

# CITY OF BETHLEHEM

## Department of Community and Economic Development Interoffice Memo

**TO:** Adam Waldron, City Council President

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

**RE:** Zoning Amendment – Allow for Grocery Store in the Institutional District  
Petition submitted by Bethlehem Manor Village LLC

**DATE:** August 18, 2020

---

At their August 13, 2020 meeting the Planning Commission voted unanimously to recommend that City Council should NOT support the proposed Zoning Ordinance amendment to allow a Grocery Store as a permitted use in the Institutional Zoning District.

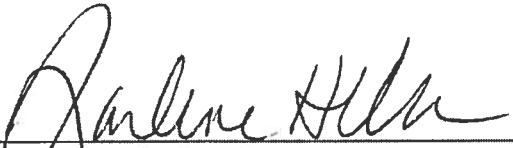
Attached is the memo and background information that was forwarded to the Planning Commission prior to their meeting.

This proposal was submitted for consideration by a private property owner. We forward this information so that the proposal can be scheduled for a public hearing at your convenience.

---

### Attachments

CC: City Council Members  
J. Spirk  
Mayor Donchez  
A. Karner  
T. Samuelson  
C. Peiffer  
W. Leeson

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Darlene L. Heller, AICP  
Director of Planning and Zoning

# CITY OF BETHLEHEM

## Department of Community and Economic Development Memo

**TO:** Planning Commission members

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

**RE:** Zoning Ordinance Amendment  
Allow for Grocery Store in the Institutional Zoning District  
Petition submitted by Bethlehem Manor Village LLC

---

Attached for your review and consideration is a proposal for the creation of an additional permitted use (Grocery Store) in the I-Institutional Zoning District.

### FINDINGS

As described in section 1303.07(g) of the Zoning Ordinance, the Institutional District is intended “to provide areas for large educational, medical and health, and public institutions within which facilities to meet their needs may be developed.”

Article 1305 includes the Use chart, “Allowed Uses in Primarily Non-Residential Zoning District”. Section 1305.01(b) shows where commercial uses are permitted in non-residential districts. The Use Chart does not permit retail store or shopping center in the Institutional District. A foot note to the chart does note that “Personal services, restaurants or cafeterias without drive-through service, a laundromat, a financial institution, and retail stores may be allowed as accessory uses in a hospital, medical office building or college or university building provided they do not have their own exterior entrance and are primarily designed to serve students, staff or patients of the institution.” However, these uses are not allowed in the I District as stand-alone uses.

Grocery Store is not a use listed individually in the chart of permitted uses. A grocery store is currently viewed as a general retail use. Inclusion of Grocery Store would be a new use in the Use Chart.

The proposal is submitted by Bethlehem Manor Village LLC, the property owner of 1838 Center Street at the intersection of Center and Dewberry Streets, which is a property in the I-Institutional zoning district.

### ANALYSIS

Our office is reviewing the proposal from the perspective of overall impacts to the City of Bethlehem. Although the petitioner may be requesting the Zoning Ordinance amendment to create a revision that relates to the 1838 Center Street property, the revision would apply to all properties within Institutional Zoning District throughout the city.

The Institutional Zone is intended to include a variety of uses that are proposed to serve the public. The Definition section of the Zoning Ordinance defines Institution as "Places of worship, schools, colleges, medical centers, hospitals, society or organization of a public character and/or the building or buildings used by such organizations". Commercial/retail uses are not included in the intended uses listed in the definition or the purpose section for the Institutional Zone.

The Institutional Zone also includes city parks and open space, much of South Mountain, Lehigh and Moravian Campuses, BASD schools and properties and Goodman Campus.

The Future Land Use section of the Bethlehem Comprehensive Plan promotes the protection of residential neighborhoods by promoting compatible land uses at appropriate densities. Additionally, it recommends differentiating between business uses that should be permitted near neighborhoods and those that should not.

The Comprehensive Plan does describe a "Neighborhood Commercial" land use that is included on the zoning map in areas such as East and West Broad Street, but those areas are a very different mix of uses and building types than any of the City's Institutional zones. In addition, Bethlehem includes a large portion of commercial/retail zones for a city of our size, including two downtowns, Stefko Boulevard, Route 412, BethWorks, Martin Tower, Linden Street, Broad Street, Schoenersville Road, Easton Avenue, Airport Road, etc. It is challenging to continue to support each of these areas with a healthy mix and variety of retail and commercial uses. It hasn't been demonstrated that Bethlehem can support additional retail space alone.

The proposed zoning amendment includes no parameters for the type or magnitude of the grocery store permitted in the Institutional Zone. The impacts and traffic generation from a grocery store could be more intense than those uses typically permitted in the Institutional zone.

The City has been looking for opportunities for an additional quality grocery store. There are food deserts in the City of Bethlehem, but they are not located in the area near Center and Dewberry Streets.

#### RECOMMENDATION

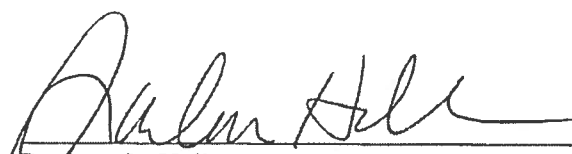
Because the inclusion of the grocery store use applies to the entire city and the proposal would allow a significant retail/commercial use type to locate in remote or otherwise inappropriate sections of the City, the Planning and Zoning Bureau does not support the zoning amendment as proposed.

This item is placed on your August 13 Planning Commission agenda for consideration.

---

cc: Mayor Donchez  
A. Karner  
T. Samuelson  
E. Healy  
C. Peiffer  
Bethlehem Manor Village LLC

DATE: 8-5-20

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Darlene L. Heller  
Director of Planning & Zoning