



## **Minutes: Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDC) August 18, 2025**

The regular meeting of the Middle Smithfield Township Economic Development Advisory Committee was held on August 18, 2025, with Ed Regina (Chairperson) presiding.

**Board Members:** Ed Regina (Chairperson), Deborah Emin (Vice Chairperson), Beverly Brown, Joe Memoli, and Ashley Takacs attended in person. Gina Bertucci attended via Zoom.

**Absent:** Charlie Stecker

**Township Staff:** James Brechbiel, Economic Development Manager, and Annette Atkinson, Township Supervisor, attended in person.

**Township Residents/Guests:** Michael Putney (resident) in person.

The meeting was called to order at 5:31 pm with Ed Regina presiding.

### **Minutes and Agenda**

- Deborah Emin made a motion to approve the July Minutes, seconded by Ashley Takacs. Motion passed 6-0.
- Deborah Emin made a motion to approve the August agenda. Joe Memoli seconded the motion. Motion passed 6-0.

### **Correspondence**

- None.

### **New Business:**

**Business Updates:** James Brechbiel reviewed the following updates for businesses in the area:

- Big Ridge Self Storage: Clearing of the lot has begun, and construction is anticipated for fall / early spring.
- 209 Blazing Grill – BBQ Jerk House: A CO is issued, and they are doing the final touches before opening in August.
- Raj Investment (former Pocono Palace) has a name reveal –SRSC (Shrimad Rajchandra Spiritual Center) and they have partnered with St. Luke's for a Poconos Wellness Fest on 9/27/25 from 12:30 to 3:30 p.m.

**Community/Township Updates:** James Brechbiel directed the committee to review the list of events at the bottom of agenda:

- LERTA Update— Monroe County has passed its extension by 10 years on 8/6/25. The Township's program is officially extended through 2035 for East Stroudsburg Area School District (ESASD) and Monroe County. Middle Smithfield Township's program does not expire.
- The Township attended the Pocono Mountain Economic Development Corporation (PMEDC's) Luncheon, where PPL (Pennsylvania Power & Light) presented Energy Resource Adequacy Crisis updates. James Brechbiel noted for the committee to look into House Bill (HB) 1272 / Senate Bill (SB) 897: Generation Investment Flexibility for Electronic Distribution Companies (EDCs), allowing options for generation development companies to invest in generation development, which possibly includes ownership for addressing anticipated shortfalls (40GW–70GW+ by year 2030) and reducing price volatility. (Short – if there is a shortfall, PPL can petition the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PA PUC) to either create directly, or contract a third party to do so).
- The Township is applying for the PA Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) Main Street Matters Grant to establish a “downtown development district.” The said project will include geofencing software for data/research and business prospecting, an official Township map, and a sketch plan of the district.
- The Township is attending the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce (GLVCC) Award Ceremony on 8/20/25 for its Marshalls Creek Explosion Site project, which will receive \$1,979.80 from the chamber once completed. Funds will be used for additional banners on 8 utility poles aligning Route 209 at the site, landscaping around the Historical Marker, and markers in honor of the victims who lost their lives.
- The Middle Smithfield Township 1,000 Feet of Street Litter Clean-up is Saturday, 9/20/25, at 8 am. Members present were instructed to contact Chris Rain, Parks and Recreation Manager, for more information or to volunteer.

### **Data Centers:**

- James Brechbiel noted that he attended the public hearing on data center development in Pennsylvania on 8/11/25 and shared some of the testimonies offered by those on the panel. Concerns about the environment (water needs), etc., were discussed, and it was noted that a lack of definitions (clear and reasonable) in ordinances will be a stumbling block for development. The main understanding is that data center development is a matter of when, not if, and that updates to ordinances should be reviewed and acted upon within local government/communities to prepare.
- Joe Memoli noted that one of the factors that makes Pennsylvania prime for this development is that it lacks natural disasters. James Brechbiel noted that one of the factors those on the panel listed is that PA is cooler for longer periods of time compared to other states, and that the data centers can harness the colder months to save on energy for cooling.
- The committee discussed that rapid advancement with AI has led to an increased need for data centers. Deborah Emin noted that AI books have been banned in bookstores and that a friend of hers who works for Lexus Nexus noted how AI is affecting case law. Deborah Emin furthered that, although opposed to AI, there is very little to stop data center

development, and asked if the Township is prepared. The committee discussed data centers are allowed in the C1, C2, I, and R3 (conditional) Zones in Middle Smithfield, and Ashley Takacs asked if there was a way for the Township to further restrict data center development within the Township if that was a consensus from the community.

- Annette Atkinson noted that the Township is already considering changes within the ordinance rewrite that the BOS is undertaking, and noted that the best solution for responsible development is to have a regional planning commission with up to four municipalities sharing comprehensive plans to restrict data centers to possibly just one municipality, etc. Annette A. furthered that this was not the current arrangement for Middle Smithfield and the surrounding townships, however. Joe Memoli asked, although the Township must allow data centers, if there is a model ordinance that can be reviewed and Annette A. noted the Monroe County Planning Commission has a model ordinance.

#### **Expanding EDC Membership Discussion:**

- Deborah Emin asked if the committee should consider expanding membership. Deborah E. noted that more members on the EDC can further help engagement with smaller businesses, and that the EDC could possibly orchestrate outreach/consultation days for businesses with EDC members. Beverly Brown noted that the consultation would have to be specific to make sure members are educated on the subject they are consulting on, which may present obstacles.
- Joe Memoli noted that, should the EDC expand, it should seek members with a variety of different skills other than those that members of the committee currently have. Gina Bertucci noted she is in favor of committee expansion.
- Ed Regina noted that the committee should consider reviewing and sharing in activities according to their skill set, etc. The committee discussed gathering a list of duties and having members determine what each can do to bolster efforts for the time being, rather than expand membership.
- Ashley Takacs noted that one-way members can expand and bolster efforts is by visiting the businesses with an intentional purpose once a week, and helping boost support through posting on social media with organic content.
- Beverly Brown noted that the committee could go together once a month to a business/restaurant to show support.
- James Brechbiel noted some practical ways to engage with businesses is on social media during Shop Local campaigns, and for EDC members to attend ribbon cuttings, the upcoming Home Buyers Seminar at the Community and Cultural Center on 11/1/25, and to get sign-ups for deal card activations at the Township's tree lighting on Saturday, 11/29/25.
- Ed Regina noted there is no magic bullet or thing the EDC can do to solve everything, but that any effort made to help the businesses is beneficial.

#### **Old Business:**

**Revitalize 209 Status Updates:** The Committee reviewed the following updates:

- **Richards Tree Farm**'s project to replace its fence was preliminarily approved at the BOS's 7/24/25 meeting.
- **Middle Smithfield Presbyterian** submitted its complete application to repair/resurface the parking lot.
- **Rental House at 5027 Milford Rd.** submitted its complete application for siding the entire house.
- Both the church and rental house projects are on the Revitalize 209 Committee's August meeting agenda.

#### **Geolocation Software Status:**

- James Brechbiel noted that he reached out to several geofencing software companies and had a demonstration from Four Square and scheduled another with Safe Graph. James B. noted that Four Square provides geofencing, but cannot provide demographic information, requires the use of an advertising company to reach the target audience, despite citing direct cell phone advertising, and does not have all the same features compared to Placer AI.
- Ed Regina noted that the committee can review a list of other companies and prospect possible

#### **Announcements:**

- Ed Regina noted that the Township is in the process of rewriting the ordinances and wanted to know if the Committee feels that a copy should be given to the businesses. Annette Atkinson noted that the rewrite changes are not specific to the business district, but that updates to the table of usage can be referenced.

#### **Public Comments:**

- None

**Meeting adjournment:** Deborah Emin made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:02 p.m., seconded by Ed Regina. The motion passed 6-0.

The next meeting will be held on Monday, September 15, 2025, at 5:30 p.m. at the Township Municipal Center.

Respectfully Submitted, James Brechbiel, Middle Smithfield Township