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March 31, 2021

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Re: Relocation of Luzerne County Tourism & Visitors' Bureau

Dear County Council Members & Mr. Wampole:

I read with interest the March 23 *Times Leader* story about Council's discussions to relocate the county tourism and visitors' bureau. I understand Council is considering the yet rehabilitated Central Railroad station in Wilkes-Barre as a potential future site. I would be remiss if I did not make Council aware of an alternative to the Central Railroad station site, specifically the White Haven Area Community Library & Visitor Center.

Historically Significant

The White Haven Engine House Project transformed the former Lehigh Valley Railroad engine repair shop, built in 1889, into a viable multi-purpose library and heritage visitor center. The structure has been determined eligible for inclusion on the National Registry of Historic Buildings. Located near the center of White Haven, the Engine House is one of a few historically significant structures remaining that reflect the persona of the community and our county.

The Engine House Project is consistent with several initiatives outlined by local, county, and statewide entities. White Haven Borough has stipulated the need to maintain and develop historic landmarks to attract retail and service industries as well as promote continued renewal of the downtown area, listed as a top priority in its Comprehensive Plan.

Location, Location, Location

Geographically, the White Haven Area Community Library & Visitor Center is located two miles from Interstate 80, nine miles from Interstate 81 and five miles from the Pennsylvania Turnpike. All three major thoroughfares have available signage to draw people from the highway to the tourism and visitors' bureau.

The White Haven Area Community Library & Visitor Center is strategically located to provide informational and respite services to the thousands of visitors using the local state parks and D&L Heritage Corridor trails. The Black Diamond portion of the D&L trail and the northern end of the Lehigh Gorge State Park entrance connect through the Main Street of White Haven. The Engine House is located one block west of Main Street and less than 100 yards from the trailhead. It serves as a respite area for visitors using the trail for recreational purposes and enables people coming off the trail safe accessibility to acquire information and bathroom facilities.

White Haven Borough is considered the entrance community for the Hickory Run State Park, Lehigh Gorge State Park and Nescopeck State Park. Over 400,000 visitors came to the Lehigh Gorge State Park in 2019 and over 500,000 visited in 2020.

The average daily count of trail users in 2020 throughout Luzerne County was 130, translating to over 470,000 people. With the increased development of an additional 20 miles of trail, that daily number will continue to surge.

It's Getting Even Better

A new Rail Yard Park will be constructed this summer, adding more amenities for visitors coming through the greater White Haven area. The park will include two large activity areas, ADA accessible walkways, lighting, picnic tables, benches, bike racks and native plantings. The project is fully funded by DCED, DCNR and private donations.

The location of the Rail Yard Park will add to the programming and recreational experiences offered by the state parks promoting project partnerships. Moreover, programming and events held at the library are already established with the Luzerne County Historical Society, the PA Game Commission, the Penn State Master's Gardener's program, the DCNR park staff, the North Branch Land Trust as well as other private entities.

It Checks All The Boxes

As a heritage visitor center, the project meets the goals of the Luzerne County Convention & Visitors Bureau by increasing the awareness level of historic sites, area businesses, and tourist attractions. The project meets the goals of the Luzerne County Redevelopment Authority by promoting community viability and increasing economic opportunities. It also reflects the "Keystone Principles" as recommended by the Department of Community and Economic Development to the Governor's Office, specifically to Redevelop First, Provide Efficient Infrastructure, Concentrate Development, Increase Job Opportunities, Foster Sustainable Businesses, Restore & Enhance the Environment, Enhance Recreational and Heritage Resources, Plan Regionally, Implement Locally.

Additionally, a partnership has been established with the Delaware & Lehigh Heritage Corridor and meets its mission "to enrich the communities within the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor through actions and partnerships that conserve the resources, preserve the history, and enhance the quality of life for residents of the Corridor."

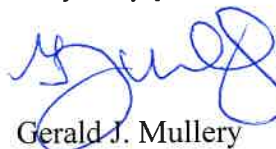
The Space

Finally, the space available for the tourism and visitors' bureau is ideal. The White Haven Area Community Library and Visitor Center offers 2,200 dedicated square feet including a large great room, a conference room/office, restrooms, and storage rooms. The space is handicap accessible. Adequate parking is available.

In summation, our tourism and visitors' bureau should be where our tourists and visitors are. I cannot think of a better location for this excellent asset than the White Haven Area Community Library & Visitor Center. I respectfully request you give this option your full consideration and vetting and invite you to an on-site visit to see the facilities for yourself.

If you require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very truly yours,



Gerald J. Mullery

cc: David Pedri, Esq.
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