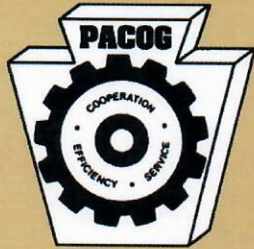


the PACOG News

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Spring 2019



Pennsylvania's Keystone for
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2019 Local Government Excellence Awards

The 2019 Annual Governor's Awards for Local Government Excellence, sponsored by the Department of Community and Economic Development, the Governor's Center for Local Government Services, was held on April 10th at the Governor's Residence.

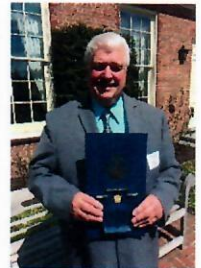
Municipalities were recognized for their successes in undertaking innovative projects and initiatives. Local government officials were selected from their local government associations and recognized for their exemplary service and dedication to local government in Pennsylvania.

Following are the award winners:

PACOG Individual Award Winner was Stewart Neff from the Huntingdon County COG, and past President of PACOG



Intergovernmental Cooperation Winner –
 Turtle Creek Valley COG, Allegheny County



Building Community Partnerships Winner – Hempfield Township,
 Westmoreland County

Innovative Community/Government Initiatives Winner- The Reading
 Bridges Workgroup, Berks County

Responding to Adversity – Bethel Park, Allegheny County

Innovative Planning/Sound Use Practices Winner- Middleton Township
 Delaware County

Information Technology Winners- Mercer, Lawrence, Butler, and
 Venango Counties

Health and Wellness Initiatives Winners- Bethlehem City, Easton City,
 and Northampton County

Fiscal Accountability and Best Management Practices Winner- Milton
 Borough, Northumberland County

Promoting Community/Economic Revitalization Winner- Lancaster City,
 Lancaster County

PACOG Congratulates all the Award Winners!

All COGs are encouraged to start thinking NOW about your successes.
 And prepare to apply for an award next year!

COG Talk... What's Happening in Our COGs?

The **Mid Mon Valley Council of Governments** has been revitalized and met this past February at an informational meeting. Five municipalities (Monongahela, Donora, Charleroi, Brownsville Township and Dunlevy) were present at the meeting, but at least nine communities have passed ordinances to be involved. The goal of the group is communication, cooperation and collaboration to help municipalities that face similar issues. The COG will help their communities in areas such as bulk purchasing, connections to state and county funding and the coordination of shared services. The Mon Valley Alliance (MVA) exists to help the region's communities grow and prosper. Their mission is to be the leading advocacy organization promoting and marketing economic, community and workforce development in the mid-Mon Valley communities. The MVA will be the facilitator and pay the dues for the initial year of operation of the COG, in order to help the COG succeed. Ben Brown, Director of Operations for the MVA, will also be the day to day contact for the COG.

Capital Region COG welcomed a record crowd to its Annual Dinner. Representative Frank Ryan shared his expertise, insight, and sense of humor with the crowd talking about a lifetime of service and the financial condition of the Commonwealth. Joint bids for 2019-2020 for items such as construction materials, line painting, office supplies, road materials, traffic signs, post and control devices and others were ratified at the COG Board of Delegates meeting. They are also preparing for their annual July 17th Surplus Equipment and Vehicle Auction, which includes other surplus items also.

Beaver County Regional COG [BCRCOG] recently completed bidding of Spring Road Commodities, including stone and paving materials, precast items, grates, pipe and fuels. Winter Road Salt will be bid in May. A Managers & Secretaries Workshop in May will feature a discussion on Marketing Your Municipality, while the Delegates' spring meetings will include a visit to Animal Control partner Beaver County Humane Society and guests from Beaver County Community Law Enforcement Coalition, which focuses on diffusing community tensions to avoid police-involved critical incidents. BCRCOG sponsors a Local Government Conference each summer; this year's conference, Rivers of Opportunity (register at www.brcog.com) takes place July 31-August 1 and will offer a Legislative Cruise jointly with Beaver Co Chamber of Commerce.

Moshannon Valley COG's 14th Annual Equipment Show and Training Day will be Wednesday, May 15th. It is held at the Clearfield County Fairgrounds from 9:00 to 3:00. Many exhibitors will be on site and several training sessions are scheduled. This year's sessions include the following: Cybersecurity for Municipalities, Development in a Floodplain, Posting and Bonding Updates and Flagger Certification. If you are interested in attending, please contact Lorie Rowles at moshannonvalleycog@gmail.com for a registration form.

The **Western Chester County COG**, in conjunction with the Western Chester County Chamber of Commerce, held a March Municipal Leader Luncheon. Topics that were covered included: a regional emergency management system; a Route 322 task force to determine the needs of the corridor; partnering with Chester County in technology and implementing a GPS system; and working with the high schools to offer a scholarship, implement an internship program, and adopt a Junior Council Person Program as offered by PSAB.

Two COGs, **Steel Rivers COG** and **Quaker Valley COG**, are participating in the Local Government Academy (LGA) 2019 Municipal Intern Program. The LGA is an independent non-profit, non-partisan organization promoting excellence in local government in the southwestern Pennsylvania region. The **Steel Rivers COG** intern will be a Social Media Coordinator and Marketing Liaison whose prime responsibility will be to steward the relationship between the Tri-COG Land Bank and the nonprofits in the development of marketing materials. Responsibilities will also include establishing/maintaining a social media presence, updating the website, and various administrative tasks. The **Quaker Valley COG** intern project involves furthering intergovernmental cooperation along the Route 65 Corridor by conducting research, organizing community events, and working with municipalities, academics, businesses and technologists to improve the regional highway corridor.

Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission Funding Issues

The Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission (PTC) is in the headlines lately. A six percent toll increase took effect in January 2019, the 11th consecutive year of increases. The increase was required to meet the PTC's funding obligations, per Act 44 of 2009, to maintain and improve the 552-mile PA Turnpike system and support mass-transit in the state.

Even with the toll increases, it appears, according to a state audit of the turnpike, that the turnpike has a funding problem. The PTC borrowed money to make payments to PennDOT to help fund public transit agencies. The borrowing debt keeps increasing every year. According to State Auditor General Eugene DePasquale, "It just isn't sustainable. The ever-increasing tolls are not only not putting a dent in the debt of the Pennsylvania Turnpike but it's actually driving, no pun intended, forcing less people to use the turnpike." DePasquale feels the turnpike can be on the road to insolvency.

In addition, two nationwide trucking organizations have filed a federal lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of using turnpike tolls to support non-turnpike projects, and they are seeking about \$6 billion dollars in refunds from the tolls. The lawsuit has resulted in the PTC stopping payments to PennDOT, which in turn, has PennDOT putting projects on hold.

State Senator Kim Ward of Westmoreland County has assembled a legislative working group to review the turnpike situation and consider options. Governor Wolf's spokesman, J.J. Abbott was supportive of the working group "because there are a multitude of issues that do need to be addressed."

Pennsylvania Voting Machines

In April 2018, Acting Secretary of State Robert Torres informed all Pennsylvania counties that they must select new voting systems that provide a paper record and meet 21st century standards of security, auditability and accessibility no later than December 31, 2019. This resulted from a U.S. Department of Homeland Security statement that all state and local election officials should make certain that by the 2020 Presidential election every American votes on a system that produces a paper record or ballot that can be checked and verified by the voter and audited by election officials. These changes were prompted by questions during the 2016 Presidential election and the inferences that there was Russian interference in the election.

Modernization of the voting system along with enhanced security and accuracy are the aims of the new voting systems. The paper record enables the voter to verify their choices before casting the ballot. The new systems should make it easier for persons with disabilities to vote unassisted. In addition, the new systems should assist officials in implementing better post-election audits.

Counties are scrambling to comply, but cite lack of money and the time crunch as obstacles. Under the Pennsylvania Election Code, voting systems chosen by the counties must be certified by the Federal Election Assistance Commission and the Pennsylvania Department of State. Governor Wolf has promised some state funding, but not a sufficient amount. If the counties do not have new voting machines, the state has said that it will de-certify current machines by the 2020 primary, meaning that they cannot be used in the elections.

Save the Date!
PACOG ANNUAL CONFERENCE
"BETTER TOGETHER"
October 11 & 12, 2019
Nittany Lion Inn, State College

Spotlight on Mount Penn Preserve Partnership COG

In July 2018, five Berks County governmental bodies - the County of Berks, the City of Reading, the Borough of Mt. Penn, and the Townships of Alsace and Lower Alsace - joined together to create the Mount Penn Preserve Partnership Council of Governments (MP3 COG). Its mission is to protect, promote and enhance the natural beauty, heritage and attractions of the Mount Penn Preserve.

Since the spring of 2016, the initiative to create a municipal partnership designed to coordinate plans to make Mount Penn a recreational and entertainment destination had been under way. Berks County Commissioner Kevin Barnhardt and Lee Olsen, a member of the Berks County Planning Commission and immediate past chair of the Pagoda Foundation, were at breakfast and discussing the assets of the area. They invited input from the community at large regarding establishing an entity to work collectively on Mount Penn issues. The first exploratory meeting was attended by about 60 supportive individuals. Next, officials from the four municipalities and the county were invited, and they each agreed to invest \$1,000 in the initiative.



Then, the Reading-Berks Association of Realtors, through its national foundation, sponsored a grant for \$15,000 to create a master plan. From that plan, an executive committee was formed. The committee structure formulated a marketing plan, a governance structure, an environmental assessment, and a public safety procedure to successfully monitor the health and vitality of the mountain area. Representatives from the five government entities were involved throughout this entire process.

The municipal legislative bodies or boards, as well as the county commissioners, all approved the 2018 ordinance creating the COG. The MP3 COG is governed by and comprised of representatives from the four municipalities and the county.

The COG ordinance is the cumulative, official outcome of this collaboration. "I am so proud to be a part of a viable and dedicated movement created out of identifying a need and capitalizing on our natural resource and treasure to enhance the quality of life in our community," said Olsen. "Our responsibility is to leave a legacy for future generations so they can continue to enjoy the beauty and history of this gem," Barnhardt added. "The MP3 COG is a testament to the cooperative spirit that's alive and well in Berks County," said Barnhardt. "Bringing five governments together to preserve and enhance the Mount Penn Preserve is remarkable."

The Mount Penn Preserve is a 4000+ acre site, approximately 1000 feet above sea level, that was preserved by the City's forefathers, although there are some public facilities across the area. The preserve stretches across a total of three municipalities: the City of Reading, and the townships of Alsace and Lower Alsace. The majority of these 4000 acres is owned by the County of Berks and the City of Reading.

Features within the Mount Penn Preserve include: the Reading Pagoda, William Penn Memorial Fire Tower and Skyline Drive (WPA projects), Antietam Lake Park, multiple passive recreation areas, and unique restaurants that offer a wide variety of fare. The area is also home to a trail system recognized by the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) as a Bronze Level Ride Center, one of 37 Ride Centers worldwide. In addition, there are over 40 miles of biking, hiking and equestrian trails within the Mount Penn Preserve and over 200 historically significant landmarks/districts.

The Mount Penn Preserve Master Plan lists 50+ goals for the future which include:

- Addition of dog park and gravity sports area
- Addition of rest facilities at various passive recreation areas
- Addition of trailheads and trail signage at key locations
- Establish gateway area and signage
- Expansion of the trail system to connect with other trail areas

If past history is an indicator, the MP3 COG representatives will continue to collaborate and successfully move forward on future initiatives.

The 2020 Census

Even though the 2020 U.S. Census is still a year away, it is important that local government officials realize the impact of the census. The information the census collects helps determine how more than \$675 billion of federal funding is distributed to states and communities each year. This translates to about \$26 billion in federal grants to Pennsylvania. The state could lose approximately \$2,000 in funding for every uncounted person.

Several of Governor Wolf's cabinet secretaries are stressing the financial impact of the census. As Rick Vilello, Department of Community and Economic Development Deputy Secretary for Community Affairs stated, "It isn't a Republican issue. It isn't a Democrat issue. Getting the count right affects so many different budgets."

Medicaid, health insurance for children, food stamps, energy assistance funds, funds for education programs like Head Start and reduced school lunches could all be affected. And, there is the possibility that Pennsylvania could drop from 18 to 17 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives if the state shows a decline in population. This decrease in congressional representation could translate to less opportunity to hold key positions of leadership and chairmanship.

State officials are doing what they can to make sure they get the word out to everyone to fill out those census forms, including hard-to-count populations like young children, the homeless, rural residents, and those who don't speak fluent English. They're trying to make it easier this year to fill out the census by making it available online and in twice as many languages.

Legacy Data Scanning and Digitization

The non-profit Pennsylvania Electronic Government Consortium (PAeGovC) is partnering with PACOG to offer COGs a new opportunity to assist their members and improve their use of digital technologies, and data, and information management. The array of possible programs includes:

- * Legacy Data Scanning and Digitization
- * Records Governance, Standards, Policies and Practices for the preparation, retention, and disposition of public records
- * Education and Capacity Building Information for Best Technology Practices
- * Digital Technology Standards for Local Governments
- * Rural Broadband Deployment
- * Municipal Collaboration Platforms and Virtual Hubs
- * Intergovernmental Shared Technology Programs and Staff
- * Government Process Management, and Financial and Budgeting Tools
- * Municipal Digital Transformations
- * Disaster and Continuity of Government Planning

The programs will be conducted in partnership with the PA Future's comprehensive, centralized, web-based online archive/repository of Pennsylvania's local government's public records including: current/historic policies, planning documents, publications, meeting minutes, budgets, ordinances/resolutions, and other data. This system will have user-friendly searching and analytical tools to help local government officials to be more informed and effective in their job.

PAeGovC is currently gathering data and input from COGs and municipalities. Public and private sector partners will be sought as will grant monies. For additional information, or to schedule a presentation to your COG, contact Alan R. Kugler at ark@paegovc.org or 814-881-4155.

Enacted 2019 Legislation

Act 1 - 2019-- broadens the **Public Employee Pension Forfeiture Act** to not award taxpayer-funded pensions to elected public officials or employees who commit serious job-related crimes including sexual offenses, theft, forgery, bribery and wagering on an official action. Provides for definitions, for disqualification and forfeiture of benefits and for restitution for monetary loss. Forfeiture would begin on the day the official/employee pleads guilty or no contest or is found guilty. Also repeals a retroactivity provision.

Pending 2019 Legislation

SB 115 - would provide hands-only cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and automated external defibrillator (AED) training for high school students.

SB 127 – would add a PACOG (Pennsylvania State Association of Councils of Governments) appointee to the representatives on the 911 Advisory Board.

SB 396/HB 97 – would ban the sale of vaping products to minors. A minor caught trying to purchase tobacco products could be fined between \$100-\$250 for the first offense. Youth caught with tobacco products at school could be fined \$50.

HB 275 – would amend Act 47 of 1987 (regarding distressed municipalities), renaming the **Early Intervention Program to the Strategic Management Planning Program**.

HB 284 – would allow the **Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission to go to a private entity, on behalf of a local government, in order to obtain an archived record**.

HB 349- prohibits municipalities that opt-in to the **PA Uniform Construction Code** from utilizing only one third party to administer and enforce their building codes.

HB 510 – would simplify and be a more cost-effective method for cooperation among municipalities. **It would allow a municipal Resolution, rather than the more formal enactment of an Ordinance, to be used to enter into Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreements.**