



**Turtle Creek Valley
Council of Governments (TCVCOG)**

The Past, Present & Future of Intergovernmental Cooperation

Profile 2014

Turtle Creek Valley Council of Governments

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Board of Directors

EXECUTIVE BOARD

TIMOTHY W. BRIDGE, CHAIRMAN
DENNIS J. SIMON, VICE-CHAIRMAN
WILLIAM H. PRICE, TREASURER
MAX E. SPENCER, SECRETARY

TCVCOG BOARD OF DIRECTORS

BRADDOCK BOROUGH

ROBERT PARKER
TINA DOOSE

CHALFANT BOROUGH

MARK SWINNEY
CHAD HOOVER

CHURCHILL BOROUGH

DIANA YANKES

EAST MCKEESPORT BOROUGH

PETER MCGINTY
JOHN EKIERT

EAST PITTSBURGH BOROUGH

DENNIS J. SIMON
JOHN CORBETT

EDGEWOOD BOROUGH

JACK WILSON
PATRICIA SCHAEFER

FOREST HILLS BOROUGH

BILL TOMASIC

MUNICIPALITY OF MONROEVILLE

TOM WILSON
STEVEN DUNCAN

NORTH BRADDOCK BOROUGH

TIMOTHY W. BRIDGE
CHRIS ROLAND

NORTH VERSAILLES TOWNSHIP

SAM JULIANO
RUSS SAULA

MUNICIPALITY OF PENN HILLS

DR. J-LAVON KINCAID, SR.
GARY N. UNDERWOOD

PITCAIRN BOROUGH

JOHN PRUCNAL
ORELIO VECCHIO

PLUM BOROUGH

DAVE VENTO
MIKE DELL

RANKIN BOROUGH

WILLIAM H. PRICE
BILL PFOFF

SWISSVALE BOROUGH

DARRELL RAPP
MICHELE STANTON

TURTLE CREEK BOROUGH

MAX SPENCER
NICK BIANCHI

WALL BOROUGH

STEVE ARNOLD
JOHN DUSAK

WILKINS TOWNSHIP

SYLVIA MARTINELLI
JOSEPH COSTA

WILKINSBURG BOROUGH

PAIGE TRICE
PAMELA MACKLIN

WILMERDING BOROUGH

STEPHEN SHURGOT
KAREN PETERSON

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Message from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

With direction from our Board, the Turtle Creek Valley COG has been assisting municipalities with various multi-municipal tasks for over 40 years. For example, we have represented your interests to the State and Allegheny County in numerous plans and studies. We have successfully administered millions of dollars in State and Federal grants. We have successfully competed to win grants on your behalf. We have filtered propositions on numerous presentations from the private sector. We have successfully implemented projects and on-going programs on your behalf. All of these things save municipal staff time and money, while still being accountable to elected officials. I hope that you will find the enclosed information informative and helpful. Although we never know what new opportunity is going to present itself from day to day, it provides a good summary of how we allocate our resources.

What else can we do to serve our members? The answer is... whatever our members want! Working together, we can provide any government service – from tax collection to billing services! We are here to meet the needs of our members and can adapt our organizational structure to do just that. The good news is that you already have a tried and true organization ready to meet any multi-municipal needs that arise.

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve as the Executive Director of this COG that represents twenty great communities. It is my privilege to work with our dedicated staff and with municipal staff. The Turtle Creek Valley COG is the past, present and – with your support - future of shared municipal services and intergovernmental cooperation. We hope that you recognize all the ways in which the Turtle Creek Valley COG continues to add value to your membership.

Respectfully yours,

Amanda Settelmaier

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The Turtle Creek Valley Council of Governments

The TVCOG is a non-profit organization that facilitates multi-municipal efforts and implements efficient, cost-effective programs on behalf of its members. The organization operates under a set of written by-laws and is governed by a Board of Directors.

Member municipalities join the COG through Council resolution. Each member pays annual dues of \$4,590 and is entitled to appoint two representatives to the Board of Directors – one voting and one alternate delegate.

The TCVCOG was founded in 1971 when eleven municipalities recognized a benefit to working cooperatively and sharing services. Currently, there are twenty municipalities in the TCVCOG with a total population of approximately 177,286. The members are:

| | |
|------------------|--------------|
| Braddock | Penn Hills |
| Chalfant | Pitcairn |
| Churchill | Plum |
| East McKeesport | Rankin |
| East Pittsburgh | Swissvale |
| Edgewood | Turtle Creek |
| Forest Hills | Wall |
| Monroeville | Wilkins |
| North Braddock | Wilkinsburg |
| North Versailles | Wilmerding |

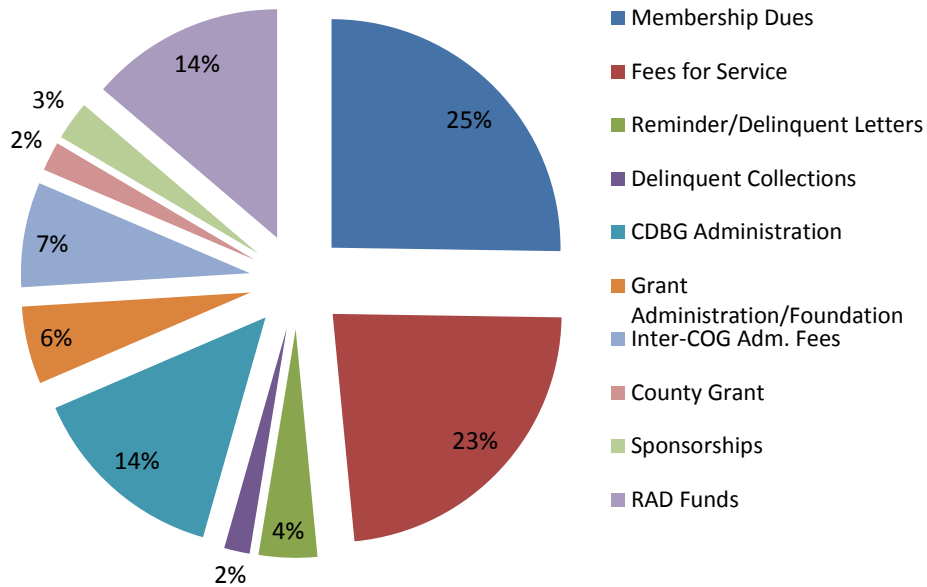
An administrative staff hired by the organization carries out the day-to-day activities and programs of the COG. Currently, this staff consists of an Executive Director, Grants Coordinator, a Computer/Fiscal Services Manager, Special

Projects Coordinator, an Office Manager, a Delinquent Collector, a Vector Operator, and three Public Works employees.

The COG derives its operating funds from various sources including annual membership dues, fees for contracted services, an administrative fee from Allegheny County Department of Economic Development to administer CDBG grants, and through RAD. The COG does not have a dedicated source of funding.

What else can we do to serve our members? The answer is... whatever our members want! We can provide any government service – from tax collection to billing services! We are here to meet the needs of our members and can adapt our organizational structure to do just that. The good news is that you already have a tried and true organization ready to meet any multi-municipal needs that arise.

2014 Budgeted Revenue



| 2010 Census Data | 2010 Population | Median Age | Percent White | Percent Individuals Below Poverty | Percent Vacant Houses | Percent Owner Occupied Houses |
|------------------|-----------------|-------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Braddock | 2,159 | 34.9 | 22.9 | 34.2 | 24.2 | 44.1 |
| Chalfant | 800 | 43.9 | 85.9 | 5.2 | 10.2 | 68.8 |
| Churchill | 3,011 | 52.7 | 81.9 | 4.1 | 5.2 | 96.1 |
| East McKeesport | 2,126 | 43 | 89.1 | 12.1 | 12.8 | 61.6 |
| East Pittsburgh | 1,822 | 35.6 | 48.8 | 32.6 | 20.6 | 38.4 |
| Edgewood | 3,118 | 40.8 | 85.1 | 9.3 | 5.4 | 65.4 |
| Forest Hills | 6,518 | 47.5 | 87.7 | 6.6 | 6.2 | 78 |
| Monroeville | 28,386 | 45.9 | 79.5 | 6.6 | 6.6 | 67.4 |
| North Braddock | 4,857 | 41.7 | 51.2 | 23.6 | 21.7 | 51.5 |
| North Versailles | 10,229 | 44.8 | 82.9 | 9.8 | 8.3 | 68 |
| Penn Hills | 42,329 | 45.3 | 61.4 | 10.5 | 7.6 | 76.7 |
| Pitcairn | 3,294 | 40.4 | 86.4 | 9.7 | 16.7 | 44.3 |
| Plum | 27,126 | 42.6 | 93.9 | 4 | 5.3 | 79 |
| Rankin | 2,122 | 30.9 | 18 | 40.2 | 4.4 | 34.3 |
| Swissvale | 8,983 | 39 | 59.1 | 18.9 | 12.5 | 50.1 |
| Turtle Creek | 5,349 | 41.2 | 78.4 | 18.7 | 13.4 | 41.3 |
| Wall | 580 | 40.9 | 89.8 | 21.9 | 22.5 | 59.8 |
| Wilkins | 6,357 | 48 | 83.7 | 8.3 | 6.9 | 66.2 |
| Wilkinsburg | 15,930 | 41.2 | 28.3 | 22.8 | 18.9 | 37.7 |
| Wilmerding | 2,190 | 36.9 | 75.2 | 31.3 | 14.4 | 33.6 |
| TCVCOG | 177,286 | 41.9 | 69.5 | 16.5 | 12.2 | 58.1 |

4 Summary of Services

TRI-COG COLLABORATIVE

Turtle Creek Valley COG, Steel Valley COG and Twin Rivers COG collaborate on special projects that require a larger regional approach.

SPECIAL PROJECT: LAND BANKING

Vacant and abandoned properties are a challenging problem for any community.

One notable strategy being used nationwide to contest property abandonment is land banking. Land banks are public authorities created to acquire, hold, manage and develop vacant properties. Land banks aim to convert vacant properties that have been neglected by the open market into productive use, thereby transforming neighborhood liabilities into assets. A land bank:

- * Acquires title to vacant and abandoned properties;
- * Eliminates barriers to redevelopment; and
- * Transfers property to a new owner in a way that supports community needs and priorities

As such, land banks often provide marketable title to properties previously impossible to develop.

The Tri-COG Collaborative has been working to understand if land banking can be an important addition to smart growth strategies for community development in our collective region. By helping communities manage vacant properties and put them back into productive use, land banks help achieve a range of smart growth goals – facilitating infill

development, spurring economic investment, and preserving open space. (Smart Growth America)

In October we released our Cost of Blight study where we identified many of the ways blighted and abandoned properties cost us money. Millions of dollars are being lost. The Executive Summary and Full Report can be found on our website at www.tcvcoc.com.

The Tri-COG Collaborative is currently putting together a Business Plan for a Land Bank with a target completion date of June 2014. A Land Bank would be a powerful tool each of our members could use to achieve development goals and combat blight.

SPECIAL PROJECT: CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Too many times good programs have been dismantled because of an inability to effectively resolve conflict. These previous, unresolved conflicts frequently become obstacles to future efforts, whether working together on a COG project, or outside the COG when considering other joint possibilities. The Local Government Academy recognized that sustainable inter-municipal partnerships need a formal process for resolving conflict and developed the Intergovernmental Consensus & Conflict Resolution Program. Knowing that COGs are not immune to the dangers of unresolved conflicts, the Tri-COG Initiative moved forward, with LGA's assistance, to develop a framework for resolving conflicts. Within this framework, the Tri-COG has embraced the following principles:

- * The most effective way to resolve conflicts is to allow for interventions at the earliest opportunity possible
- * The process that is created must be built around the unique characteristics inherent to municipal governance
- * A clear structure for working through conflict enhances the opportunity for people in conflict to reach mutually created resolutions
- * A unified commitment and adherence to the created structure is essential
- * Ending a COG relationship because of an unresolved conflict, whether over membership or project dissatisfaction, should be the choice of last resort
- * Building a stronger COG helps municipalities achieve beneficial and lasting relationships with each other, furthering opportunities for lasting intergovernmental cooperation

Therefore, the Executive Directors of all three COGs worked together over several months to develop proposed amendments to their individual by-laws and a mutually acceptable structure as a conflict resolution process.

FISCAL SERVICES

We currently provide sewage/refuse billing services, and accounts payable services.

Sewage/Refuse Billing: At low to no cost to the borough, we manage municipal account data, manage individual municipal bank accounts, field constituent phone calls, and provide detailed collection reports. We also provide a delivery service which further demonstrates our commitment to providing excellent service.

In 2013 we provided accounts payable, and utility billing services to nine municipal clients and two apartment complexes. We processed **\$3,492,217** through our utility billing program alone. Our utility billing rate is typically passed along to the household, therefore costing the borough virtually nothing. A check with detailed reports is supplied to the municipality monthly or upon request.

Homestead Borough reported that we increased their collections by \$27,000 in the first nine months of collections due to our data correction efforts. Our utility billing program supports the COG and provides the municipality with an efficiently managed shared service. ***Please consider allowing us to manage your utility billings - especially if you're currently using a third party!***

Accounts Payable: We enter data into our computer system, produce checks, and provide detailed monthly and end of year reports.

DELINQUENT SEWAGE COLLECTION

In 2013 much time and effort was applied to getting our delinquent collection procedures in place. Our computer software was modified to allow us to efficiently collect while staying in compliance with the law. We are on schedule to begin our first collection in March for Homestead Borough, then in June for East McKeesport Borough. We look forward to assisting these towns in recovering money that is owed to them.

MANAGERS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The TCVCOG convenes monthly meetings with municipal managers and secretaries to discuss issues and solutions to common problems. Tools and information that can assist this group are presented when appropriate. This forum is used to explore new ways in which towns can work together. The Uniform Construction Code (UCC) Board of Appeals is a success of this committee. The Managers' Advisory Committee is currently assisting the COG with creating an in-house Code Enforcement program.

UNIFORM CONSTRUCTION CODE (UCC) BOARD OF APPEALS

This is a COG-wide Board that responds to appeals from our participating towns. A regional approach has enabled the creation of a full board that is ready to comply with the law.

POLICE CHIEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The TCVCOG convenes monthly meetings with municipal police chiefs to discuss solutions to common problems. The group explores new ways in which to work cooperatively, such as joint police testing and training. The group has also had success in lobbying Allegheny County for increased communications with County 911 dispatch.

JOINT POLICE TESTING

Three towns participated in the first joint police test in July 2011. This process saved each town approximately \$500 in advertising alone. They also received more applications than they would have had they tested alone. We will be conducting our third round of testing in Spring, 2014.

JOINT PUBLIC WORKS

For over twenty years, the TCVCOG has operated a Joint Public Works department that provides basic service for the boroughs of Braddock and Rankin.

VECTOR

The Vector is an expensive piece of equipment that municipalities use to comply with federal mandates for sewer maintenance, and to keep their sewer system working properly. We are about to embark on our third year of an opt-in program for the Vector. Towns that choose to opt-in to our Vector program receive 15 days of service at a rate of \$962/day while we work to pay off our truck loan. Although this daily rate is more than in the past, it is still less expensive when compared to the private sector. Creating an opt-in program has allowed us to provide quality service while covering our operating budget.

MULTI-MUNICIPAL GRANT ADMINISTRATION

The TCVCOG applies for grant funds for multi-municipal projects. Although many funding sources have disappeared, we did find success most recently with our EPA Brownfield Grant application. This project was applied for on behalf of the tri-COG Collaborative and was funded in the amount of \$600,000.

MUNICIPAL REPRESENTATION AT SEMINARS

TCVCOG staff attend seminars and workshops regarding topics important to our members whenever possible. Since many of our towns do not have the staff to send to these important functions, we attend to ensure the Eastern suburbs have a voice at the table.

SALT BRINE ROAD TREATMENT PROGRAM

By partnering with the Municipality of Monroeville, we are able to provide our members with salt brine at a cost of \$.25/gallon. When used correctly, salt brine cuts the use of rocks salt by at least 30%.

CERTIFIED RODENT ABATEMENT

We offer this service to TCVCOG member towns at a rate of \$50/hour (two hour minimum) plus \$10 mobilization. Non-member towns pay \$75/hour (2 hour minimum) plus \$25 mobilization.

INTERCOG PURCHASING ALLIANCE

The InterCOG Purchasing Alliance pools purchasing power from participating COG communities to achieve savings in commodities such as rock salt. Furthermore, contracts through the Alliance afford members with protections not found in other group bidding efforts.

INSTITUTE OF POLITICS (IOP) COMMITTEE

The TCVCOG participates on the IOP Committee that is investigating ways to restructure ALCOSAN's Board in order to make it more representative of the majority of rate payers. This is an excellent example of how the COG adds value to your membership. This committee was selected by the Allegheny County Chief Executive and the Mayor of Pittsburgh, and it will be responsible for making recommendations to them.

EDUCATION & DISBURSEMENT OF INFORMATION

Information garnered from a variety of sources (ie. workshops, meetings, webinars, etc.) is presented to members via the advisory committees, the monthly Director's report, our website and our electronic newsletter, The COG Advantage.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANTS (CDBG)

The TCVCOG manages the CDBG program on behalf of its members. Our service begins at the initial application phase, to advertising and bidding, to awarding contracts, to the final drawdown of funds and audit compliance. In 2013 we administered \$1.3 million in grants filtered through Allegheny County. Our towns benefit by not having in-house staff responsible for overseeing the complexities of complying with Federal and County regulations.

BLIGHT BUSTERS

As part of the Tri-COG Collaborative's initiative on blight, the Blight Busters group meets monthly on a myriad of topics related to blight and abandoned property. This meeting is open to anyone interested in this topic and we strongly encourage your town to have representation.

NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

What monetary value can be placed on being able to pick up the phone and ask your colleague for assistance? Developing interpersonal relationships is an important element to Intergovernmental Cooperation and good Government. Therefore, TCVCOG hosts two annual events to bring our members together.

- * Our Annual Dinner brings our members together under one roof for an evening of good food and good fellowship.

- * The TCVCOG also hosts a hospitality room at the Allegheny League of Municipalities Conference each spring. This is a unique opportunity for our members to interact in a fun, relaxed environment. We have seen first hand numerous positive outcomes directly as a result from this opportunity. Indirect outcomes are difficult to know, but we suspect there are many.

COMMUNITY INVESTMENT & TOURISM FUND (CITF) GRANT ADMINISTRATION

The TCVCOG will administer these funds at the request of our member municipalities. We provide the same full service grant administration as we do with CDBG, however the administrative fee is paid by the municipality/authority.

ANNUAL REAL ESTATE TAX BILLING

For the first time this year we will be printing real estate tax bills for East McKeesport Borough and North Versailles Township. This is a result of Allegheny County's Treasurer's office no longer wanting to provide this service. We look forward to filling in this gap in a cost effective way for our members.

THE TCVCOG WORKS FOR YOU

The Turtle Creek Valley COG takes pride in providing exceptional service. We look forward to working together with you and your staff to cost effectively meet your needs now, and into the future.

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Contact Us

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