



April 14, 2021

Robert Melosky, Chair
Bethlehem Planning Commission
10 E Church St
Bethlehem, PA 18018

Darlene Heller, Director
Department of Planning & Zoning
10 E Church St
Bethlehem, PA 18018

cc: Tracy Samuelson (Assistant Planning Director), City Clerk for distribution to City Council Members, Mayor Robert Donchez, Lynn Rothman (Bethlehem EAC), LoriAnn Wukitsch (Historic Bethlehem), Sherri PENCHISHEN (Bethlehem Citizens Traffic Advisory Committee), Becky Bradley (Lehigh Valley Planning Commission)

Re: Updated Letter on Martin Tower Redevelopment Project (follow-up to original letter dated March 10, 2021)

Dear Mr. Melosky & Ms. Heller,

The Martin Tower redevelopment project has the potential to be a car-centric project, but I am hopeful that if executed with care, it could have benefits to encourage biking, walking, and public transit for the many reasons these modes support public health and quality of life.

The developer's plan suggests that for its 53 acre footprint, the Martin Tower property will be covered with 30 acres of asphalt for car parking and interior roads. The vast amount of pavement is striking to me, and so I write to encourage transportation alternatives that are less consumptive of land and have a smaller footprint on air and water quality.

This moment is an excellent opportunity to link the developer's proposed businesses and residences by way of the adjoining Monocacy Way trail and an abandoned tree covered railroad spur that heads west under 8th Avenue to Pennsylvania Avenue, ending just shy of Airport Road. In 20 or 50 years when we look back on this project, it could be seen as kickstarting a crucial branch of east-west multi-use rail trail that will have connected so many west and north Bethlehem neighborhoods with these businesses, downtown, and Bethlehem's Memorial and Illick's Mill Parks. This off-street trail connection would provide both recreation and useful human-powered transportation opportunities in-line with the [City of Bethlehem's Climate Action Plan](#) and LVPC's regional [Walk/RollLV Active Transportation Plan](#). It is specifically identified in 2016's "[BETH CONNECTS: A Trail Study for the Bethlehem Area](#)"

While a 2+ mile rail trail might seem ambitious out of the gate, a starting point with this project should be to connect the Monocacy Way trail to 8th Avenue, a 0.3 mile long section that follows the southern border of the Martin Tower project. (shown in red as Future Martin Tower Spur Trail" in the image to the right)



Potential trail connections around Martin Tower site (CAT concept)

The developer’s plan includes medical offices, a grocery store, housing, and more – which are very universal destinations for all residents of Bethlehem to access, by car or without. When we look at the map, these trip generators would be otherwise accessible from Bethlehem’s core only by way of 8th Avenue/Route 378 or Schoenersville Rd, neither of which are as appealing or provide such a direct link as a rail trail.

I give the developer, Mr. Lewis Ronca, very much credit for taking a property that has languished unused for 20 years and has created a blank slate for the future. I am in favor of free enterprise, with considerations to propel the businesses into the 21st century with sustainable transportation in mind.

Martin Tower redevelopment plans from 2019 very clearly show a spur trail connector from the retention pond area of the new development connecting to the disused rail line running west from the Monocacy Way trail under 8th Avenue. In 2021 project sketches, the connectors appear to have been removed. (see Figure 5 below) Are these trail connections still being considered?

Around the Lehigh Valley I’ve been seeing shopping centers being built, bringing more traffic and wider roads. Let’s go beyond parking lots and envision Bethlehem alive with greenspace. I believe that Bethlehem can show the way for 21st century sustainable development. The following are additional questions & comments for your consideration.

Questions & Comments

1. **Trail Connections** - The Monocacy Way trail provides a lush and green north-south connector from the D&L Trail at Sand Island all the way to Illick’s Mill. The spur that branches off from it just below Burnside is an east-west railroad bed that runs beneath 8th Ave past Pennsylvania Avenue and all the way to the Allentown border. This could essentially be a spine to connect so many neighborhoods to this development and to downtown. This potential trail connection is shown in red on the map below.

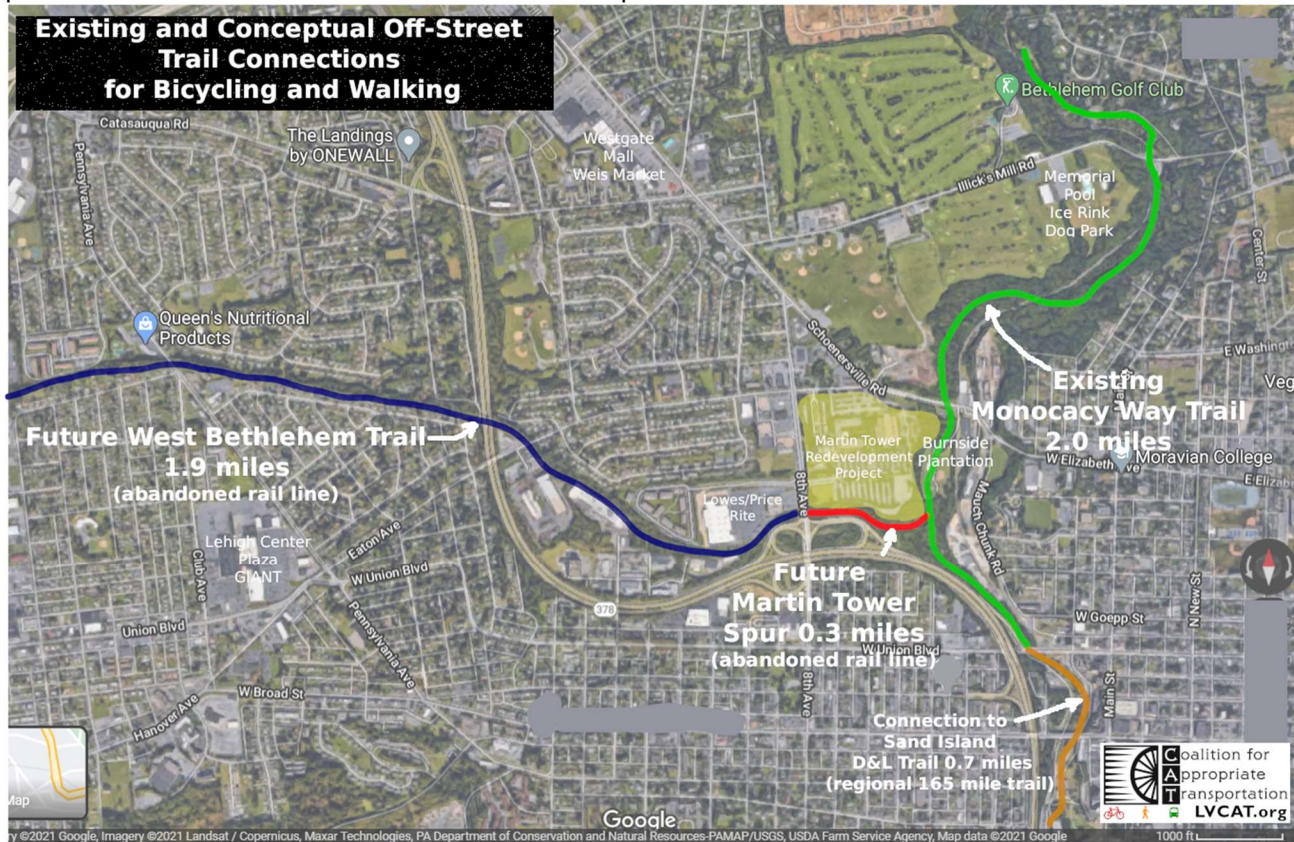


Figure 1- Existing and Conceptual Trail Connections (CAT concept)



Figure 1a – A Future Trail? Rail line noted as Future Martin Tower Spur Trail on map above. On left, viewed from Monocacy Way Trail. On right, viewed from 8th Avenue.

2. **Land Use** - Based on public plan sketches I estimate that the Martin Tower redevelopment plan is about 30 acres of asphalt. My estimates are below (calculations shown in Figure 7).

Estimated Land Use Areas

58%	30.7 acres	Pavement Area (parking lots and interior roads)
17%	9.1 acres	Building Area
25%	13.2 acres	Green Space Area

I am thankful that the developer is promoting public transit (LANTA bus) in this design.

3. **Clarification of Green Areas on Plans** - In the sketches provided by the developer, there are green areas on the rear of the property. For clarity, will these be wooded areas or mowed grass? How much wooded land is being cleared near the west side of the Burnside entry road for the proposed residential area? I would like to voice support to maintain the natural tree line buffer to avoid encroaching on the green space of historic Burnside.
4. **Stormwater Management** - What is the flow path of stormwater when the retention pond exceeds capacity? What measures are being employed to prevent excessive erosion on the wooded area right of way immediately south of the retention pond? The Monocacy Way trail already has erosion issues due to other impervious surfaces near Route 378 and 8th Ave. Will the retaining pond be allowed to grow to establish a wildlife habitat, rather than mowed and made sterile? Is pervious asphalt or other surface material being considered for the parking lots in this project?
5. **Improvement to Monocacy Way Trail Crossing at Schoenersville Rd** - Has the developer modelled traffic flow on Schoenersville Rd/Elizabeth Ave? What is the expected increase with the Martin Tower project? If possible, please provide anticipated traffic volume compared with the last five years, not 20 years ago. Please consider as part of this project an improved trail/pedestrian crossing of the Monocacy Way trail across Schoenersville Rd at the driveway for Burnside. The existing trail has an unmarked crossing as shown in the photo below:



Figure 2 – Existing Monocacy Way trail crossing at Schoenersville Rd

I recognize that Schoenersville Road/Eaton Ave may have been designed to handle large traffic volume in the 1970's, but Martin Tower has sat empty for 20 years. I like to believe that the City of Bethlehem takes pedestrian safety very much more seriously now than ever and would support an improved trail crossing at this location - for example with a high-visibility crosswalk and pedestrian-activated warning lights (RRFB) similar to that shown in the photo below.



Figure 3 – Sample of High-visibility crosswalk and and pedestrian activated warning lights suggested for Monocacy Way trail crossing at Schoenersville Rd (CAT concept)

The trail crossing location is shown on the map below.

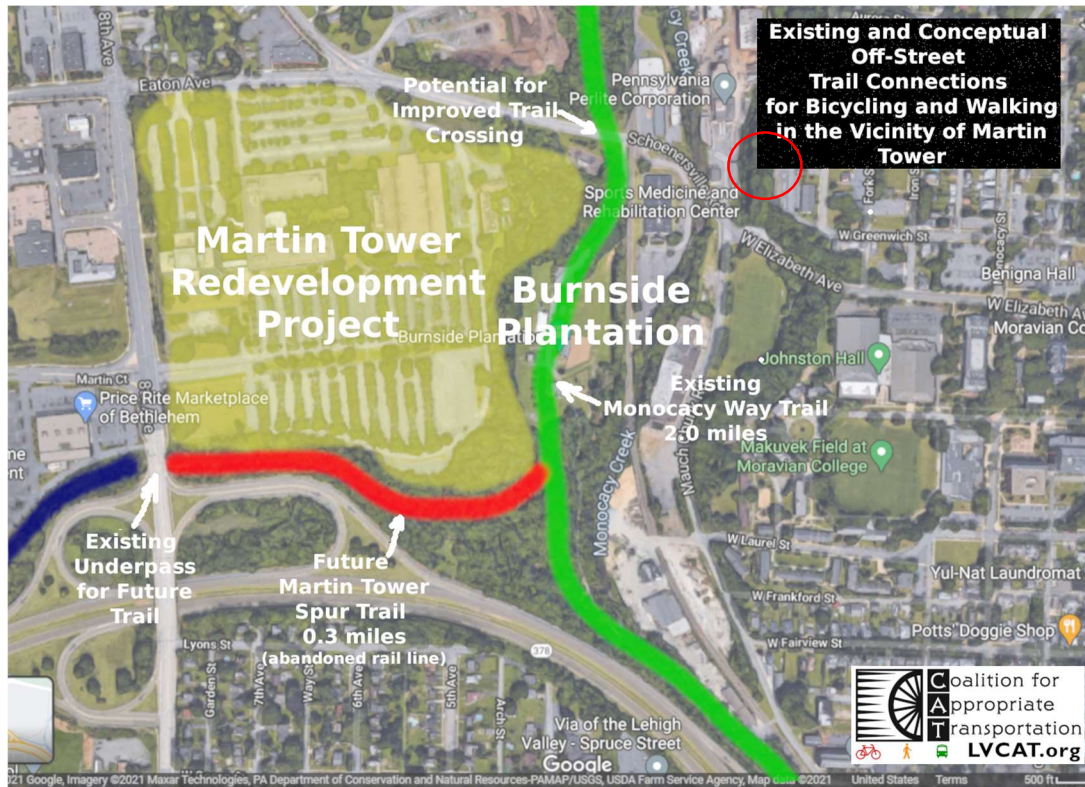


Figure 4 – Location of Monocacy Way Trail Crossing of Schoenersville Rd (CAT concept)

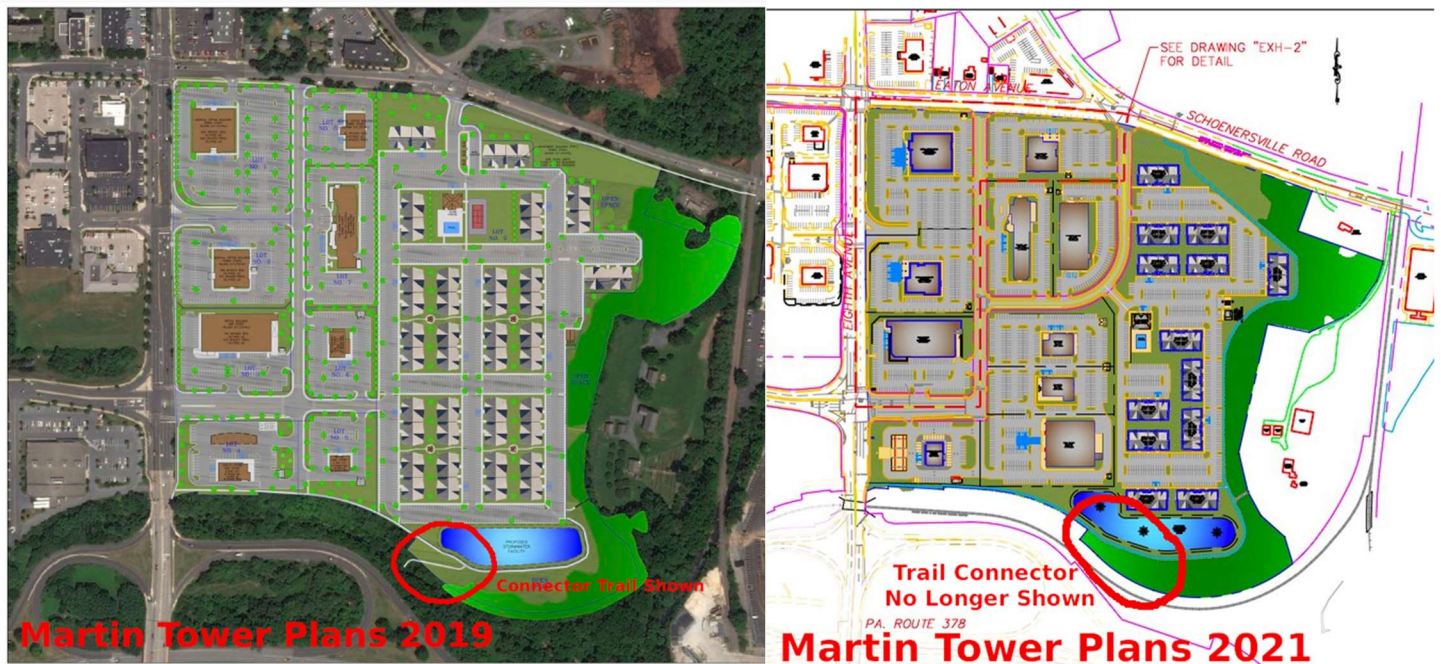


Figure 5 – Martin Tower Redevelopment Plans with (2019) and without (2021) connector trail to spur trail

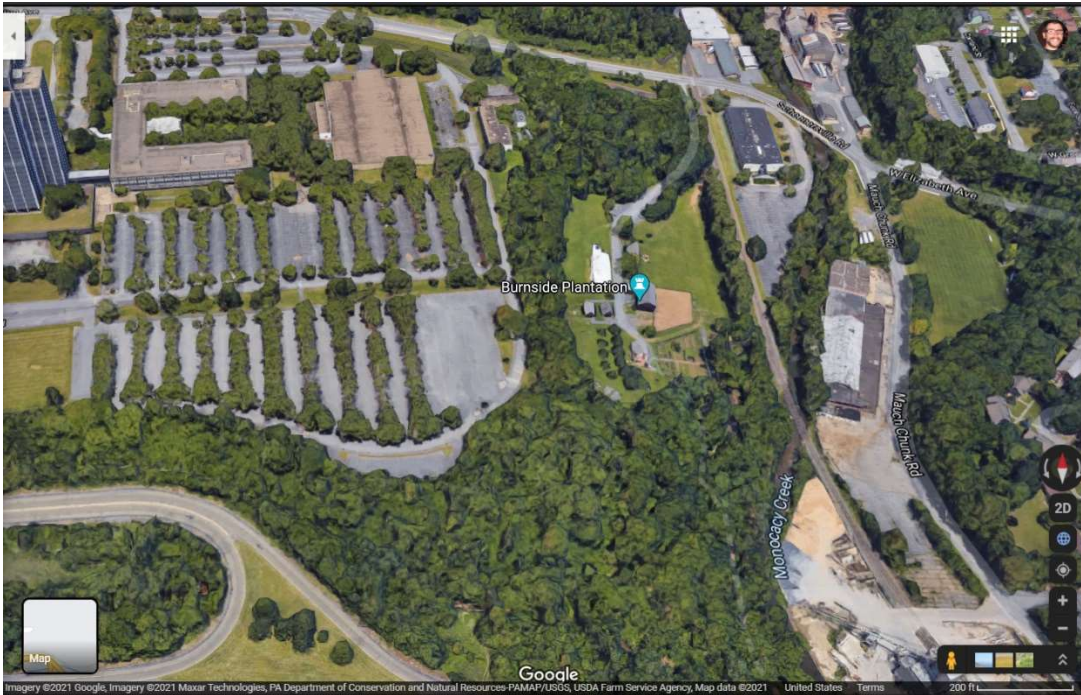


Figure 6 – Martin Tower Aerial view of tree cover prior to demolition in 2019

Martin Tower Redevelopment based on plans 3-10-2021				
Total Land Area				
W (pixels)	L (pixels)	Qty	Area (sq pixels)	
374	277	1	103598	
Buildings				
W (pixels)	L (pixels)	Qty	Area (sq pixels)	
31	31	1	961	
17	25	1	425	
28	26	1	728	
22	58	1	1276	
49	28	1	1372	
17	32	22	11968	
40	10	1	400	
26	16	1	416	
16	15	1	240	
Building Total			17786	
Green Space				
33	31	1	1023	
11	36	9	3564	
49	23	1	1127	
46	21	1	966	
101	136	1	13736	
102	52	1	5304	
Green Space Total			25720	



Pavement Area Total = (Land Area - Building Total - Green Space)		60092
Estimated Land Use Areas		
58%	30.7 acres	Pavement Area (parking lots and interior roads)
17%	9.1 acres	Building Area
25%	13.2 acres	Green Space Area

Figure 7 - My estimate of land use areas based on site layouts obtained from local newspaper articles.

I have lived in the Lehigh Valley for almost 20 years, although I finally became a Bethlehem resident last year. One of my favorite places in the whole city is the Monocacy Way trail. As a green space it has a lot to offer: a community garden, plants, animals, the sweet Monocacy Creek running through, and Moravian History.

I hope that the execution of this project can realize great benefits for quality of life to residents and the environment, in the way of housing, jobs, and services – linked by roads and trails. Thank you for considering these comments.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott Slingerland". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Scott Slingerland, P.E., Executive Director
CAT-Coalition for Appropriate Transportation
Bicyclist, Pedestrian, Transit Rider, Trail Enthusiast