

**The Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission  
Regional Policy Advisory Committee  
June 26, 2023  
Fay-Penn Economic Development Council, Fayette County– 2:00 p.m.**

Members present were: Darin Alviano, Mike Belding, Art Cappella, Mark Critz, Scott Dunn, Pat Fabian, Ann Ogoreuc, Leslie Osche, Mark Rafail, Jason Rigone, and Vince Vicites.

Others: Ellen Kohler, University of Pennsylvania; Patrick Joval, Gov. Shapiro (SWPA Regional Office); Tammy Nedrow, Fayette County; Mary Over, Fayette County; Lori Scott, Fay-Penn Economic Development Council

Staff: Mary Brangan, Kirk Brethauer, Leann Chaney, Dominic D’Andrea, Linda Duffy, Margaret Fonner, Caitlin O’Connor, DJ Ryan, Ailisa Sobien, Catherine Tulley, Vincent Valdez, Sara Walfoort and Andy Waple.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Commissioner Vicites welcomed everyone and thanked Fay-Penn Economic Development Council for providing the meeting space. The space was chosen due to best venue for parking and its pretty high-tech meeting room.

Commissioner Vicites explained that Fay-Penn has what they call a launch box, which helps businesses get started, working with Penn State Fayette campus located across the way. We're also in the University Technologies Park. You have several businesses in here and have room to grow. This park was developed around the year 2000 and it's a Technological Park geared towards those types of businesses. Fay-Penn is our lead economic development organization where they work with the county and our lead economic coordinator, Mark Rafail, and the commissioners.

We’re glad you came. We know how important regionalism is working together as a region to make it stronger. And we want to do everything we can to bolster that, to do what we can to be a good regional partner.

Commissioner Dunn also welcomed everyone to Fayette County and thanked them for coming.

Commissioner Fabian said he appreciates the fact that we've gone out to Armstrong, we've gone off to Butler County, mainly because the space in the Strip District hasn’t been open yet. I think you said a key word there – regionalization. We're working as a region. That's what we do. And it's nice to get out to these kinds of things.

2. Action on Minutes of the April 24, 2023 Meeting

Mark Rafail moved to approved the minutes of the April 24, 2023 meeting and Ann Ogoreuc seconded. The motion carried.

### 3. Update on the Allegheny River—DJ Ryan, Director of Strategic Initiatives and Policy

DJ followed up on the discussion that took the entire 60 minutes at the last policy committee meeting. Thank you all for your attention when we discussed the Allegheny River. Just to give a recap for those people who may not have been there. We had Col. Adam Czekanski, District Commander, and Vince DiCarlo, Deputy District Engineer, from the Pittsburgh District Army Corps of Engineers here. Essentially what they explained to us is the locks on the lower portion of the Allegheny River that is closest to downtown Pittsburgh and their hours of operation, what they call level of service are determined solely by the number of commercial lock events through those locks. The Cheswick power plant closes, the number of barges going up, down, up and down the river as a result of that brings that level down. Of course, there are a lot of other factors as well. The commercial lockages are down. What that means is that we expect in the next few years, that the hours of operation that those locks are going to go down. When that happens, the number of commercial lockages will likely go down, and so on and so forth, then we get a problem. As this is obviously something that we want to solve, we want to keep the vitality of the region and especially those communities along the Allegheny River. So, the Army Corps of Engineers, in addition to coming and talking to us, convened a couple of meetings with SPC, with the Port of Pittsburgh Commission, the Fish and Boat Commission, commercial operators, recreational boaters, a lot of other people, including federal offices, and we've been trying to really drill down on this problem and find out what's exactly going on.

What we've learned in that discussion, first of all, this whole idea of commercial lockages, being the thing that informs the hours of operation for the locks, is a regulatory thing. The Army Corps of Engineers has an internal board that is responsible for developing this better. It's not something that's in law, that doesn't necessarily mean that the fix for this is regulatory. We are exploring legislative and regulatory fixes for this. But in general, it gives us a lot of options. The other important thing to remember here is the Army Corps of Engineers can't lobby themselves to change this. And they also can't lobby Congress because of the nature of that military organization. So, the Army Corps has been having these discussions that they need someone to take over the leadership and decision. They're going to be holding a meeting on August 1, based on the discussions that we have had in prior meetings. We believe that it's going to be the consensus of the group who takes this next meeting, that the SPC and the Port of Pittsburgh Commission are going to be asked to co-lead the effort to change the policy. Largely, I believe this is because we have the capacity and the experience and the space to do something about it. But also, the SPC and the Port are already pretty connected. So, nothing's official yet, but I want to make sure that it's on your radar that SPC (Sara Walfoort and myself) is going to be asked to do this for us, go to these meetings talking to a lot of people. The staff at SPC believes that we are capable of leading this effort. Our plan would be to convene another meeting probably in September, where we can have more specific discussions about a specific solution, or what is the best solution and what to ask of our elected officials and start to follow that path with trips to DC this fall to ask for specific advice from our elected officials. So that's the general plan. I'll just also tell you that Sara has been in touch with other partners across the country who may be experiencing a similar problem, because any change that we make is likely to affect all of us workers across the country, not just here in Pittsburgh, and we're here in Fayette County and certainly the Monongahela River could be affected by any kind of policy change as well. So,

we're hopeful that we can get this effort moving. If we start at a lobbying effort in fall, we have then a year to get a piece of legislation for Congress if that's the path we decide to take. And we'll keep our fingers crossed for good news on that regard as well. I do believe that we have supported most if not all of our federal elected officials here. We just need to get a more robust group together so that we can get something actually pushed to the Congress, given all the various priorities that they have right now.

Commissioner Fabian commented that he lives on the river system, way up north of Pittsburgh. If anybody was at the Armstrong meeting, one of my biggest complaints is when we start to get some momentum moving forward, there seems to be a leadership change within the Army Corps. Then we're like Chutes and Ladders. We start to climb this ladder then slide back to the beginning again, educating the new leadership. But I'm happy to hear the update as far as SPC and maybe partnering with Port of Pittsburgh to lead this. So that's exciting. He said if he could help in any way at several meetings, he'd like to join those as well.

4. Guest Presentation (Virtual) – Ellen Kohler, JD, MS | Director of Applied Research and Programs at The Water Center, University of Pennsylvania

The University of Maryland Environmental Finance Center Network leads a national network of centers helping communities find ways to the natural resources for infrastructure restoration activities. The projects include drinking water, wastewater, stormwater, and source water issues.

The Water Center at Penn is a community-focused research center working to identify integrated solutions to the challenges facing water systems and watersheds. We work on strategies and research to engage, network and empower communities. We've been in the Pittsburgh region since the center's inception five years ago. The Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority is currently on a stormwater Master Plan. The Water Center partners that work.

Last fall the team was designated by the EPA as the water infrastructure center for the Mid-Atlantic region (Region 3). The EPA designated cities across the US to help underserved and disadvantaged communities access funds for water infrastructure. The WaterTA provider team consists of University of Maryland Environmental Finance Center (TEAM LEAD); The Water Center, University of Pennsylvania; Moonshot Missions; Quantified Ventures; Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project, Inc. (SERCAP); RCAP Solutions Northeast; WV Community Action Partnership; and University of Maryland Center for Community Engagement, Environmental Justice, and Health

The Region 3 Water Technical Assistance (WaterTA) program offers direct support to municipalities, tribes, and water utilities in the Mid-Atlantic region, to help them access federal and state funding to address water infrastructure needs. Coordinated by the University of Maryland Environmental Finance Center through a five-year award from the US Environmental Protection Agency, the program aims to increase the number of communities that can successfully access water infrastructure funding to ensure safe, reliable water systems for all.

Assistance is available to any municipality, tribe, and water system in US EPA Region 3, which covers Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. Assistance is provided at no cost to communities and is delivered on the basis of availability and

need. Priority is given to historically underserved and disadvantaged communities and those that meet their state's affordability criteria.

Assistance is available at any step in the process of accessing water infrastructure funding, including identifying water challenges; developing plans; building technical, financial, and managerial capacity; and completing funding application materials. Projects can span drinking water, wastewater, stormwater, source water protection, nonpoint source, decentralized wastewater (e.g., septic systems), and/or Financial Capability Assessment (FCA) assistance.

The following is a range of available services:

#### Planning & Assessment

- Community Engagement
- Plan Development & Coordination
- Studies & Assessments
- Asset Management

#### Project Development

- Preliminary Engineering Reports
- Lead Service Line Inventories
- Project Design
- Environmental Reviews

#### Partnerships & Engagement

- Ongoing Engagement & Outreach
- Decision-Maker & Board Education
- Water System Partnerships
- Capacity Building & Training

#### Funding & Financing

- Rate & Revenue Analyses
- Financial Planning
- Identify Funding Options
- Application Support

#### Program Management

- Bid Support
- Change Order Review
- Project Inspection
- Domestic Preference & Davis Bacon Assistance

This is a five-year project working with 40 to 60 communities a year at varying levels of engagement.

We have started planning a meeting for July 26 for Southwest PA particularly Greene County. So that is the sort of session where we'll have a lot of folks live from these communities and be able to learn about the TA and about how to take next steps.

Contact Us:

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Questions & Answers

Catherine Tully, SPC Water Resource Center

For anyone that wants to get started and has no experience, what would be a competitive project application? We do have one here in the city and know that it's a good candidate for technical assistance. What would they do just to get started? Do they talk to you? Should they start information gathering for an application?

Ellen Kohler

I think probably the best is either to contact the finance center or ARP. We both can help with exactly what's required. They can also reach out directly to the folks at Invesco.

5. Next Meeting Date – August 28, 2023 at 2:00 p.m. in Westmoreland County.
6. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 2:58 p.m.