



MEMORANDUM

To: City Council

From: Mike Handzo, Zoning Supervisor

Date: April 9, 2025

CC: Jennifer Gomez, Director of Planning & Zoning

Re: Bill No. 16 – 2025

I am writing to clarify the intent and potential effect of Bill No. 16 – 2025, amending Chapter 660 (ZONING) of the City of Allentown Zoning Ordinance by amending Section 660-6 to revise the definition of COMMUNITY CENTER.

While this text amendment request was presented to City Council as a petition by RCI Village Properties and the Lehigh Conference of Churches, it is not a rezoning request for petitioners' properties and would not have this effect. Both petitioners are in the line of trade of operating community centers, and the amendment would be relevant to any facility in the City offering this use.

If Bill No. 16 – 2025 were to be adopted, the zoning districts where community centers are permitted by right, permitted by special exception, and prohibited would remain the same. Any existing community center wishing to establish a meal program would still be required to obtain a zoning permit through the process outlined in Chapter 660. Any food preparation and service would need to meet all relevant Health Bureau requirements. The ordinance would not statutorily permit a community center to instantly begin offering meals with no further review process.

There has been an inaccurate perception that this bill would provide RCI Village Properties automatic approval to operate a community center with meal service at 1539-1551 Chew Street. This property is in a Medium High Density Residential (R-MH) Zoning District, where a community center use requires special exception approval. Should Bill No. 16 – 2025 pass and RCI wish to establish a community center at this location, they would be required to submit a zoning application. The application would then be heard by the Zoning Hearing Board at a public hearing with notice. Neighbors and interested parties would be permitted to offer comment for consideration.

For a more detailed analysis of the proposed text amendment and its impacts, please see the Bureau of Planning & Zoning Staff Report, dated March 11, 2025.