



Minutes - Final

Community and Economic Development Committee

Wednesday, April 23, 2025

6:00 PM

Council Chambers

Roll Call: Chair Mota, Hendricks, Napoli

[15-7500](#)

Bill No. 16 – 2025

An Ordinance amending the Zoning Code of the City of Allentown, Section 660-6, by removing the meal preparation and provision to only senior citizens limitation within the community center definition and to read as follows: A building used for recreational, social, educational and cultural activities owned and/or operated by a public or nonprofit group or agency. Any residential uses or a treatment center shall only be permitted if they also comply with the requirements for such use.

Sponsors: Affa and Gerlach

Attachments: [Bill 16 Community Center](#)

[ACPC actions TextAmendCommunityCenter 03.11.25.pdf](#)

[Community Center Definition Change - A building used for recreational, social, educational and cultural activities owned and or operated by a public or nonprofit group or agency.pdf](#)
[Allentown - Community Center Definition.pdf](#)

[03 March Minutes Draft.pdf](#)

[Planning & Zoning Staff Report - Community Center Definiton Text Amendment - MAR2025.pdf](#)
[ZHB decision.pdf](#)

[Memo to City Council re Bill No. 16 - 2025 8APR25.docx](#)

Dr. Cynthia Mota stated ok, Ms. Gomez.

Ms. Jennifer Gomez stated good evening and stated that she is the Planning Director for the city. The Petitioner is requesting that the definition of community center be amended to a more readily facilitate the provision of meals and social service setting. She stated that the definition currently reads: a building used for recreational social education and cultural activities owned and operated by a public and nonprofit group or agency. The use may also include the nonprofit preparation and provisions of meals for senior citizens. She stated that any residential uses of treatment centers shall be only permitted if they also comply with the requirements of such use. The Petitioner proposes to strike the second sentence of the definition regarding the meals for senior citizens. No

further text amendments, map changes, or rezonings are proposed. Their goal is to remove the ambiguity with regard to meal services from our definition. She stated that the Petitioners represent organizations that would be classified as community facilities. She stated further more, RCI Village properties had a special exception application for a community center at 1539 - 1551 Chew Street which was denied in 2024 by the Zoning Hearing Board. She stated that the Zoning Hearing Board cited concerns that the applicant failed to prove the use will not negatively impact the residential neighborhood in the proposed use exceeded the definition of a community center. She stated that has been the subject of ongoing litigation between RCI, Village Properties and the Zoning Hearing Board. She stated that the applicant can comment on that litigation further if they wish to. Petitioner asserts that senior citizens is not defined within the Zoning Ordinance and staff concurs. The current provision restricting meal provision to senior citizens would be difficult to enforce and ambiguities could leave enforcement open to legal challenges. She stated that additionally, meal provision at a community center could also be interpreted as an accessory use for many contexts. She stated for this reason when the city is working on a Zoning Code Amendment where they are removing that ambiguity with the definition and taking a much more broad definition. She stated that is their proposal. It is not in place currently, but it will be before the Council leader for a vote. She stated with that said, the staff does not object to the language, to the definition change nor does the Allentown City Planning Commission has recommended approval as the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission. She stated that they received a number of phone calls regarding this particular application. She stated that she does feel that it is important to clarify a few things. She stated while this text amendment was presented as a Petition by RCI Village, and the Lehigh Conference of Churches. It is not a rezoning request. It is also not a decision that would allow the applicant to operate a By Right Community Center without a Public Hearing. A Public Hearing would be required to operate that use. If this bill were adopted, the Zoning Districts where community centers are permitted by right, by special exemption, and prohibited would remain the same. Any existing community center wishing to establish the meal program would be required to obtain a Zoning permit and any food preparation would need to meet the Health Bureau requirements. This will not allow anyone to instantly open a food distribution. There has been an inaccurate perception that this bill will provide RCI Village Properties an automatic approval with meal service. This property is in a Medium High Density Residential Zoning District where a community center use requires special exception approval. She stated should this Bill pass and should the applicant wish to establish a community center at this location, they would be required to submit a Zoning Permit. She stated that application would be heard by the Zoning Hearing Board at a public meeting with notice. She stated any neighbors

or interested parties would be permitted to offer comment and consideration for a decision by the Zoning Hearing Board. The Zoning Hearing Board shall not approve a special exemption application if evidence is presented that the use will result in a traffic safety hazard that there is a public health or safety hazard or negative impacts on the desirable character of a residential neighborhood and other criteria. She stated that decision is not being made today. This is just a definition change. She stated that it concludes her comments and is available for questions.

Dr. Cynthia Mota thanked Ms. Gomez. She asked if there were any comments from the dais.

Dr. Daryl Hendricks stated that he has a question and stated so what you are saying is any decision they make here tonight is forwarded to full Council and should be made by full Council would have no bearing on Zonings, either approval or disapproval of this Bill or of the Zoning request.

Ms. Jennifer Gomez stated correct. If this applicant was denied a Community Center with a Special Exemption use request, they would need to apply again and have a Hearing to have that decision be made.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks stated thank you.

Dr. Cynthia Mota asked if there are any other comments from the dais.

Mr. Santo Napoli stated to Ms. Gomez he wants to make sure that they are clear. He stated that the new Zoning rewrite that has not been adopted yet, but will be in front of them soon. He stated that you are saying that this language will be consistent in that Zoning rewrite, correct.

Ms. Jennifer Gomez stated that the language will be slightly different, but the issue at hand with regards to the meal provision is not in the new language. She stated that the property in question would still be a special exception in the proposed ordinance as well. This is the direction the city is proposing to go anyway.

Mr. Santo Napoli stated that this provision, if someone opens in a commercial and industrial area they will have the right to do this, but in residential whether it is low, medium, there are still special exceptions and again, to your point they will have to go to a hearing and start at square one, the whole nine yards.

Ms. Jessica Gomez stated yes, currently Inter Codes today generally speaking are commercial and industrial zones districts, allow Community

Centers by right generally speaking the new Zoning Code, they would continue to be allowed by right in residential areas, including where this property would be zoned. It would be a special exception use. In either the new code or the existing code this will be a special exception use for a Community Center. The Zoning Hearing Board is the decision maker on special exceptions after a Public Hearing.

Mr. Santo Napoli stated that his last question and they talk about ambiguity a lot around here with our ordinances, our codes. He asked what is the benefit or maybe not the benefit. He asked if there is ambiguity in the code, could that be an issue for us for instance down the road in a court room or when it comes to a challenge or anything like that.

Mr. Jennifer Gomez stated that any ambiguity in the Zoning Code could result in legal challenges.

Dr. Cynthia Mota stated so her question is since they are going to do a Zoning rewrite, should we wait or should we just do this now.

Ms. Jennifer Gomez stated that is a decision for Council to make. She stated that their recommendation is to move forward. It makes sense now with the Code put in place. The new Code may take several months to become in place. This will fix an issue with our Code in the meantime.

Dr. Cynthia Mota asked if there were any other comments and stated go ahead Ms. Gerlach.

Ms. Ce Ce Gerlach stated that she just wants to wait since she is not on the committee. She stated that there are already community centers that are serving people that are not senior citizens that exists. She stated they exists.

Ms. Jennifer Gomez stated likely yes stating they would need to do an assessment to find out and identify all community centers who are offering food provisions. She stated therefore this remove the ambiguity.

Ms. Ce Ce Gerlach stated that it seems to not be consistent with reality. She stated yeah, ok and then in terms of the Zoning Board and stated that she knows it is a separate issue that have been discussed tonight therefore relevant. She stated that the Zoning Board, they will consider in terms if a community center is allowed in a residential neighborhood. She stated that she heard Public Safety and traffic and asked do they consider public good.

Ms. Jennifer Gomez stated they would have to consider the criteria within

the allowable location for the use and specific criteria and in terms of the public that would need to be defined, but they would take into consideration the impact of the character of the residential neighborhood.

Ms. Ce Ce Gerlach stated ok so if having the Community Center in a neighborhood were to increase the character of a neighborhood by increasing the social fabric of the neighborhood that would be considered.

Ms. Jennifer Gomez stated that would be a determination from the Zoning Hearing Board.

Ms. Ce Ce Gerlach stated ok and stated thank you.

Dr. Cynthia Mota asked if there were any other comments from the dais or any comments from the public. She stated if you have comments, this would be the right time.

Sherri Brokopp Binder, Executive Director of Ripple Community Inc. - RCI Properties, stated that they are here today along with their nonprofit partners and supporters as you heard to ask Council for a remedy for the current Zoning Code for all nonprofit Community Centers in the city of Allentown. The current definition of Community Centers recurred includes specific language around meal service and the ambiguity that already raised some enforcement issues and inconsistencies as far as application and this was highlighted in a recent decision by the Lehigh County Court of Common Pleas by a Presiding Judge and interpreted this language as a Nonprofit Community Center. They only served meals. This is not to other individuals. She stated that she would like to take a moment to share why this matters and why to your questions Dr. Mota, they are asking to make this change. She stated that it matters in short because with this decision, every nonprofit community center in the city of Allentown that serves meals to non senior citizens is now out of compliance with the current ordinance. She stated that impacts not just the properties that are looking into improve on 16th Street and RCI's current community center on Linden Street. It impacts the Conference of Churches Day Break Community Center. It impacts Big Brothers, Big Sisters which is also a Community Center and the city of Allentown. She stated that any nonprofit that serves meals, you will go with physical or mental disabilities: veterans, youth, children, and people that are especially isolated. It affects many of those groups and so to oppose this change would be to oppose the ability for the nonprofit organizations to serve meals in our community to unfortunately struggle with it on food insecurity. She stated that they are asking Council to take action on this now because they understand the Zoning Code is being rewritten, but in the meantime organizations like ours are at risk and they wish they could assume something like this would never happen. If someone could

report many of our organizations for being in violation which could result in fines and (inaudible) services and other consequences that might impact the people we serve. They found broader approval from the bottom and asked for Council's support here to make sure that the Community Centers in the city are important.

Dr. Cynthia Mota thanked Ms. Binder and asked if there were any other comments from the public.

Ms. Marjorie Houser (sp) stated that she is here as a representative for the West Park Civic Association. She stated that one thing they did submit a letter and wanted to confirm that Council in fact did get their letter to change the definition. She stated that she doesn't know if they could read the letter or confirm that you have received it.

Mr. Santo Napoli stated that he received it.

Ms. Marjorie Houser asked everyone got it.

Dr. Cynthia Mota stated yes.

Ms. Marjorie Houser stated she guesses further comment on that is opposing the changing of definition, they do not see the definition of Senior Citizen as ambiguous definition in terms of the body of opposition (inaudible) and in that sense if you look at it when the decision of the Zoning Hearing Board went to the Court of Appeals and in fact they did not see it. They brought down the decision specifically saying that this is the definition that is in our current Zoning. She stated that she thinks the idea that again recognizing a Community Center is there to serve multiple purposes not necessarily just to serve meals. The serving of meals to a segment of a population does by definition also determine and influence the impact that the Community Center would have on the surrounding neighborhoods. In that sense, they are linked in terms of impact of the Community Center operations. She stated again, they still feel that they should stay with the current definition. Let the current process unfold in terms of the definition of the new Zoning regulations and let that process continue and see where they end up in terms of potentially expanding definition. She stated and not take action now to change the decisions that are already made on that Zoning and the court of appeals and rather let the process they are doing in Allentown and our government process to get actions (inaudible).

Dr. Cynthia Mota thanked Ms. Marjorie Houser (sp) and stated next.

Mr. Blake Henry stated that he just want to let you guys know that he lives in West Park and have been a part of West Park Civic Association and do not believe that there has been a vote for that letter.

Ms. Marjorie Houser stated that there has been a vote.

Mr. Blake Henry stated that he would like to see those minutes. He stated that this is a letter that was passed around, but he just wants to be clear that they are talking about this change. Not about a certain property or talking about the Zone of a property. He stated that they are talking about a definition.

Dr. Cynthia Mota stated definition.

Mr. Blake Henry stated that if they do not want Community Centers to serve food to people who just happen to be senior citizens and don't want to serve food to anyone else, you guys will keep it the way it is.

Dr. Cynthia Mota thanked Mr. Henry and stated next and asked anybody else.

Ms. Susan Bartels, CEO, Big Broths Big Sisters, stated as a going before the Zoning Board and got a Special Exemption back in 2015. She asked how this would impact her.

Dr. Cynthia Mota thanked Ms. Bartels. She asked anybody else.

Ms. Abigail (Abby) Goldfarb, Lehigh Conference of Churches, stated that she just wants to share that last year they served 75,000 meals to our community in a Community Center that was zoned in 2015. If something would happen to that building tomorrow by an act of God or man, they would have a really hard time picking up where they left off unless this agenda item is (inaudible).

Dr. Cynthia Mota thanked Ms. Goldfarb and stated ok, alright.

Mr. Santo Napoli stated to be clear, it would still be special exemption for residential neighborhoods and applicants would have to go in front of the Zoning Hearing Board, public testimony, everything.

Ms. Jennifer Gomez stated correct.

Dr. Cynthia Mota stated that it is not a zone change. It is just the language that needs to be fixed.

Ms. Jennifer Gomez stated correct. It is a definition change. It is not a decision on a property.

Dr. Cynthia Mota stated ok, anybody else and stated Mr. Hanlon.

Mr. Santo Napoli stated that he thinks full Council should at least here this and talk about it and give the public one more shot.

Dr. Cynthia Mota stated that she needs a motion.

Mr. Michael Hanlon asked are you moving it forward to a Public Hearing.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks stated yes.

Mr. Michael Hanlon stated ok, alright.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks stated that he understands it.

Dr. Cynthia Mota stated ok, next.

Mr. Michael Hanlon stated that would be tentatively scheduled for June 4th at 6:00 PM.

Dr. Cynthia Mota stated ok, so June 4th at 6:00 PM.

Ms. Ce Ce Gerlach stated a regular Council meeting.

Mr. Michael Hanlon stated a Public Hearing and have to go through certain hoops to advertise the Public Hearing. He stated that you will have the Public Hearing at 6:00 and then it will be and this is Daryl's call. It would probably be on the full Council meeting to vote on the 4th as well.

Dr. Cynthia Mota asked if Mr. Hanlon is going to put this in the newspaper and people will be notified.

Mr. Michael Hanlon stated yep.

Dr. Cynthia Mota stated ok, alright. Thank you.

A motion was made by Santo Napoli, seconded by Daryl Hendricks, that this Bill be forwarded to the full Council

Yes: 3 - Cynthia Mota, Daryl Hendricks and Santo Napoli

[15-7640](#)

Bill 37

Amending the 2025 Grants Fund to provide for a supplemental appropriation of One Million Dollars (\$1,000,000.00) from the State Office

of the Budget, Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP). These funds are a pass-through grant that will support Cedar Crest College.

Sponsors: Administration

Attachments: [Bill 37 Cedar Crest RACP](#)
[Ordinance #16129.pdf](#)

Dr. Cynthia Mota stated ok, Ms. Kistler.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that these are pass throughs that come to them as an RACP grant. This is a request that has been submitted by Cedar Crest College.

Dr. Cynthia Mota stated ok and asked any comments from the dais or any comments from the public. She stated ok, she thinks she needs a motion.

A motion was made by Santo Napoli, seconded by Daryl Hendricks, that this Bill be forwarded to the full Council.

Yes: 3 - Cynthia Mota, Daryl Hendricks and Santo Napoli

[15-7643](#)

Bill 39

An Ordinance providing for the expenditure of Six Hundred Fifty-Four Thousand Seven Hundred Seventy-Five Dollars (\$654,775) in Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) and One Million Six Hundred Thousand One Hundred Twenty-One Dollars and Twenty-Three Cents (1,600,121.23) in HOME Investment Partnership Program, unspent funds for the January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020, January 1, 2021 to December 31, 2021, January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2022, January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2023, and January 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024 grant years, for housing and community development programs pursuant to the approved Consolidated Plan, appropriate Federal Law and United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) regulations. The monies are received by the City of Allentown under Title I of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1976, as amended; The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2009; and Title II of the National Affordable Housing Act of 1990, as amended; for the purpose of undertaking programs of housing and community development within the City.

Sponsors: Administration

Attachments: [Bill 39 HUD Amendment](#)
[Ordinance #16131.pdf](#)

Dr. Cynthia Mota stated ok, Ms. Kistler.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that this one is a little more complicated. She stated that what they are doing in our HUD Program is they are trying to address the timeliness spending of HUD money. They have gone back to any account that has a remaining balance to use that money before the current year money. She stated in 2020 to 2021, they may have been a Project approved for \$300,000 who spent \$299,089 and the remaining balance is there. She stated what this allows them to do is move those smaller amounts toward our existing Projects and getting us out of a timeline which means if you don't spend your money by a certain date, they will take your money back. They are applying the oldest money in sort of a housekeeping fashion to the current proposals in order to use up those years of funds. She stated that in one case she thinks that they had an account in 2017 that had less than \$100 in it and that keeps the grant year open. She stated that this is our effort to move the funds forward to close the grant year. In addition, there were program income that came to them from the sale of the building. She stated that they would like to use some of those funds to address the issue with the funeral home property on Sixth Street to finally realize the potential of eight units of affordable housing and that would be Project Managed by our Housing Authority. She stated that they are trying again to resolve some of the open issues that have been open for a long time.

Dr. Cynthia Mota asked how much money are we talking about.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that they are approving the expenditure of \$654,000 in Community Development Block Grant. She stated \$1 million in unspent home investment partnership and whatever is listed through the grant amount. She stated that she thinks it is those two amounts.

Dr. Cynthia Mota stated ok, thank you. She asked if there were any comments and stated go ahead Mr. Hendricks.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks stated thank you madam Chair. He stated Ms. Kistler, his understanding is this is more or less just a house cleaning Bill sort of speak.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that the fact that you have all those older years money moving forward, is the housekeeping issue. The other two issues are the allocations of unspent funds. At times they have unspent funds because Projects fall through the cracks and can't be delivered so they can't spend their funds or in the case of this one, they have revenue that came from a Project. She stated if you use HUD Funds for a Project in the Home Program and you don't adhere to the deed restriction, in other words to take a nonprofit building and you sell it, if there is program income that is back, it has to be applied to another construction project that qualifies to

the same lower income development. In this case, they have the funeral home that they need to develop or they need to repay HUD for the money that was spent years ago to purchase the property and demo the property. She stated that they need to build something there. They are under the gun to develop that property and they have program income now to apply to the develop of the property and that is what this ordinance will do. She stated that eight units of affordable housing will be built on that Sixth Street right now baring lot that has been sitting there for she thinks 15 years. She stated 10 to 15 years. She stated that they are finally going to use this money to develop those eight units.

Dr. Cynthia Mota stated that they are in desperate need of housing.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks stated of housing. He stated thank you very much for the explanation.

Dr. Cynthia Mota stated thank you.

Ms. Ce Ce Gerlach stated just a quick question, and stated that she wishes that she was on this committee. She stated Page 2, where it says Allentown Housing Authority, Parks and Recreation, RCDC Environmental Review, HUD 108 Loan and asked what are those.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that those are what this money is being applied to. She stated that the 1.6 is going to the Housing Authority Development Project. The second line is the Assessments and the pre-development work that had to be done to get them to the point of being able to develop. The \$15,000 was going to be a General Fund expense to repair the doors to the Band Shell in West Park that had been vandalized according to bring them back to structurally sound doors that was going to be in the General Fund and was able to use the remaining 15 to cover that under the CDBG Grant. She stated that the other one is the Environmental Review that needed to be done for Childcare Expansion. She stated that the last one is the difference in the 108 Loan for the Da Vinci Center of the payment that differs from the interest rates.

Ms. Ce Ce Gerlach asked where does the funeral properties fit within that list.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that is the 1.6 million to the Housing Authority. She stated that is the gap in their financing. They raised all the rest of the money to build the unit. She stated that is the gap.

Dr. Cynthia Mota stated yea, that's all they need.

Ms. Ce Ce Gerlach stated gotcha. She stated so the Housing Authority that will be their Project. She asked is that Section 8 or is that.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated Project based vouchers, she thinks.

Mr. Mark Hartney stated it is Project based vouchers.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that she thinks it is Project based vouchers.

Ms. Ce Ce Gerlach stated gotcha. Thank you.

Dr. Cynthia Mota asked if there were any other comments or any comments from the public. She stated that she needs a Motion.

A motion was made by Daryl Hendricks, seconded by Santo Napoli, that this Bill be forwarded to the full Council.

Yes: 3 - Cynthia Mota, Daryl Hendricks and Santo Napoli

[15-7642](#)

Bill 43

Amending the 2025 Grants Fund to provide for a supplemental appropriation of One Million Dollars (\$1,000,000.00) from the State Office of the Budget, Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP). These funds are a pass-through grant that will support Phoebe Ministries.

Sponsors: Administration

Attachments: [Bill 43 - Phoebe RACP](#)
[Ordinance #16135.pdf](#)

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that again is the same as Cedar Crest College. It was renovating their ball fields. She stated that she believes that Phoebe has applied to the State Office of Budget to do some renovations to their and she believes it is long-term care part of their facilities.

Dr. Cynthia Mota stated ok and asked if there were any comments from the dais or any comments from the public and asked for a Motion.

A motion was made by Santo Napoli, seconded by Daryl Hendricks, that this Bill be forwarded to the full Council.

Yes: 3 - Cynthia Mota, Daryl Hendricks and Santo Napoli

Minutes

Mr. Michael Hanlon stated it is just there is you have any questions on them. He stated that Committee does not have to approve them.

[15-7670](#)

February 5, 2025 Community and Economic Development Committee Meeting Minutes

Sponsors: System

Attachments: [February 5, 2025 Community and Economic Development Committee Meeting Minutes.pdf](#)

[15-7669](#) March 12, 2025 Community and Economic Development Committee Meeting Minutes

Sponsors: System

Attachments: [March 12, 2025 Community and Economic Development Committee Meeting Minutes.pdf](#)

Adjournment: 6:29 PM