

Turtle Creek Valley COG Director's Report

TCVCOG Board Meeting
May 28, 2015

Important Dates:

June 16th: Police Chief Meeting, 1:00pm
June 17th: Manager's Meeting, 10:00am
June 25th: Board Meeting, 6:30pm

Land Banking:

On Wednesday May 27th the Center for Community Progress presented on "EVALUATION OF THE TRI-COG LAND BANK BUSINESS PLAN: A Solid Foundation for a Regional Approach to Vacancy and Abandonment in the Mon Valley and Beyond." We had a number of communities and several school districts represented. The presenter, Kim Graziani, from the Center for Community Progress (CCP) stated that of all the business plans across the country, the Tri-COG plan is the best she's seen. She said that she was extremely impressed with the level of research and thoughtfulness that went into the plan, especially in terms of the Cost of Blight study, and the Governance Structure that ensures all taxing jurisdictions have a voice in the process. The study indicated that further thought is needed in terms of how the Land Bank will interact with the Allegheny Amendment. The report also indicated that our revenue may be overestimated. We have worked to correct these issues.

Today An Lewis, John Palyo and I met with representatives from several foundations and Jen Liptak and Casa Collinge from Allegheny County. The meeting was arranged and hosted by the Heinz Endowments. Once again, Kim Graziani from CCP presented the results of their study. The philanthropic community is very much engaged in what is happening with the Tri-COG Land Bank, and interested in helping to make it a success. It was a very positive meeting to say the least. Jen Liptak indicated that the County Executive is very supportive, and they are taking time to make sure they can answer any questions that County Council may have. When asked about a timeline for the County to sign the ICA, Jen said it should be done by the end of the year. She doesn't anticipate any problems.

Code Enforcement:

On June 5th Liz, Jason and I met with Craig Robinson, Rebecca Bradley and Leonard Hill in order to check-in a vet any issues and/or concerns. Everyone is well pleased with the program.

Joint Police Testing:

The test took place on May 14th. There were 28 candidates, and 27 of them passed the test. Test results have been sent to the participating communities.

Other:

On May 7th, Amanda presented on Land Banking at the PA Land Trust Association conference in Gettysburg. One of the outcomes is that we will be meeting with Chris Beichner, Executive Director of the Allegheny Land Trust, on June 3rd to discuss ways we can partner as the Tri-COG Land Bank moves forward in terms of disposition of property.

Liz went to the Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group Conference on May 12-13th. The conference was well attended with Community Development Corporations in the county with many presentations from groups in near-by states. One session was on land banking in Warren, Ohio and the Trumbull County Land Bank. The message of the presentation was how to reestablished identity in disinvested neighborhoods through land banking, rebranding, and social media. The Executive Director for the Center of Community progress, Tamar Shapiro, gave the lunchtime keynote speech. This is the same organization that reviewed our land bank business plan. Her presentation on dealing with blight was very much in line with what we have been working to accomplish.

Vector:

We are in need of scheduling for June and beyond. If you are an opt-in town, or in need of service, please contact Ray at your earliest convenience at (412) 495-0019.

Police Chief Meeting – May 19, 2015

Joint Testing:

Joint police testing occurred on May 14, 2015. North Versailles, Forest Hills, Churchill and Wilkins were the communities that participated in the test. There were a total of 28 applications. The police chiefs wished there was a larger number of applicants but were happy with the quality of the applicants. Overall the police chiefs that were in attendance were satisfied with the test.

Tactical Training:

The Police Chiefs carried on their conversation from the meeting on April 17, 2015. There is a desire to form a Tactical Training program for Patrol Officers in the COG. The officers in

attendance were in agreement that it would be a great program that would provide good training to the police officers. It could also be used towards MPOETC training.

There were some questions about sustaining the program. The issue was raised that officers will need to receive continued tactical training due to turn over. The program would need to be sustainable to ensure trainings occur on a regular basis. The officers agreed.

The preliminary budget was put together, with a cost of just under \$20,000. Amanda will follow up with the District Attorney's office to see if there is any money available to fund the project. Others suggested looking towards JAG grants as a source of funding. Before approaching any organization for funding we will need a Memorandum of Understanding from municipalities that are interested as participating. The list of committed municipalities will leverage funding opportunities and will allow the interested municipalities to have a better understanding of how much the program is going to cost each individual municipality. Once the equipment is purchased it was thought that costs will be extremely minimal, and may simply consist of officer time.

Amanda will reach out to Officer Starko from Moon Township, who helps to facilitate the program at the SHACOG.

The next meeting will be on June 16th at 1:00 pm.

Manager's Meeting – May 20, 2015:

In attendance: Moe Rayan, Penn Hills; Julie Bastianini; Edgewood; Tim Little, Monroeville; Craig Robinson, Churchill; Patty Logo, North Versailles; Annette Dietz, Pitcairn; Clyde Wilhelm, Swissvale; Debra Brown, Braddock

LED Lights:

Monroeville is going to be replacing their LED light bulbs in their traffic lights. While they are old, the lights may have some life in them. If any of the municipalities are interested in taking them please let Amanda know.

Cable Franchise:

Some of the managers have already received letters from Verizon that the cable franchise agreement will expire within the next 18 months. In 2007 the COG municipalities joined together to receive a discounted rate from Cohen Law Group to represent the individual municipalities and negotiate the franchise terms. The last time the COG paid Cohen Law group about \$28,000. Amanda said there is some money in the Manager's Advisory Committee fund

that can substantially reduce the out-of-pocket costs for municipalities that are interested in coming together. The managers were very interested in working together and using the funds to pay the legal costs.

Amanda asked if there was anything they were unhappy with from the last negotiations that occurred. There were none. Many of the managers were interested in negotiating for internet for municipal buildings in this next franchise agreement. This is something that will be looked into.

The group was comfortable asking Cohen to provide a proposal. Although most municipalities collect the highest percentage available by law, Cohen Law Group has been making sure the cable companies are including all costs in the gross revenue. Some companies were not including penalties and interest in the gross revenue, 5% of which should be given back to the municipalities. Monroeville passed a resolution this week to enter into a class action lawsuit to recoup these payments.

Code Enforcement:

Our code enforcement program is up and running in Wilkins and Churchill. Craig said that he is very happy with the program and that Jason has been very proactive.

The COG will be getting a GIS system this summer. A summer intern will be setting up the program and begin mapping data for interested communities. If any of the communities have data (vacant land, catch basins, vacant housing) we will be happy to provide maps.

Moe announced that Penn Hills has been working on a new land lord registration ordinance that has been passed in Penn Hills. They are requiring an inspection whenever there is a change in tenant. The fee offsets the cost of inspection. Monroeville was thinking about passing a similar ordinance but needed to think about when inspections and fees would be required.

Annette talked about her experience at the Bayardstown Social Club, on the edge of town between Lawrenceville and the Strip District. This was a vacant piece of land that backed an industrial lot. The land was bought by a non-profit or co-op type organization. Members pay a minimal monthly fee. Members are then allowed to have parties on the vacant lot. This is just one example of how a vacant lot, where in the past would be a place for dumping and/or drug use, has been transformed into a community asset. We need to be thinking about new ways in which our communities can use vacancies to our advantage.

Other:

Swissvale is hiring a Public Works Director and Monroeville is hiring a Planning Director. If anyone has qualified candidates in mind please let Clyde or Tim know.