

September 22, 2025

City Council  
City of Allentown  
435 Hamilton Street  
Allentown, PA 18101  
RE: ZONE Allentown

City Council,

The Lehigh Small Cities Lab is writing this letter confirming our support for the City of Allentown's comprehensive Zoning Ordinance rewrite and SALDO update. The Small Cities Lab builds upon local knowledge to develop best practices, policy frameworks, and scalable solutions for small cities, places that have been chronically under-studied and under-resourced. The City of Allentown has been a valuable partner in our work to help cities address local challenges by utilizing data, community engagement, and relevant case studies. The Small Cities Lab focuses on supporting research that recognizes the interconnected nature of our urban spaces. ZONE Allentown, in line with Allentown's Vision 2030 Comprehensive Plan, signals a focus on the future of Allentown, one that acknowledges the need for place-based solutions, preventative interventions and long-term planning.

We believe ZONE Allentown serves as a model code for small cities across the Lehigh Valley and beyond, and we incorporated its core themes into the curriculum of our Fall 2024 architectural design studio. Under our direction, Lehigh students studied existing conditions in the 1st and 6th Wards and developed design proposals for micro-childcare facilities and residential mixed-use buildings, which we then evaluated for compliance with the city's proposed code. Based on this in-depth engagement with the code, along with our expertise in urban design and zoning, we believe the proposed code is well positioned to guide the city's own evolution and future direction and to play a big part in broader conversations around best practices in zoning. Importantly, the ordinance supports an increase in the supply and affordability of housing, prioritizes making Allentown a walkable city and activating the city's public and urban design and reinforces a commitment to sustainable development practices in order to preserve the city's future. Each of these are policy areas the Small Cities Lab is hearing about from communities across the region and country, only reinforcing how forward-thinking this revision truly is.

In summary, ZONE Allentown is a mechanism to work toward the goals for the future of this city and its residents. We hope that Allentown City Council votes to approve the proposed Zoning Ordinance and SALDO.

Sincerely,



Karen Beck Pooley  
Co-Director, Small Cities Lab



---

Wes Hiatt  
Co-Director, Small Cities Lab