

# CITY OF BETHLEHEM

## Department of Community and Economic Development Interoffice Memo

**TO:** Planning Commission Members

**FROM:** Darlene L. Heller, Director of Planning and Zoning

**RE:** Proposed Zoning Text Amendment to Address Environmental Education Centers

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We have often discussed Bethlehem's Climate Action Plan (CAP) and the ongoing efforts to incorporate climate action and environmental issues in all of the City's policies and projects. The City administration understands that many of the CAP initiatives require the support and efforts of partnerships with local nonprofits and other community organizations.

Bethlehem is proposing a text amendment to the Zoning Ordinance to clarify the definition and parameters for Environmental Education Centers, Community Recreation Centers and Nature Preserves. The attached text amendment proposes to support the ongoing and future uses that support the environment and awareness of Bethlehem's goals related to climate action.

Some of the CAP goals and recommendations include:

- Educate the community and local businesses on the benefits of renewable energy.
- Expand the inventory of Bethlehem's trees and ecosystem services.
- Expand and create new greenways.
- Partner with community organizations to promote tree planting efforts.
- Engage and incentivize residents and businesses about the options and benefits of conserving land.
- Preserve land with valuable natural resources in perpetuity using 3<sup>rd</sup> party conservation organizations.
- Establish and effectively manage native-habitat corridors and areas.
- Support local gardens and urban farms.

Environmental Education Centers, Community Recreation Centers, Nature Preserves and similar uses would each share a common mission with these CAP goals and objectives, thereby creating partners to assist in implementation of the CAP.

The Bethlehem Vision Comprehensive Plan also supports working closely with watershed associations, conservancies, educational institutions and landowners to implement environmental conservation strategies.

Because the City continues to look for partners in the education and implementation of our environmental and climate action goals and strategies, we support the attached zoning ordinance amendment to support these uses and associations and clarify their definitions and uses.

This item is placed on your April 13<sup>th</sup> Planning Commission Agenda for consideration. We request that you act on the proposal with a recommendation for approval to City Council. We can discuss the proposal in more detail at the meeting.

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C. Mayor Reynolds  
Craig Peiffer  
Laura Collins  
Alicia Karner

DATE: April 5, 2023

*Darlene Heller*

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Darlene L. Heller  
Director Planning and Zoning

BILL NO. \_\_\_\_-2023

**ORDINANCE NO. 2023-\_\_\_\_\_**

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING THE ZONING ORDINANCE,  
PART 13 OF THE CITY OF BETHLEHEM, LEHIGH  
AND NORTHAMPTON COUNTIES, PENNSYLVANIA,  
ADDING PROVISIONS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL  
EDUCATION CENTERS

THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BETHLEHEM HEREBY ORDAINS  
AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. Article 1302 of the Zoning Ordinance, Definitions, shall be amended as follows (underlined text denotes additions except where underlined in existing ordinance, whereas strikeouts denote deletions):

1302.30 Community Recreation Center– A building, place, or other facility used for recreational, social, educational, and/or cultural activities.

The definition of “Community Recreation Center” shall be added at Article 1302.30 immediately after the definition of “City Revitalization and Improvement Zone (CRIZ) Qualified Project” and immediately before the definition of “Comprehensive Plan”, which shall be renumbered as Article 1302.31, and all subsequent sections of Article 1302 shall be renumbered accordingly.

1302.42 Environmental Education Center – A building, place, or other facility open to the public and used for classes, activities, events, and other programming that teaches, promotes and develops one or more of the following: (1) awareness and sensitivity to, and knowledge and understanding of, the environment and environmental challenges; (2) attitudes of concern for the environment and motivation to improve or maintain environmental quality; (3) skills to identify and help resolve environmental challenges; and (4) participation in activities that lead to the resolution of environmental challenges.

The definition of “Environmental Education Center” shall be added at Article 1302.42 immediately after the definition of “Employees” and immediately before the definition of “Essential Services or ‘Essential Public Utility Services’”, which shall be renumbered as Article 1302.43, and all subsequent sections of Article 1302 shall be renumbered accordingly.

1302.86 Nature Preserve – A noncommercial preservation of land providing for wildlife habitats, forests, gardens, agroforestry, scenic features, trails, and observation areas that involves no buildings other than customary maintenance buildings.

The definition of “Nature Preserve” shall be added at Article 1302.86 immediately after the definition of “Municipalities Planning Code or State Planning Code” and immediately before the definition of “Nightclub”, which shall be renumbered as Article 1302.87, and all subsequent sections of Article 1302 shall be renumbered accordingly.

SECTION 2. Article 1304 of the Zoning Ordinance, Allowed Uses in Primarily Residential Districts, shall be amended as follows (underlined text denotes additions except where underlined in existing ordinance, whereas strikeouts denote deletions):

1304.01(b)(5) Accessory Uses, Day Care Center accessory to and on the same lot as an existing lawful Place of Worship or Environmental Education Center.

SECTION 3. Article 1305 of the Zoning Ordinance, Allowed Uses in Primarily Non-Residential Zoning Districts, shall be amended as follows (underlined text denotes additions except where underlined in existing ordinance, whereas strikeouts denote deletions):

1305.01(f) Accessory Uses, Day Care Center accessory to and on the same lot as an existing lawful Place of Worship or Environmental Education Center.

SECTION 4. Article 1322(q)(6) of the Zoning Ordinance, Additional Uses, shall be amended as follows (underlined text denotes additions except where underlined in existing ordinance, whereas strikeouts denote deletions):

(q) Day Care Center (Child)

(6) A principal "Place of Worship" and "Environmental Education Center" may also include a day care center as an accessory use.

SECTION 5. Article 1322.03(t) of the Zoning Ordinance, Additional Uses, shall be amended as follows (underlined text denotes additions except where underlined in existing ordinance, whereas strikeouts denote deletions):

(t) Environmental Education Center

(1) An environmental education center may include: buildings, community gardens, meeting and performance spaces, wildlife habitats, wildlife viewing areas, interpretive signage, walking and hiking trails, nature based playscapes, tree and native plant nursery, maintenance equipment storage buildings, greenhouses, and management offices.

(2) In any District other than the CB District, off-street parking shall be provided in accordance with Libraries, Museums, Visitor Centers, Post Offices, Civic Centers and Similar Establishments uses as noted in Article 1319.01(a)(21). Where an Environmental Education Center also includes an Accessory Day Care Center, then additional parking shall be provided in accordance with Day Care Center or Adult Day Care Center uses as noted in Article 1319.01(a)(9).

(3) If an environmental education center includes a child or adult day care center as an accessory use, then all of the requirements for a child day care center in Article 1322.03(q) or adult day care center in Article 1322.03(a) shall be met.

The previous subsection (t) of Article 1322.03, titled "Forestry", shall be renumbered as Article 1322.03(u) and all subsequent sections of Article 1322.03 shall be renumbered accordingly.

SECTION 6. All Ordinances and parts of Ordinances inconsistent herewith are, and the same are hereby repealed.

Sponsored by: /s/ \_\_\_\_\_

/s/ \_\_\_\_\_ PASSED finally in Council on this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2023.

/s/ \_\_\_\_\_ President of Council

ATTEST:

/s/ \_\_\_\_\_  
City Clerk

This Ordinance approved this this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2023.

/s/ \_\_\_\_\_ Mayor

