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Gurbir S. Grewal, Attorney General
New Jersey Office of the Attorney General
RJ Hughes Justice Complex
25 Market Street
P.O. Box 080
Trenton, NJ 08625-0080

April 7, 2020

Re: Concern that City of Lambertville is Moving Forward with Controversial Development Project During the COVID-19 Health Emergency

Dear Attorney General Grewal,

We understand that you are very busy during these trying and unprecedented times. Governor Murphy's Administration has taken strong action during this public health emergency. Executive Order 103 declared a State of Emergency and a Public Health Emergency, Executive Order 104 announced aggressive social distancing measures, and Executive Order 107 directs all New Jersey residents to stay at home until further notice. On March 20, 2020 Governor Murphy signed P.L.2020, c.11., which states that "a public body providing only electronic notice of a meeting pursuant to this subsection shall limit public business discussed or effectuated thereat to matters necessary for the continuing operation of government and which relate to the applicable emergency declaration."

Despite these measures, the City of Lambertville is trying to use the coronavirus emergency to push through controversial projects, including a development project in an environmentally sensitive area. This is in direct violation of P.L.2020, c.1.1. because this project is not related to keeping the government running or addressing the public health emergency. They need to be held accountable for their actions and must not be allowed to move forward until the coronavirus crisis is over.

During their regularly scheduled session on April 23rd, The City of Lambertville wants to move forward with an ordinance to set up a redevelopment plan for multiple large tracts of land. According to the agenda, "Ordinance Number 01-2020: an ordinance of the City of Lambertville. County of Hunterdon, State of New Jersey amending the Redevelopment Plan for the Lambertville High School Redevelopment Area, Block 1073, lots 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 32, 33 and 33.01, block 1090, lots 4 AND 5, and block 1091, lots 1 and 1.01."

We are concerned because it would put a redevelopment zone on top of the City's police station and a 4-acre tract so that the city can sell it to a developer. As part of that zone they want to put a 5-story



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apartment building next to Alexauken Creek, which is a C1 stream and has a 300-foot buffer. Once the police station is gone, the City Council will need a new location for the police station. They want to use this ordinance as an excuse to force the City to pay for a \$14-16 million City Hall Complex.

This project takes away from important work that the City of Lambertville needs to be doing to deal with this health emergency and the finances of Lambertville. The City should be concentrating on dealing with the economic and public health impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak. It makes absolutely no sense to spend \$14 million on building a new City Hall Complex at a time of financial uncertainty when unemployment is rising. Hundreds of people in our community have been laid off, dozens of businesses are closed, and people don't know how they will pay the mortgage or rent while they have been told to shelter in place. Moving forward with this development project is an unconscionable move by an out-of-control mayor and city council.

They are live-streaming the meeting, which is unfair and discriminatory because people must have computers and internet access to participate. People who are disadvantaged, including low-income, elderly, handicapped, non-English speaking, and others do not have access to computers or do not have internet access at home. Families coping with distance learning for children, or multiple family members working from home at once, strains internet bandwidth and access to computers at home. There are many people in Lambertville who are opposed to this project but cannot participate because of more pressing concerns about the health and safety of their family, their jobs or their finances during this pandemic. The meeting will be held via Zoom, which is easily hijacked and limits the number of participants. This process is undemocratic and unsafe.

Given the seriousness of the COVID-19 outbreak, and the fact that this development project does not directly affect the running of the government or the public health emergency, we believe that the City of Lambertville should postpone voting on this issue. The public's right to participate in government decision-making is critical at all times. This project will promote growth and will change Lambertville forever. It will also exacerbate financial issues in the City, especially during this time of economic instability. This issue should be put on hold until freely accessible public input can once again be included.

If you have any questions, or if there is any additional information that I can provide, please feel free to call me at (609) 558-9100.

Sincerely,



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Jeff Tittel

Director of the New Jersey Sierra Club