

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission
Regional Policy Advisory Committee
August 28, 2023
Westmoreland County Community College, Board Room (Room 145) – 2:00 p.m.

Members present were: Darin Alviano, Mike Belding, Doug Chew, Mark Critz, Pat Fabian, Aadil Ginwala, Brandon Leach, Ann Ogoreuc, Johnna Pro, Mark Rafail, and Vince Vicites

Others: Christopher Briem and Aurora Sharrard, University of Pittsburgh; Dan Distler, Beaver County Office of Planning and Redevelopment; and Jason Theakston, Washington County Planning Commission

Staff: Mary Brangan, Kirk Brethauer, Ronda Craig, Dominic D’Andrea, Linda Duffy, Margaret Fonner, Chuck Imbrogno, Jenn Lasser, Caitlin O’Connor, DJ Ryan, Mason Secreti, Ailisa Sobien, Catherine Tulley, Vincent Valdez, Sara Walfoort and Andy Waple.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Commissioner Pat Fabian welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

2. Action on Minutes of the June 26, 2023 Meeting

Ann Ogoreuc moved to approve the minutes of the June 26, 2023 meeting and Mark Rafail seconded. The motion carried.

3. Update on the Port of Pittsburgh – DJ Ryan, Director of Strategic Initiatives and Policy

DJ Ryan explained that four months ago the Allegheny River was in danger of losing their hours of operation on some of the locks there, which could result in what they call a death spiral and eventually make it pretty impossible to traverse up and down the river. Sara, our freight manager, and I have been having meetings to discuss the impact of this with various groups of people from County representatives, Fish & Boat Commission, recreational boaters, commercial operators and others. The end result of these discussions essentially was that the Army Corps. of Engineers, who is the operator and maintainer of our lock and dam system, is a military entity and cannot themselves ask the federal government for assistance on these kinds of things. So, they needed some people to take it over who could lead more of the action portion of the effort. SPC and the Port of Pittsburgh Commission are now leading this effort. Ultimately, this is going to result in us convening meetings where we're going to discuss this in greater detail and work with the federal elected officials to determine what the best possible course of action is. We are holding our first meeting next week on the sixth with a group of about fifty different individuals who are representing every possible group you could imagine that's a stakeholder in the river. We hope to have a good constructive discussion there if anybody on this committee would like to attend the meeting. Please let me know if you'd like an update on the meeting. I'll certainly provide those to this committee or

to you directly, but we're excited to be a part of leading this effort. It's vital that we do something here. We're grateful to the committee and to our SPC leadership for the support that they've given in this space.

Questions:

DJ was asked if the meeting was going to be online also. DJ said it's in-person meeting only. These meetings have traditionally been that way to facilitate a more robust discussion and the group felt that it was better to continue the in-person only. But happy to keep everybody updated or if there's things you want me to bring back, I'm happy to do that, too. It's September 6 at two o'clock at SPC offices. We are asking everyone to RSVP just so we can get a headcount. Make sure we have enough space and chairs and everything. If anyone's interested, please reach out to me and I can coordinate with you to get you on the list. The invites were sent out this morning.

Commissioner Fabian – Since you brought up the Army Corps of Engineers, I brought a newspaper article today, and Vince and I talked about a month ago, I'm not sure what SPC's role would be in this situation, but since you're bridging that collaboration or that relationship with the Army Corps of Engineers and Armstrong County, we have a facility that was used early 60, 70 that has shallow uranium in there. The Army Corps of Engineers is embarking on a \$500M cleanup. My concern is from a public safety standpoint when they're going to be mediating this material and transporting it out of Armstrong County through several of our southwest counties. Does the ACE have a role in that or do they take a lead in that? But the concern is from public safety standpoint or even an emergency management standpoint is if something happens whether it's being rolled out or whether a truck overturns, what is the response for that? The ACE have been quiet on this. There is a public meeting next month, but I just wanted to make my colleagues and other counties in the southwest are aware of this. This material is going to be moving through southwest Pennsylvania. I know in Armstrong County, we want to be prepared if something catastrophic does happen. I'm sure my neighbors would want to be prepared if something catastrophic happens. I just wanted to bring it to SPC's attention whether this was an appropriate time or in the meeting this afternoon, but I just wanted to make everybody aware of it. I'll be attending that meeting. But I think my county and neighboring counties and public safety directors and emergency personnel want some assurance or at least some kind of game plan if X happens. How are we responding to that?

Vince Valdes – Thank you very much for raising it to our attention. In fact, we had a conversation and I brought it up with staff again and we're aware of the situation. I didn't realize the Army Corps. was going to have a meeting very soon, but I think we definitely need to be at least participating in the meeting to be aware of what the circumstances are going to be especially since there aren't any real details that are coming out of it.

Andy Waple – I guess it just depends on where it's going through more populated areas. Maybe there's a public meeting. It's worth collecting information finding out particularly where the state falls and Pittsburgh comes in on this as well, and maybe to have some options, but we can certainly find out. I think it's definitely something that needs to be raised to that level because you're right, we don't want another disaster. That meeting date is September 20th at 7 p.m. at Parks Township Volunteer Fire Department. I'll be independent so I can pass along information or if anybody from SPC wants to participate, that'd be welcome.

Commissioner Fabian asked is it just the Army Corps. and FEMA involved? Are there any other federal agencies that are involved? I know the community in that area, especially the volunteer fire department. Local municipalities have already talked to Senator Fetterman and Senator Casey's Office. So, we're in discussions about that. Their concern is more physical or financial in a sense that if something catastrophic does happen, we're not sure we have the gear and the materials to resolve the situation. That was kind of their conversation. Where's the funding at to assist us with getting it? But we're only talking in that area. We're only talking about a six-mile stretch. My concern was beyond that. What happens when we get outside of Armstrong County? It's a regional issue and that's why I thought it was worthy to bring it up today. I know when we were having our discussions with DJ he mentioned reaching out to Casey as well. I imagine this conversation has been going on since 2015 about cleanup, where they're going to get the financial resources to remediate. So now they're at the point where they're doing some of that prep work here. The remainder of this year and next year they're going to look at removing it

off site. So, I'm sure more plans or more details to come. Maybe they already have a plan and how they're going to incorporate this if they move it out of the area through the state and so they will have partners.

4. Water Resource Center and Environmental Planning and Programming – Cathy Tulley, Manager of Environmental Programs and Mason Secreti, Water Resource Specialist

Cathy Tulley:

Cathy Tulley introduced the new water resource staff person, Mason Secreti. He came from Civil and Environmental Consultants as their Environmental Field Technician and has his graduate degree from Washington & Jefferson University with a Bachelors in Environmental Studies.

Mason Secreti:

The history of the SPC's Water Resource Center dates back to 1999 when we held a conference on sewage related problems. In 2002, 3 Rivers Wet Weather issues regionalization report. In 2005, Heinz School of Public Policy and Management at Carnegie Mellon University provided a 2-year Endowment-funded grant to support the generation of political will for integrated water resource management. In 2007, there was a Task Force recommendation creating a way for local governments to organize and advocate for water resource issues in their communities. In 2008, SPC's Annual Policy Conference focuses on recommendation of the Task Force; it was then presented to the Regional Policy Committee for their recommendation and SPC's Board approves the resolution. In 2013, SPC created the dues-funded Water Resource Center.

SPC's Water Resource Center staff includes Catherine Tulley, GISP – new Environmental Programs Manager (9 years @ SPC) (March 2023) and Mason Secreti – new Water Resource Specialist (August 2023).

Mason spent three years as an environmental scientist in the field conducting samplings of all kinds at steel mills, oil and gas sites, chemical manufacturing, etc. He got his HAZWOPER certification, (hazardous waste operations). He dealt with PCBs at various sites, which is a genetic material that comes from a by-product from various industries, but he dealt mostly with steel. Both staff are trained & certified as municipal NPDES Stormwater Permit Inspectors by EOY '23. Other certifications for Association of State Floodplain Managers (ASFPM) will be added as appropriate.

Stormwater: Initial Focus – Here to Stay

The issue of stormwater management affects a variety of infrastructure. We deal with flooding to sewage management to road maintenance to the culverts on those roads and their capacities and erosions and segmentation. We have plenty of big hills here with important infrastructure on it, touching from commercial, residential, industrial, and recreational. Stormwater affects everything here in the area.

Act 167 SWMPs Status in PA: 4/13/23

About half of our region have approved Act 167 stormwater management plans and half don't. There were two approved within the last 5 years. We're glad to work with areas that don't have a plan and we want to be a resource utilized by them. SPC is currently providing in-kind match via technical assistance to Indiana County for their Phase II SWMP.

Regional Cooperation & Coordination

There have been a number of forums, conferences and meetings on water management. The commission holds meetings. There's been planning director meetings and we want to facilitate a long-range plan with storm water management and kind of parallel to our transportation. We want to be a great resource when it comes to stormwater management and parallel with transportation.

There are plenty of stakeholders involved: The Department of Environmental Protections, USACE, DEP, DCNR, PennVEST, municipal authorities, NGOs, etc.

Technical Assistance / Regional Clearinghouse

We want to be utilized as a resource to provide the most up to date regulation information and anything pertaining to storm water management in the area. We want to be utilized and make sure that the counties that need help get the help that they need. To do that we have a number of things in place to provide technical assistance to our counties. We have our Water Resources Center website and our newsletter. We have Best Management Practices Guides. We monitor existing SWMPs and associated ordinances. We want to help counties with funding opportunities and we want to disseminate regulatory info keeping counties and citizens, everyone involved with what the newest regulation information is in terms of storm water management.

Education

We want to be also an educational resource. We want to reach out to the area and bring everyone involved. This affects everyone. We collaborate with other nonprofits in the region. We identify and try to identify possible new partners in the region. And we collaborate with ongoing educational efforts in our region to identify new stormwater management issues, or historical issues that have been unresolved. We want to get those resolved and also possibly foresee issues coming in the future. There's plenty of new development and storm water is the cornerstone of a lot of that development.

We attend seminars, workshops, webinars conferences. We're everywhere. We try to have a long reach to get a bigger picture and understand everyone's different issues.

Future Focus

We want to refresh our newsletter. We want to refresh the website and keep going with our webinar series. We're working with environmental education grants so we want to work with people who are interested in that and want to have access to that. We have a lot of exciting new mapping updates and field work. We want to keep our information as up to date as possible. We want to explore future water resource management opportunities in the region to stay abreast of what's happening and to be a couple steps ahead of what's going to happen.

Cathy Tulley:

The Center for Climate Integrity recently released a report called "Pennsylvania's Looming Climate Cost Crisis." By 2040, Pittsburgh is expected or projected to phase \$520M adaptation costs for storm water management. This is \$31M in annual climate adaptation. That number is more than the budgets of 23 of the city's 27 departments, including operations and facilities. Nearly 2/3 of those expenses, \$22M a year, for storm drainage alone with another \$5M expected to be needed for controlling landslides. Of the top 10 municipalities identified in the state to have these high climate impact costs, 5 of the 10 are in the SPC region.

In terms of environmental planning, we've been focusing heavily on renewing strategic partnerships, making connections with planning partners. I have been invited to join the Ohio Region Regional Advisory Board for the state water plan through my letter and application for that to the governor's office.

We recently got the EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Grant of which DJ and I are the project managers. SPC staff have been participating in climate reduction programs, working groups and DJ and I are beginning to look into some potential primarily with planning and meetings with the Army Corps of Engineers, Port of Pittsburgh Commission, and other folks.

We've been making some partnerships with education and outreach with folks such as the Audubon Society of Western PA, the USDA Rural Development, POWR/Stroud Water Resource Center, and folks like that. Mason and I just participated in training through the State Conservation Commission for the Dirt Gravel & Low-Volume Roads Program, which is a water quality improvement program disguised as a road maintenance program. We got certified in that and we've also been attending the Southwest PA Decarbonization Forum and a variety of public events.

In terms of technical assistance, we've provided a few Single Point of Contact (SPOC) or Inner Governmental Review letters, answering a lot of questions about different types of funding assistance. I was an invited speaker at a Greene County water infrastructure workshop. And we're going to be holding

that again in Indiana, Cambria and Somerset Counties coming up in November that's in coordination with the Southwest PA Water Network. We discovered that SPC can offer free technical assistance to our municipalities from partnering with the County Conservation Districts and the DGLVR program. So, we'll be doing traffic counts for anyone that needs it for that program. We're providing in-kind match in terms of data services to Indiana County for Act 167 Phase II Plan. They are working on a planning assistance state grant with the Army Corps of Engineers for their modeling. We've had some initial discussions on hazard mitigation plans with PEMA and with the State GeoBoard folks. We're in some early discussions since those plans are going to be due within the next 5 years. What can we do at the state level now to maybe think about a base map for housing mitigation planning by the next 5 year cycle? We're also providing some technical assistance to a few of our northern boroughs on electric vehicles. So, thanks to that outreach, we've been invited to speak on EVs at a future Allegheny InterCOG Council meeting.

Other things that we've been working on include completing my stormwater permanent inspector training with the auto and low impact development, green infrastructure module. That's good for 5 years. And Mason will be completing the same certification in October. We just completed the ESM Certification through Dirt, Gravel & Low-Volume Roads Program. That's also good for 5 years. I've completed the National Flood Insurance Program agent training. I'm taking over Andy's position on the board of the Pittsburgh Region Clean Cities. I'm continuing to serve on the AASHTO data work group where there's some good cross pollination with environmental justice and justice 40 data. And I'm continuing to help a little bit on the side with SPC broadband planning and programming. And we're going to be attending some upcoming conferences. There's the Water Infrastructure Finance Act / State Revolving Funds training coming up and I'll be attending the Pennsylvania Municipal Authority Association Conference. Mason will attend environmental education related conferences on water and rivers and then Penn State is doing a dive deeper summit on environmental education.

In terms of establishing priority projects for environmental planning, what do you want us to do? Since we're talking water resources, water and sewer infrastructure are key areas of focus. Some of the ideal potential projects to go after in the coming months are to resume the existing regional sewer inventory that had been started in 2021. And then as a part of that do a follow up regional gap or needs assessment in terms of where are our regional water and sewer authority in terms of digital data, digital assets, mapping staffing, technical abilities, things like that.

We're in the early stages of some discussions with 3 Rivers Wet Weather and civic mapper to see about building out their water and sewer data model to the region and having this level of detail in a system will allow some fairly advanced hydrologic modeling for the whole region. Providing some data mapping assistance to small water and sewer authorities like at the Greene County meeting. An authority staff member came up to us and just asked for help. We got them connected with her appropriate county staff.

But those are the level of needs that we're seeing out there, because not everyone is on equal footing. And that's somewhere where we have the technical expertise that we can provide that kind of assistance.

For county planning staff just continue cross collaboration is needed, especially on the big plans that are still due working with our COGs and municipalities on in-person and virtual trainings particularly around evening for the most part right now.

Stakeholders, we've been kind of batting around to establish a water monitoring technical assistance/gear program similar to the SPC Active Transportation Bike Counting Program. An effective way we're looking at doing that as a fun project. It's like a Google, 360 Street View before our rivers. We can go out on a boat with a 360-degree camera and map the length of our rivers. It's a great product for environmental outreach and education for asset, mapping, things like that.

And then lastly, just improving our environment on data impacts and continuing to cross collaborate with other departments here at SPC.

So, what I'm asking for from you all is please let us know how we can continue to be a strategic partner for environmental planning in terms of having ongoing discussions about these issues in our region. Let us know what you would prefer in terms of meeting frequency in a format or do you want to have a special dedicated forum like once a month or quarterly or bi-annual. Let us know what would be ideal in terms of moving this conversation forward.

Questions:

Mark Rafail -We ran into a situation where the EPA approved an inspection. Thank goodness for the pressure that our county commissioners and the municipalities put on these folks. They actually pulled their permit. Where do you sit? Are you looking into these things because it ultimately at the end of the day, it was going to affect the water shed?

Cathy Tulley – I read the EPA permit email every day like the NPD. I'm seeing what permits are being approved or denied things like that. I think that's something internally we need to get a better handle on. If that's something you feel the commissioners need to speak as one voice for this situation, we can have that discussion.

Mark Rafial - I turn to you Commissioner Fabian because of the fact and you just mentioned it earlier, this is toxic materials being brought in from other states. It's not even Pennsylvania waste. In fact, it was coming from Oklahoma. So, the question I have is the same as you had about your situation. What happens when one of those trucks is in an accident? Where is this water coming from? I mean, we talked to EQT and they said they don't even do this and they're the biggest gas in oil company in Fayette County

right now, and they don't believe in it. My question, are we as SPC going to look into and take a formal stance, maybe, to try to help these municipalities because what we're working on right now Fayette is new zoning because it's not zoned and no one knows what zone it is, or what the client classifies it. So right now, they're just coming in and they can dump it. They already did a test and now we stopped it because the watershed folks there and the the local officials actually stepped up to the plate. So can we direct someone to look into this a little more and to come up with policy and a statement about it?

Vince Valdes - think it's important that we reflect our region's needs. And that's where we're here to provide technical assistance. All the right equipment. All the right tools for you to reflect your political will, if that means directing us to do these analyses and then having a policy region wide and being able to take it to a senator's office or the governor's office or what have you. That's what we're here for, but we're not going to take the lead, we're going to take the direction from everyone around this table and everybody on the call because that's what we're supposed to do as an organization, but we're here to do that. We're not going to be biased either way. When you get the information from us or when you get the technical assistance from us, you know, it'll be the right thing and it'll be unbiased and it'll be objective and I think we need to educate everyone in the SPC, all the different counties, because if they came to Fayette, they're coming to other counties too, so we need to be aware of what's going on ahead of time. We need to be able to articulate what those needs are and then transfer them to a regional policy to your point.

Pat Fabian - It takes an organization like this or a regional effort known to create that advocacy or that policy that represents us. Here are the risks and here are the things that we need to consider as we move forward with these initiatives and if we can assist them with writing the policy, writing the zoning.

Absolutely, we found some other folks that did it, but you still want to tweak it to your best ability, too. If we could come up with something and maybe pass that to the next level. At the next meeting, if we could get someone to talk on that subject and then sharing that, right? Because they're going to move out of Beaver County. They're moving to the next neighbor. It really goes against your economic development efforts. You get something like that in the county and then we thought it would be lucky that we drew their application, but like you said, they're going to go somewhere else and it goes against economic development.

Ms. Tulley are you aware of any studies that maybe connect the dots to economic development or lack of economic development, attracting population, attracting businesses plans, things of that sort?

Cathy Tulley – There was just a study that came out about the health impacts. I can do a little bit of research and have something to present for the next meeting.

Vince Valdes - The discussion that we're having here is exactly the kind of thing that I think that Cathy and Mason would like to continue, not just in this meeting, but in a separate thing. We have separate meetings for freight. We have active transportation and for every type of transportation, vehicle transportation you could think of, and I think having two people who are committed and who are here for the long-haul having conversations like this, whether it's in a separate form or here would be really ideal for them. So not just the issue that you're having, but anybody who's having an issue please connect with Cathy and we can facilitate more robust, but more like down to the nitty gritty discussions about these issues, any frequency that you want. We're happy to just sort of follow up on that.

Landslides were mentioned when you were going through your presentation. Weeks ago, we had a rather large landslide on the Gap Trail. It's in the section if you're familiar with Kennywood underneath where the old train runs. It's going to have a significant cost in terms of repairs and it may require closing at least a one-mile section of the Gap Trail below Kennywood. Do we have any update on that Catherine or Vincent?

Cathy Tulley - I've been in touch with Adam Madison DCNR and we're working with the trail folks. I think they were still doing some analysis. They were sending some drones in.

Jenn Lasser – Just on another note for everybody at the table, I think I mentioned this a few months ago at the executive board meeting, we had some water issues at a county out in Eastern Pennsylvania. I was under the impression that all of our LDDs and MPOs had a Water Resource Center. That is not the case. They stumbled on our friends here at SPC and were just amazed by the depth of knowledge and the information that our Water Resource Center provides. So just sharing that with this committee as well. Thank you.

I can connect you with all things national flooding insurance program related, MCC contractors. You could reach out to me another time for the details, but I did want to let you know, too that the Pennsylvania Association of Floodplain Managers Conferences is coming up at State College. It's September 26 & 27, it's going to be at the Graduate Hotel. I will be there. Consultants, mapping coordinators, contractors, lots of stormwater stuff on the agenda, too. It's all posted, and if you have any questions about it feel free to reach out to me.

Cathy Tulley– I know that in our region, we have a very low adoption rate for the community rating system, so that's something we can talk about down the road. And we've also been kicking around the idea of becoming Certified Floodplain Managers, so that may be like a next year kind of thing, but I'll follow up with you.

I can help you with that too. Your predecessor, Erin, and I went around and did a bunch of courses with the counties. The course is called Duties of the Flood Plan Administrator. It's kind of a crash course in floodplain management and I think we hit just about every county several years ago, so I don't see any reason why we couldn't do that again.

Cathy Tulley – That would be great. We've been partnering with the Southwest PA Water Network and that's one of the primary things that they asked us for help with is to identify opportunities for education and outreach and then just to kind of tie on to that about the classes I know folks are maybe familiar with the MS4 trainings that Erin had done previously. The DEP has definitely asked SPC to partner with them again on offering those classes once the MS4 state permit becomes open again, late 2024 early 2025.

5. Next Meeting Date – October 23, 2023 at 2:00 p.m. at SPC's new office.
6. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 2:40 p.m.