

Testimony
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Joint Senate Committee Meeting
Multi-Municipal Planning and Shared Services
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Testimony Before the
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Joint Committee Meeting

- **Local Government Committee, chaired by Senator Regola**
- **Senate Urban Affairs and Housing Committee, chaired by Senator Pippy**

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Introduction

Good Morning! My name is Barb Ciampini, and I am pleased to come before you today to speak about Multi-Municipal Planning & Shared Services.

Senator Regola, and Senator Pippy and members of the Local Government Committee and Senate Urban Affairs and Housing Committee, I thank you for this opportunity to address you.

Personal History

By way of introduction, I am a Penn State graduate, with a Bachelor of Science degree in Urban & Regional Planning. I have been the Planning Director for the City of Greensburg since 1985, and I am a member of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association. During the last twenty-three years, I have been involved in many planning processes for the City and then from 2002-2004 I was involved in the Multi-Municipal Planning process, initiated by Senator Regola when he was the Chairman of the Hempfield Township Board of Supervisors.

The planning area consists of the four municipalities and is located in Westmoreland County. The City of Greensburg, encompassing four square miles, is the urban center for the area, serving as the Westmoreland County Seat and the arts and cultural district. South and Southwest Greensburg are primarily residential boroughs with footprints of less than one square mile each. Hempfield Township surrounds all three municipalities in their entirety and makes up the majority of the planning area with approximately 82 square miles of land in a mix of agricultural, residential, commercial and industrial land uses. Twelve municipalities surround the planning area and five other boroughs are located wholly within the area covered by Hempfield Township, but were not participants in this planning effort.

The City of Greensburg and the Boroughs of South and Southwest Greensburg are densely developed and primarily built out, while Hempfield Township is more rural and suburban in character with large areas of remaining open space. However, Hempfield Township has experienced rapid growth over the last two decades. All four municipalities share a common history, demographic trends, economy, and transportation and public service infrastructure. But while each municipality has its own identity, they collectively understand their interdependence and the benefits of planning regionally. I am pleased to inform you that the Multi-Municipal Plan for Hempfield Township, the City of Greensburg, South Greensburg Borough and Southwest Greensburg Borough, commonly renamed “our community” was the recipient of a Governor’s Award for Excellence in 2004.

This planning effort was funded through a combination of funds provided by DCED, via the Land Use Planning and Technical Assistance Program (LUPTAP), the LGA and local sources including participating municipalities and a private donor.

The topic of this hearing, multi-municipal planning and shared services should include three areas of importance: Partnerships, People, and Politics

Partnerships are important.

In 2002, Senator Regola, then Chairman of the Hempfield Township Supervisors and the other Hempfield Township Supervisors initiated a series of Saturday morning workshops with the assistance of the Local Government Academy (LGA), the Smart Growth Partnership of Westmoreland County (SGPWC) and 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania. The workshops were an avenue to invite all the local governments around the Township of Hempfield and the school districts to come and learn about the local government planning process. From those workshops the City of Greensburg signed on as a partner, initially the only partner, even though the City had just recently adopted a Comprehensive Plan in 1999. The City knew there were advantages of working together regionally.

Ultimately, through discussion and presentations to Elected Officials with the consulting team already on board, Southwest Greensburg and then South Greensburg Boroughs were encouraged to join in the planning process.

Once the local governments were signed on a steering committee was appointed consisting of representatives from all four municipalities.

The question is: How can smaller local governments with staff of three or less even begin to think about a planning process that takes time away from their daily activities related to operating the local government? In our case, the City of Greensburg is the only local government with a planning department, so we took on the leadership role and helped to establish the partnerships in order to create the “multi-municipal” aspect of a multi-municipal plan. There are many local governments in Pennsylvania that don’t have planning departments. The multi-municipal planning process would be inundating for those localities to take on.

The City of Greensburg was more than pleased to take on the leadership role, even though Hempfield Township initiated the process. Please note that this leadership role involved coordination of the process, fiscal responsibility (we have a terrific Fiscal Department, with my co-worker Mary Perez at the helm) and communications.

People

The Project Steering Committee met monthly with the consultant to review and refine information and shape the plan. Public input meetings, key person

interviews, focus groups and public presentations to all four municipalities encompassed the communications aspect of the planning process.

The questions to ask here are: Who are the steering committee members? What people do you ask to serve? And more importantly, what can they do for you to help the planning process? I have to admit that when I recommended the City's steering committee members to Mayor and Council that I had an agenda in mind. Greensburg's representatives covered a variety of influences. Public Transportation, Higher Education, Professional Planners, local School District, and a resident at large. I also managed to influence one of the smaller boroughs to appoint a person that resided in the borough that is a hydraulic engineer and conservationist. You need a "loaded" steering committee to make this process work. These people worked to make the plan a reality. They worked hard.

The steering committee members that represented the boroughs were then also responsible for keeping their local officials up to date with the planning process. Communication is a key element of a multi-municipal plan. The right people can make the process smoother.

Politics

I'd like to say a few words about politics, if that's at all possible. Yes, politics could mean the usual Democrat vs. Republican, but in the case of regional planning or any planning for that matter; it has been my experience that planning can occur and planning can be good, but without the proper politics, you end up with a plan that sits on a shelf.

The Multi-Municipal Plan for Hempfield, Greensburg, South Greensburg and Southwest Greensburg has been an asset to all municipalities in a variety of arenas. Our transportation issues are prioritized so I can speak for all four municipalities at the Southwestern Planning Commission (SPC) public transportation meetings, the Greensburg Hempfield Library is currently using the Multi-Municipal Plan as their stepping stone for a "needs assessment" study for their facility, I have referenced this plan in numerous grant applications for funding, Greensburg has implemented a Gateway District, Historic & Architectural Review Board, because of the plan a Transportation Revitalization Investment District planning study is on-going in the City, Hempfield used the plan to identify the site for their skate park; Seton Hill University and the Greensburg Salem School District formed a partnership to share the School District's athletic field as the University's home field; Excelsa Health, our local hospital has utilized our plan for their own strategic planning to provide better access for health care for the community; discussions have occurred about

shared police and fire department services , we offer to share equipment and services with each other. We even tried to implement a combined salt bid, and Hempfield and Greensburg and even the two boroughs are much better friends with each other than we were before the plan. This is all good. In fact it's terrific. I impressed myself when I started to list the positive outcomes of our multi-municipal plan as I compared what we have done with our list of Implementation Strategies, but I still know that we have a long way to go. The questions are: How do you get all the municipalities to give up some of their autonomy and come together, if only for planning purposes, beyond the plan itself? The Commonwealth needs to try harder to encourage joint planning commissions and joint recreation commissions in Western Pennsylvania. The Route 30 Corridor Study, another project that Senator Regola has taken a great interest in, is turning out to be a wonderful plan, a tool for education about smart growth and how we can all do better, but what comes next?

How Can the Pennsylvania Local Government and the Urban Affairs and Housing Committees help?

OPEN PUBLIC DISCUSSION

Foster open public discussion of these politics. Hempfield Township initiated this Multi-Municipal Planning Process because they thought they would be better able to secure funding.....money does talk. Local governments know that it is soon going to be impossible to financially be able to provide the level of services we all provide. Community Planning leads to better services on a regional level. The public expects quality services, but what happens when we can't provide them?

MEANINGFUL STATE REVIEW

You could ask for all municipal recipients of LUPTAP funding to send you the impacts of their multi-municipal planning efforts and shared service programs. Currently the only review I am asked for is via an annual E-mail request from the LGA. I assume they collect the information for their use to ask for more money to fund more of their quality programs. The State could conduct reviews and then determine the "ability" of a local government to acquire other State funding, liquid fuels as an example.

Conclusion

To conclude, multi-municipal planning and shared services are going to be in the forefront of the future of local governments. The current state of our economy is going to drive it. Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on multi-municipal planning and shared services. If you have questions about my testimony I would be happy to respond.

