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Easton Prepares To Launch Future Planetarium

By Adam Fox / The Lafayette

EASTON - One business in Easton is looking toward the stars to grow its outreach, literally.

The city approved Nurture Nature Center's application for a certificate of appropriateness on Oct. 23., advancing the construction of their \$8 million planetarium.

The center, a nonprofit dedicated to spreading environmental education, first announced plans for the planetarium in January.

"It adds another attraction and educational opportunity that people can take advantage of when they're visiting Easton, or if they live in Easton," said Kim Kmetz, the director of development at Nurture Nature Center.

According to Rachel Hogan Carr, the executive director of the Nurture Nature Center, construction will begin in June 2025 and will be completed by December 2026. The new space will then open to the public sometime in 2027.

This September, the center also received a \$4 million grant from the federal government's Economic Development Administration, according to a September article by Lehigh Valley Live. The Nurture Nature Foundation, the center's sister organization, agreed to match the grant with private funds, raising the total project budget to \$7.97 million, per the article.

According to the certificate's resolution, current construction plans include demolishing the existing one-story addition and community garden to make room for the planetarium theater. The center's parking lot will also be renovated to incorporate urban garden spaces.

Carr said that the new immersive planetarium theater will seat approximately 75 people.

"They can show a wide range of environmental topics, but also do planetary science the way a planetarium does," said Carr, adding that the space could also double as a performance theater.

Kmetz — the former director of the Easton Main Street Initiative, a volunteer-driven downtown revitalization program — noted the center's positive impact on the city.

"This organization, this facility, holds a very important place in Easton's community, in the community of the Lehigh Valley," Kmetz said.

Rebecca Capone '27, an intern for the Nurture Nature Center, said that the planetarium will also feature ambient sound and a new HVAC system.

"The planetarium was something that I think a lot of people wanted," Capone said. "They took that feedback and they're trying to make it into something that everyone would use and enjoy."

Property Tax And Rent Rebate Program Extended Until December 31

By Senator Lisa Boscola

BANGOR - The Property Tax and Rent Rebate program's deadline has been extended until December 31, 2024. The income limit for both homeowners and renters is now \$45,000 with a maximum rebate of \$1,000. It's important to note when calculating your income for this program, that only half of Social Security benefits, count towards that limit. All other income will be added to that determine financial eligibility. Pennsylvanians over 65, widows or widowers between the ages of 50-64, or individuals who are permanently disabled between the ages of 18-64 that meet the income eligibility can apply. My Bangor office has the applications and my staff can assist in completing them for you.

Earlier this summer the General Assembly completed work on the state budget. As part of the budget, we made much needed investments to improve Pennsylvania's economic future and workforce development programs. The Lehigh Valley, and specifically the Slate Belt, is well-positioned to take advantage of these investments to bring more family sustaining jobs to our region.

Initiatives such as the SPEED program, net-operating-loss carry forward, historic preservation tax credit, and PA SITES program represent our commitment to economic development. These initiatives are good for business and will make us more competitive in attracting businesses and fostering growth.

The Streamlining Permits for Economic Expansion and Development Program (SPEED) will expedite business projects through enhanced permitting processes, supported by additional staff and third-party reviews. The net-operating-loss (NOL) carry forward increase from 40% to 80% over four years provides critical financial stability for start-up businesses, encouraging innovation and growth.

Additionally, the expansion of the Historic Preservation Incentive Tax Credit and the infusion of \$500 million through the PA SITES program

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