

ARK PRESENTATION NOTES

PA Futures / PACOG PRESENTATION TO LGC SYMPOSIUM (October 21, 2021)

(presentation materials submitted electronically by **September 30, 2021**)

PROPOSAL TO: Local Government Commission, Local Government Symposium

FROM: Pennsylvania Association of Councils of Governments (PACOG)

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PROPOSED TOPIC: The importance of and future opportunities for councils of governments (COGs) and other intergovernmental organizations in Pennsylvania.

PROJECT PROPOSAL: **Successful councils of governments and other intergovernmental organizations are vital to the future wellbeing of our communities in Pennsylvania. However, the potential for intergovernmental cooperation and collaboration has only been partially realized. Much work remains to be done to strengthen these organizations so they can be more effective and impactful. Our proposal is to highlight important accomplishments of intergovernmental organizations and to make recommendations to the General Assembly, local governmental entities, and fellow associations, that would enable these organizations to better fulfill their potential.**

Thank You and Good Afternoon

My name is Alan Kugler. I am the principal at PA Futures, which is a Pennsylvania statewide civic and governmental affairs consulting organization that focus on intergovernmental cooperation.

I am also here today representing the Pennsylvania Association of Councils of Governments (PACOG) for which I have been the consultant since 2008.

PACOG is the association for Councils of Governments and other intergovernmental organizations across the Commonwealth. PACOG was formed in 1973 following the passage of the Intergovernmental Cooperation Law and the formation of some of the early COGs. About half of the COGs in the State are members and most of the more active ones belong. With varying degrees of success, through the years PACOG has sought to be the central "Go to Resource" for intergovernmental issues, opportunities, and questions in Pennsylvania.

But first I want to tell you a little, abbreviated story, about the basis and importance of intergovernmental cooperation in communities. This will lead into the recommendations.

Our communities are more than their namesake cities and towns. Across Pennsylvania the boundaries of the local municipal governments often do not encompass complete communities. More often than not, our communities span multiple municipalities. Many of the municipalities are quite small in land area and population and have great difficulty providing even the most basic services. In addition, many of the municipal governments cannot obtain adequate numbers of persons to serve on their legislative bodies, boards, and commissions. In these cases, it is a myth to call these governments close to the people, or responsive to the community, for they control nothing.

In addition, there is a definite connection between governmental interdependence and economic performance. Across Pennsylvania, our cities and older urban areas are under siege from interconnected patterns of aging and declining populations, falling median incomes after adjusting for inflation, unnecessarily costly services, and eroding tax bases, while the areas immediately surrounding them may appear relatively prosperous, leading the citizens and officials in those areas to be complacent about their own futures and the economic struggles of the larger regions they call home. Prosperity in suburbia in PA is only in the eyes of the beholder and relative only to the cities nearby. Most of even the wealthiest suburbs in Pennsylvania are not keeping pace with the economic performance of the nation.

Stymied economic performance in our cities and suburbs can be traced directly to the inability to “act as a team” and “get along within the family.” At the same time, the inability to coordinate and cooperate in our true communities has unnecessarily driven urban sprawl, thereby undermining the values many cherish in the traditional rural areas of our townships.

As a result, especially when elected officials fail to recognize the interdependence between our local governments, cross boundary policies, and economic outcomes in communities, there often exists throughout much of the Commonwealth a shocking lack of intergovernmental communication, duplication of services, needless inefficiencies, lack of cross-boundary visioning and planning, and cumbersome coordination and decision-making.

For example (although I have worked all across Pennsylvania throughout the years, I will use Erie here as an example) ... “Erie is more than the City of Erie.” It encompasses at least a dozen municipalities and really, essentially, the entire county. When someone who lives in Millcreek Township (as I do) visits friends or relatives in Florida and they are asked where they live, they say Erie. There is a recognition that Erie is a regional community encompassing a large land area that includes at a minimum, Fairview, Harborcreek, Lawrence Park and Summit Townships, Wesleyville Borough, and others within and beyond the Lake Erie, Great Lakes watershed.

When there is a lack of cooperation among the municipalities, the effect is to artificially divide the interdependent, geographic, social, and economic community.

To be more specific about the Erie example: Post WWII and through the 1950’s and 60s and into the 70’s and 80’s the Erie region was poised for substantial growth. Many people wanted to come there to live and even bring their businesses (my dad among them) but the City of Erie was fully built out. The only place to go was beyond the City’s boundaries, into Millcreek,

Harborcreek, Fairview and Summit Townships. So those municipalities, led by Millcreek Township, asked for significant extensions of the City's water services (which was being run by the city as a departmental operation). For largely political reasons (us v. them) the City of Erie said no, and thereby, by withholding its water, denied the region the growth of the water system and residential and commercial development that would have ensued. The result was decades of intergovernmental wars, lawsuits, etc., with tremendous distrust and animosity. The community did not grow in the ways that it would have. The Erie region and community would be an entirely different place today if the City of Erie had aggressively marketed and regionalized its water services. The population would today be perhaps 400,000 + and not the 275,000 that it is. It would be a truly important place in this country.

Finally, in the early 1990s, with lots of conscious leadership from elected officials and civic and business leaders, with the consulting support of the Pennsylvania Economy League – and I was the lead consultant to that process - intergovernmental relations improved dramatically. The water service was transferred to a municipal authority, aggressive marketing took place, and intergovernmental cooperation finally took off. But it was too late to recapture the lost years. As a result, the community has never come anywhere near achieving its full potential for its citizens.

At that time as well in 1992. the Erie Area Council of Governments was formed. And that COG is today one of the most active and successful in Pennsylvania....

So that is where we are, and this example in many forms has played out over and over across this state.... The growth and vitality of our communities has been severely limited and truncated through intergovernmental fighting and some, if not much of the loss of wealth and young people especially in Western PA, is a direct consequence of our failures to plan and act for the future across municipal boundaries. In that sense we are our own worst enemies... And our cities and towns have stressed substantially as a result.

We must become more proactive when it comes to cross jurisdictional communications, collaboration, cooperation, and coordination if we are going to have any real chance to maintain and improve the vitality of our communities as we go forward this century.

So here are some, I believe obvious, and overarching, and really simple recommendations:

1. Provide legal standing under PA law for an association of intergovernmental organizations

Unfortunately, the Pennsylvania Association of Council of Governments (PACOG) does not presently have equal legal standing and status with the other municipal associations in Pennsylvania. PACOG should be provided the same legal standing as the other associations.

2. Create a more proactive role for DCED in helping to advance intergovernmental cooperation and organizations

- 3. Achieve dedicated funding for COGs and other intergovernmental organizations (i.e. local option sales tax with a portion of the funds dedicated to COGs and IGO's)**

We need to find better ways to support and fund these organizations.

- 4. Embrace technology to deal with and manage records by digitizing and aggregating local government public information on to shared platforms following the new standards of the PA Historical and Museum Commission (PA State Archives), Local Government Records Committee**
- 5. The Commonwealth should also provide serious financial and other support for legacy data scanning and digitalization of local government records**
- 6. Implement enabling legislation for broader and more effective use of the area wide government mechanism in the PA Constitution (Article IX, Section 7)**

Article IX of the Constitution addresses local government and is the basis for all intergovernmental cooperation and functional and structural coordination and transfers of responsibilities between municipal governments and county governments.

“Section 7. Area-wide Powers

“The General Assembly may grant powers to area governments or to municipalities within a given geographical area in which there exists intergovernmental cooperation or area government and designate the classes of municipalities subject to such legislation.

With the notable exception of the Allegheny Regional Asset District, that provision in the Constitution has been largely ignored.

- 7. Lastly, it is imperative that the Commonwealth make legislative and policy changes and provide much better incentives to enable county and municipal governments to act regionally, to more readily cooperate in the provision of public services, and to make functional and structural changes for improving services in our true regional communities. There should be a systematic review of all laws, policies and practices that empower, impact or in any way influence our local governments with an eye toward further addressing the central question of “What changes are needed to better permit and encourage local governments to coordinate and cooperate in the provision of services and to better position our communities for future growth and enhanced quality of life?”**

It is all as simple as this; If we do these things in Pennsylvania, we will transform ourselves and our communities. If we do not do it, our communities will be left to continue to flounder.

QUESTIONS???

PACOG and PA Futures will do all we can to assist with doing these things, others and all the sub elements, many of which are being talked about here today.

Thank You

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