

Turtle Creek Valley COG Director's Report

TCVCOG Board Meeting
November 2024

Upcoming Meetings

November 7: Manager's Meeting, 2:00pm
November 13: County Executive Meeting, 10am – Braddock Civic Square

December 4: Police Chief Mtg – Allegheny County DA – 2:30pm
December 12: TCVCOG Board Holiday Meeting, Location TBD

TCVCOG Office Move(?)

The new manager of Monroeville, Alex Graziani, has indicated that he may have plans for our existing office space. As such, I've been working to identify alternative locations for us to move.

Planning & Economic Development

An Lewis has secured philanthropic funding to investigate the feasibility of a new planning and economic development arm that sits between our two COGs. This effort will begin in the new year.

Appeals Boards

In May I indicated we need to fill positions on both our UCC Appeals Board and our Property Maintenance Board. Serving on one of these boards is a great way to give back if there's not a lot of time to spare. The boards meet infrequently. Thank you for your assistance in getting these important positions filled with reliable board members.

The UCC Appeals Board met on Monday October 14th to hear a case filed by Life STEAM Male Academy in Wilkins Township. They requested a variance pertaining to the requirement for the width of hallways. The Board granted the variance contingent upon posting a placard in a highly visible area indicating the occupancy max is 99 people. Testimony was heard from both the applicant and the Township.

Rail Bridge Safety and Transparency Act

Summary of Legislations: The Rail Bridge Safety and Transparency Act would address the urgent need for greater transparency and accountability for the safety of our nation's rail bridges by establishing higher safety standards for rail bridges, improving the quality of inspections, and increasing public transparency regarding the safety of these structures. Specifically, the bill

- Establishes minimum structural and safety standards for railroad bridges and requires railroad companies to inspect their bridges in-line with these standards and report their findings to DOT.
- Requires randomized audits of rail bridge conditions and authorizes DOT to seek corrective actions if a pattern of discrepancies is found between the findings of the audit and those in a rail carrier's inspection report, holding companies accountable for dangerous lapses in safety.
- Directs the Department of Transportation to keep an in-house database of rail bridge inspection reports to ensure the agency has prompt access to vital safety data during emergencies.
- Establishes a public database where residents can readily obtain information regarding the conditions of rail bridges in their communities

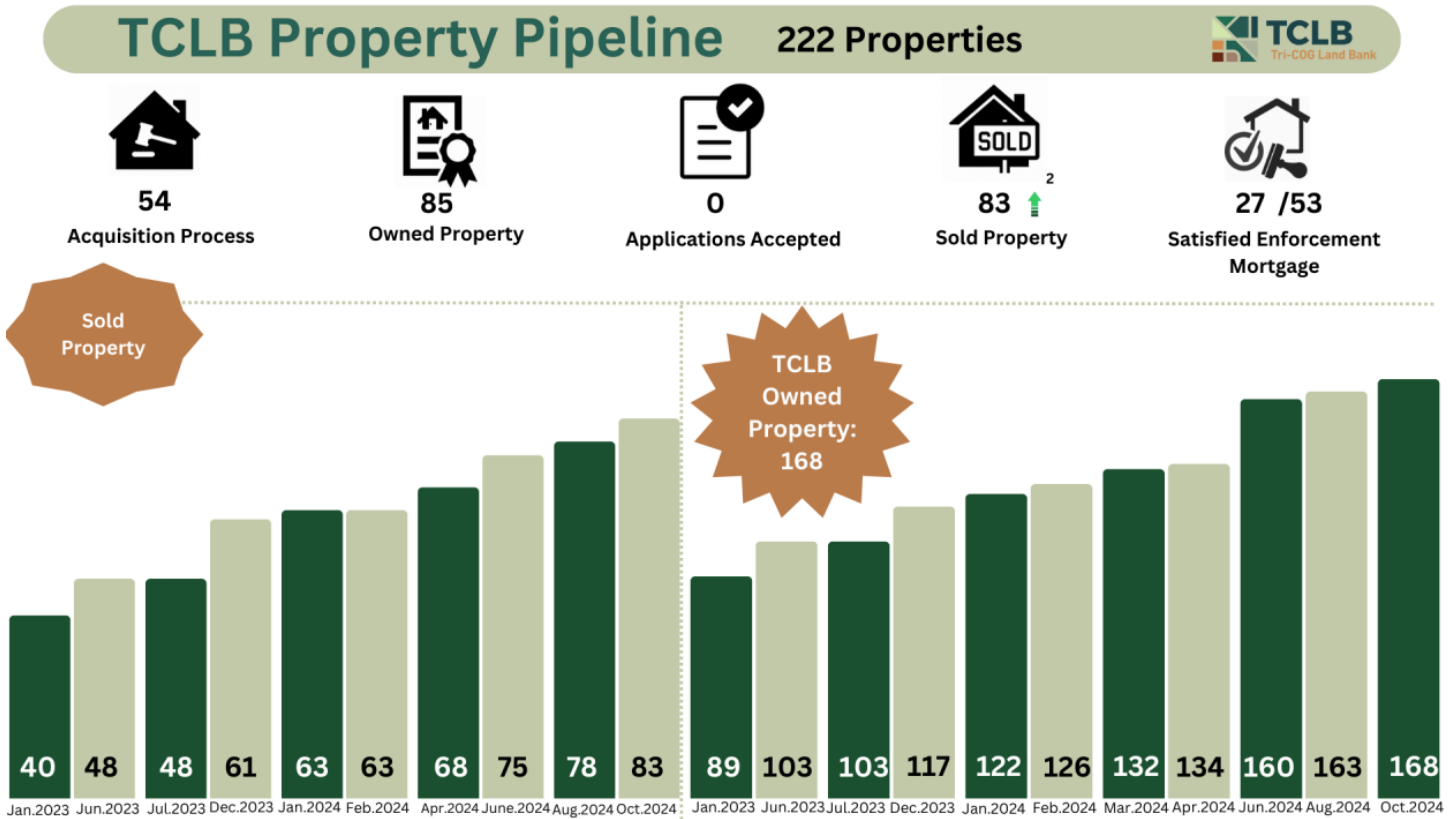
Congresswoman Lee hosted a press event in Turtle Creek Borough on Friday, October 18th to get the word out on this legislative initiative.

Code Enforcement/CodeNforce

We’ve received an executed agreement from Etna Borough to join codeNforce. We are working to onboard them.

Tri-COG Land Bank

There are now 222 properties in the Tri-COG Land Bank pipeline! Braddock Borough has decided to join.



PA Tax Exempt Appeal

No update yet.

Our liquor store purchase for ALOM sparked an inquiry of our tax status by a State Auditor. The auditor told me that we have to apply for tax exempt status with the PA Dept. of Revenue, which I did. The Dept. of Revenue declined our request, so Dayne Dice and I appeared at a virtual hearing with the Dept. of Revenue to appeal their decision. Essentially, we argued that COGs are quasi-governmental and therefore tax exempt and I presented a power point that described our work. We’re hoping that the original decision was based upon lack of knowledge of COGs. A decision should be rendered on or before January 2025.

Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) partnership

The main goal of the grant, titled Environmental Justice Government to Government (EJG2G), is to improve climate change resilience and engage in climate change preparedness within local environmental justice (EJ) communities. This grant seeks to achieve this goal through collaboration with municipal communities, local government, councils of government (COG), ACHD, and climate-environment focused organizations and partners. We’ve received resolutions from: Braddock, North Braddock, Swissvale, and Wilmerding.

Retirement Savings Plan

It has come to my attention that TCVCOG would be eligible for state reimbursement if we change our 403(b) plan to a 401(a) plan. Equitable, our current broker, does not offer 401(a) plans, so we would need to switch. As such, I've been working with Sue Trout from Mockenhaupt. Sue has put me in touch with NPPFA Benefits out of Chicago. Since TCVCOG opted out of social security in the 1980's, we should consider upping our Retirement Savings Plan contribution to 12.65% (7.65% + 5%). Doing so will help us attract and retain employees.

Accounts Payable

We will be investigating options to move to fund accounting software with an anticipated switch in January 2026.

Utility Billing

Please reach out if we can help with your refuse, stormwater or sewage billing.

Payroll

Upon the recommendation of Kristen Gusten, our shared finance professional with SRCOG and TCLB, we will move our payroll to Gusto. Costs are about the same, and Kristen will process payroll for us.

Code Enforcement

The code collaborative reviewed the 2025 budget. I'm happy to report that this program is self sustainable, and we are now able to offset municipal annual expenses due to the inspection revenue that the program is generating.

codeNforce Update

Etna has returned a signed contract we are hoping to have a contract back from Sharpsburg soon and will start onboarding and training hopefully before the end of the year.

We have completed all the tasks outlined in our Hillman Grant and are now starting work through the LSA grant. One of the major LSA tasks will be implementing a rental registry in the system. We are continuously working on app support and back end management. We also designed a way to include landbank assessments through CNF as well.

Other

New cubicles and shelving installed, it looks great and will be useful for our growing staff.

On 10/9 Amanda met with the Allegheny County conservation district. They have a grant to work in Justice 40 communities, and can do everything from tree inventory, to planning, to planting, to maintenance.

On 10/22 Amanda attended the All in Allegheny press conference where County Executive Innamorato discussed what's been accomplished in her first year and how the priorities identified in the plan can be tracked at <https://Allin.AlleghenyCounty.us>

10/23 Amanda attended Chuck Starrett's retirement party at Mary's Vine.

10/24 Amanda met virtually with Senator Costa to update him on the progress of CodeNforce, to discuss the proposed regional planning and economic development arm of TCVCOG and SRCOG, and to discuss COGs as eligible applicants on State grants.

PACOG

I've been heavily involved with the reformation of PACOG – the state Association of COGs. DCED funded LGA to provide technical assistance in getting this new organization up and running. Most recently, we've completed branding exercises and have chosen these marks to identify the organization:



Earned Income Tax

Year to date EIT collections are up by 1.3%.

Manager's Meetings

Oct 3: Managers Meetings: Greg Bachy, Swissvale; Rebecca Vargo & Tim Saunders Wilkins Twp; Scott Andrejchak, Penn Hills; Churchill ; Stephanie Schwoegl, Chalfant; Brian Bianchi & Amber Klein, WPJWA , Amanda Settelmaier, Natalie Merola. Virtual attendance: Lou Ransom, Braddock; Nathan Bish, North Braddock

New Business: WPJWA discussed their new system and listened to concerns. Every manager had an opportunity to voice their town's concerns. A common thread seemed to be inconsistency regarding fund turnover and lack of communication. WPJWA offered to investigate concerns and provide responses, and to participate in manager meetings moving forward.

Respectfully submitted,
Amanda Settelmaier