Park, which includes the installation of 24 flower planters, and have since continued its ensuing maintenance
 - Held 12 youth, family-friendly, festivals and events
 - Over 4,200 south Bethlehem youth participated in more than 50 recreational, education and/or enrichment programs
 - Completed construction of a community garden at Lynfield Community Center, which is now utilized by the 4-H Club
 - Installed a seed library at Bethlehem Public Library Southside Branch and created the Southside Garden Alliance
 - Expanded and improved two (2) community gardens in south Bethlehem
 - Held at least six (6) workshops to educate community residents on healthy eating, sustainability and growing fresh food
 - Improvements were made to 259 owner-occupied south Bethlehem homes
 - Educated 552 prospective homebuyers through homeownership counseling programming
 - Held three landlord training seminars and two home maintenance workshops
 - Referred at least 50 residents to appropriate programs to address specific housing challenges
 - Removed 29 dead and dying trees on Hayes Street, pruned 30 street trees, enlarged 28 tree wells, and planted 39 trees along Hayes Street. Completed four murals on busy thoroughways, including the Paul B. Wood commercial building and the Bethlehem Skateplaza in the Eastern Gateway neighborhood
 - Funded and installed public benches in the Eastern Gateway
 - Constructed a pavilion linking the South Bethlehem Greenway to the Bethlehem Skateplaza which includes seating, restrooms, and a concession stand
 - Installed ninety-four (94) acorn-style street lights along East Fourth Street between Hayes and William Streets. In addition, partnered with the City of Bethlehem and other key stakeholders on a lighting plan, which is in progress
 - Implemented and expanded the Southside Ambassadors program to along the Greenway and East Fourth Street (Four Blocks International commercial corridor) to Hayes Street
 - Hosted nine (9) public meetings to keep people informed about Southside Vision 20/20 in which neighborhood issues were discussed and opportunities were provided for participation in the community revitalization process
 - Organized three (3) events to help connect south Bethlehem residents across generations to build positive relationships
 - Developed the implemented the “Southside Proud!” marketing strategy during Southside Vision 20/20

- Provided the public with communications through email newsletters, monthly social media updates and traditional stories to inform them about south Bethlehem assets, events, activities, and accomplishments

Plan Development Process: The Next Six Years

Due, much in part, to the progress made since the inception of Southside Vision 20 years ago, south Bethlehem has recently seen an influx of development occurring in its community. This is a critical time to both maintain the progress that has been made, such as south Bethlehem's mix of uses, and build upon the momentum of the initiative's successes. By creating a community that serves everyone's needs and interests, this will ensure that both long-time residents are able to remain in south Bethlehem while harmonizing with new residents brought to the community through the construction of new development. This plan was developed by staff from CADCB and the City of Bethlehem in cooperation with members of the community, the CADCB board of directors, and the Southside Vision Steering Committee. Several steps were taken to collect and analyze data from the community to ensure that this plan reflected the needs and priorities of those who live and work in south Bethlehem.

Review of Existing Plans and Research

The following plans and studies were reviewed in order to collect important, relevant information that was incorporated into the development of this Plan:

- Southside Vision Master Plan 2014-2024
- South Bethlehem Eastern Gateway Vision Plan (2011)
- City of Bethlehem Consolidated Plan (2020-2024)
- City of Bethlehem Climate Action Plan (2021)
- Northampton County Consolidated Plan (2019-2023)
- Comprehensive Plan: The Lehigh Valley (2020-2030)
- Bethlehem Student Housing Zoning Ordinance (2021)
- South Side Bethlehem Historic Conservation District Study (2021)
- Bethlehem Blight Betterment Initiative (2018)
- Resident-Identified Housing Assets and Challenges in South Bethlehem (2018)
- St. Luke's Community Health Needs Assessment (2019)
- Festival UnBound, a summary (2020)
- Preservation Plan for The City of Bethlehem Pennsylvania (2011)
- Beth Connects: A Trail Study for the Bethlehem Area (2016)
- The City Livable: Modest Proposals for a More Walkable Downtown (2009)
- South Bethlehem Greenway Master Plan (2005)

COVID-19 Pandemic on Plan Development

On March 19, 2020, Pennsylvania Governor Wolf issued a "Stay at Home" order directing all state residents to shelter at home and limit movements outside of their homes beyond essential needs. While this directive, a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, was issued nearly a year before the development of this plan, the country and, subsequently, the Lehigh Valley, is still grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic. Residents are still largely sheltering at home and limiting movements outside of their homes. Continued Telework is strongly encouraged; large gatherings of more than 250 is prohibited; and Restaurants and Bars, Personal Care Services, and Indoor Recreation facilities are open at 50% capacity.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Health, as of April 6, 2021, there have been 29,529 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Northampton County, 681 of which resulted in death. Of these 29,529 confirmed cases, 3,710 were in zip code 18015, where south Bethlehem is situated. This data portrays that, in the past year, nearly a fifth (18%) of south Bethlehem's population contracted COVID-19. While

COVID-19 vaccinations are increasingly becoming available, at this time, the vaccinations are specifically reserved for those individuals who are at highest risk of contracting COVID-19. As of April 6, 2021, in Northampton County, 108,807 partial vaccinations were administered (vaccine one of two) and 55,607 full vaccinations were administered (zip code-level data is not available at this time).

As a result of the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, much of traditional plan development was altered and input previously received by in-person communication, such as stakeholder interviews and public meetings, were conducted over “zoom” video conferencing.

Surveys

A digital survey and written survey, both available in English and Spanish, were distributed to residents and small business owners throughout south Bethlehem in early 2021. This survey collected similar information that was gathered six years ago so that progress and continued needs were evaluated, as well as to better understand emerging needs of the community in context to the past six years. The survey also asked questions related to perceptions of safety, gaps in amenities, respondents’ sense of improvement of the community and their sense of hope for the community’s future. Surveys were completed by 41 residents and small business owners in all five census tracts. Respondents were diverse in terms of age, gender, level of education, income and ethnicity.

Key Informant Interviews

Ten (10) key informant interviews were conducted by active community residents, leaders of nonprofit organizations and educational institutions, and local business owners through “zoom” meetings, over phone and in-person. Interviewees were asked to identify what they value most about the south Bethlehem community; what could be changed, enhanced or added to this community to make it better; to describe three important challenges that the south Bethlehem community faces and what issue might become a big problem if not addressed soon; to describe three opportunities for the south Bethlehem community in the next 5 to 10 years; and to propose specific steps the new neighborhood plan could take to improve the community in the next year.

Southside Vision Committee Involvement

Each of Southside Vision 20/20’s existing standing committees discussed its vision for south Bethlehem in the next six years during at least one regularly-scheduled committee meeting. The committees identified current and anticipated challenges as well as anticipated opportunities for the next six years.

Public Meetings

A series of two community conversations were organized over “zoom,” due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 21 south Bethlehem residents participated in these meetings; 18 non-residents who work in south Bethlehem also participated. At these community conversations, which were held in early 2021, a facilitator asked participants in small groups to identify aspects they value most about south Bethlehem, identify current challenges being faced by south Bethlehem, and to describe their vision for how to improve south Bethlehem in the next six years. Each small group facilitator was assisted by a transcriber who recorded all comments shared by the public. At least one bilingual representative was available at each of the community conversations to engage Spanish-speaking residents.

More formal public meeting

Integration of Data

Quantitative and qualitative data from existing plans, the community-wide survey, public meetings, key informant interviews, and current Southside Vision committees were systemically reviewed and analyzed to identify the community's priorities and needs as well as opportunities for development. An overarching theme and specific strategies were extracted from the pool of data. The goals and objectives identified in this plan capture both the most pressing needs of the community as well as those that can be most feasibly addressed.

Plan Review, Approval, and Adoption

The plan was reviewed through a three-phase process. The community reviewed the preliminary plan at the aforementioned public meeting on [REDACTED]. After the community had an opportunity to approve theme, strategies and subsequent goals and objectives of the plan, it was shared with the newly formed [REDACTED] steering committee and the board of directors of CADCB. When those entities approved the plan at meetings in Spring 2021, it was considered to be adopted.