

Erie Vital Signs

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Regional Cooperation:

Significant changes are taking shape in local governments. The changes are driven by fundamental shifts and stresses in the larger society and economy that are beyond local control and are tied to national and global trends and interdependence. Yet we all maintain control over how we interact with one another. Through these interactions in cooperative and collaborative ways, we can choose to make our Erie County community the best possible place for all to live, work, raise families and do business. We can choose for our “regional” community to be one that holds the greatest possible opportunities for individual advancement, achievement, prosperity and high quality of life.

An essential element in this is high-quality, cost-effective local public services provided by Erie County government and by our municipalities, consisting of cities, boroughs, townships, intergovernmental organizations, and municipal authorities.

The Regional Cooperation section of Erie Vital Signs is intended to measure performance in the realm of public services provided by these entities and encourage cross-jurisdictional collaboration, and civic and governmental partnerships supporting those services.

Vital Signs monitors indicators for cooperative initiatives, fiscal performance, and local government efficiencies in Erie County. However, there are two other key elements needed to affect change over the longer term: involved and responsive community leadership, and the need to train and grow future governmental leaders. As the story unfolds about the progress of Erie County's local government initiatives, informed and committed leaders, voters and policy makers can use the information and data to help shape future agendas.

Local Governmental Entities

The existence of County and municipal governments in Pennsylvania is established by the Pennsylvania Constitution and state laws.

All land area within the Commonwealth is part of a County government and is also "incorporated" under a local municipal government.

Erie County government provides many services, some as an administrative arm of the Commonwealth, and other functions or services mandated or permitted by State laws. Examples of Erie County services include administration of the courts and judicial system, corrections, public health and safety, children and youth services, mental health and retardation, care of the indigent, libraries, emergency management, 9-1-1 call taking, area-wide land-use planning, real estate valuation, and public record keeping.

Erie County is classified as a Third Class County under Pennsylvania law, and the County has also adopted a Home Rule Charter under authority of the PA Home Rule Charter and Optional Plans Law, Act 62 of 1972. Erie County is governed by an elected County Executive and a seven member legislative Council elected from voting districts throughout the County.

There are three primary types, or "classifications" of municipal governments: Boroughs, Townships of the First or Second Class, and Cities of the First Class, Second Class, Second Class A and Third Class. All municipal governments operate under the respective laws applicable to their classification and form of government.

The basic forms of municipal government are established by The Borough Code, Township Codes and various City Codes. In addition, some municipal governments have adopted home rule charter or optional plan forms of government available to them under authority of the PA Home Rule Charter and Optional Plans Law, Act 62 of 1972 or prior laws pertaining to cities.

There are 38 municipalities in Erie County. They consist of two Third Class Cities (Erie and Corry), 14 Boroughs, one (1) First Class Township (Lawrence Park) and 21 Second Class Townships.

Municipal governments are autonomous from County government. The municipal governments in Erie County are principal providers of public services. Municipal services may include, among others, police and fire protection, water treatment and distribution, sewage collection and treatment, stormwater management, refuse collection and disposal, street lighting; construction and maintenance of roadways and bridges, parks and recreation facilities and programs, building and inspection codes, and planning and zoning.

County of Erie		1
Municipalities		38
Boroughs	14	
Cities	2	
Townships	22	
Municipal and Other Authorities		60
Intergovernmental Organizations		13
<u>School Districts</u>		<u>13</u>
Total Local Governmental Entities		135

County of Erie

Municipalities

 Boroughs (14)

- Albion Borough
- Cranesville Borough
- Edinboro Borough
- Elgin Borough
- Girard Borough
- Lake City Borough
- McKean Borough
- Mill Village Borough
- North East Borough
- Platea Borough
- Union City Borough
- Waterford Borough
- Wattsburg Borough
- Wesleyville Borough

 Cities (2)

- Corry City

Erie City

Townships (22) (21 Second Class Townships)

Amity Township
Concord Township
Conneaut Township
Elk Creek Township
Fairview Township
Franklin Township
Girard Township
Greene Township
Greenfield Township
Harborcreek Township
Lawrence Park Township (First Class Township)
LeBoeuf Township
McKean Township
Millcreek Township
North East Township
Springfield Township
Summit Township
Union Township
Venango Township
Washington Township
Waterford Township
Wayne Township

Municipal and Other Authorities (60) (Some are Inactive)

Albion Borough Municipal Authority
Corry City Airport Authority
Corry City Municipal Authority
Corry City Parking Authority
Corry Housing Authority
Corry Redevelopment Authority
Cranesville Sewer Authority
East Erie Suburban Recreation & Conservation Authority
Edinboro Borough Municipal Authority
Edinboro Water Authority
Erie Cable Television Public Access Authority
Erie City Housing Authority
Erie City Water Authority

Erie City, Higher Education Building Authority
Erie Civic Center Authority
Erie County Community Services Financing Authority
Erie County Convention Center Authority
Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority
Erie County General Authority
Erie County Hospital Authority
Erie County Housing Authority
Erie County Park & Recreation Authority
Erie County Redevelopment Authority
Erie County Solid Waste Authority
Erie County Tax Collection Committee
Erie County Water & Sewer Authority
Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority
Erie Municipal Park Authority
Erie Parking Authority
Erie Regional Airport Authority
Erie Sewer Authority
Erie-Western Pennsylvania Port Authority
Fairview Parks & Recreation Authority
Fairview Township Sewer Authority
Fairview Township Water Authority
Girard Township Water & Sewer Authority
Girard, Erie County, School Authority
Harborcreek Township Sewer Authority
Harborcreek Township Water Authority
Iroquois Area School Building Authority
McKean Township Sewer Authority
McKean Township Water Authority
Mid County Water Authority
Middleboro Municipal Authority
Millcreek Township Sewer Authority
Millcreek Township Water Authority
North East Borough Sewer Authority
North East Borough Water Authority
North East Township Water & Sewer Authority
Northwestern Recreation Authority
Summit Township Sewer Authority
Summit Township Water Authority

Union City Borough Municipal Authority
Union Township Municipal Authority
Washington Township Sewer Authority
Washington Township Water Authority
Waterford Borough Municipal Authority
Waterford Township Sewer Authority
Waterford Township Water Authority
Wayne Township Sewer Authority

School Districts (13)

Corry Area School District
Erie City School District
Fairview School District
Fort LeBoeuf School District
General McLane School District
Girard School District
Harbor Creek School District
Iroquois School District
Millcreek Township School District
North East School District
Northwestern School District
Union City Area School District
Wattsburg Area School District

Intergovernmental Organizations (13)

Conelway Emergency Management Agency
East Erie County Council of Governments
Erie Area Council of Governments
Erie County Association of Boroughs
Erie County Association of Municipal Administrators
Erie County Association of Township Officials
Erie County Zoning and Code Enforcement Officials Association
Erie Area Transportation Study Metropolitan Planning Organization
(Erie MPO)
Northwest PA Uniform Construction COG
Northwest Tri-County Council of Governments
Northwest Tri-County Intermediate Unit (IU 5)
West Erie County Emergency Communication Center
West Erie County Emergency Management Agency (COG)

Additional Indicators

- Public Services (Neutral)
- Fiscal Performance (Negative)
- Intergovernmental Cooperation (Improving)
- Multi-Municipal Collaborations (Improving)
 - Cooperative Planning (Neutral)
 - Electronic Government (Improving)
 - Emergency Management (Improving)
- Civic – Governmental Partnerships (Improving)
- Building Regional Capacity (Neutral)

Public Services (Neutral)

County and municipal government services are those that are “public” in nature. They generally cannot be provided cost-effectively through a private market economy and/or they have dimensions of regulation that are needed to assure community-wide cooperation and coordination. The intention is to create “public goods” and equal benefits for all.

County governments provide many services, some as an administrative arm of the Commonwealth, and other functions or services mandated or permitted by State law. Examples of county services include administration of the courts and judicial system, corrections, public health and safety, children and youth services, mental health and retardation, care of the indigent, libraries, emergency management, 9-1-1 call taking and dispatch, area-wide planning, and real estate valuation.

Municipal governments in Pennsylvania are autonomous from county governments and are the principal providers of direct public services to communities. Municipal services often include, among others:

- * police and fire protection;
- * water treatment and distribution;
- * sewage collection and treatment;

- * stormwater management;
- * refuse collection and disposal;
- * street lighting;
- * construction and maintenance of roadways and bridges;
- * administration of parks and recreation facilities and programs;
- * administration and enforcement of building and inspection codes; and
- * planning and zoning, etc.

These services, and many others provided by municipal governments, are indispensable to the well-being of our Pennsylvania communities.

The Municipality Authorities Act, PA Act 164 of 1945 (as amended) governs the creation of municipal authorities. A municipal authority is a body corporate and politic, authorized to acquire, construct, finance, improve, maintain and operate projects, provide financing for insurance reserves, make loans, and to borrow money and issue bonds to finance them.

A municipal authority may be created by a single county, municipality or school district, or may be created as a joint authority by two or more governments.

Under Pennsylvania law, the municipal government(s) that create a municipal authority appoint the members of its board; however, the authority is not considered part of the municipal government which created it. An authority is an independent agency of the Commonwealth. It is a separate legal entity with power to incur debt, own property and finance its activities by means of user charges or lease rentals.

There are two general types of municipal authorities: financing and operating. A financing authority is used only for financing a particular project that is to be operated by the municipal government(s) that created it. Under this scenario, the authority sells bonds to finance the project and then leases the project to the municipality to operate.

An operating authority sells bonds to finance its project(s), operates the project(s) using its own personnel, and pays off its debt from the project revenues. In this case, the municipality has no role in operating or paying for the project.

Municipal authorities in Pennsylvania do not have the authority to levy general taxes, but they can and do charge customers for services. There are 60 Authorities in Erie County.

Fiscal Performance

(Negative)

Significant changes are taking shape in local governments. The changes are driven by fundamental shifts and stresses in the larger society and economy that are beyond local control and are tied to national and global trends and interdependence. In many cases the revenue generating capacity of our local governments is severely stressed. Increased revenues under current tax structures to pay for ever increasing costs of services and demands by the public for expanded services are not in balance. This is especially true for Cities and other municipalities that have substantial non-taxable land within its boundaries and that attract large numbers of non-residents into the community for employment, health care, entertainment and other amenities. These municipalities are providing services to support those functions for which they do not receive adequate revenues in return, thereby placing the burden on their resident tax payers, and making them appear to outsiders to be inefficient. This is a cross-jurisdictional issue in Erie County and throughout Pennsylvania that must ultimately be corrected.

Intergovernmental Cooperation

(Improving)

A very bright spot throughout Erie County is in the realm of Intergovernmental Cooperation.

County and municipal governments can most help to advance economic growth, community development, and general prosperity by doing well the basic things that are within their governmental control, including the provision of coordinated, efficient and cost-effective services.

To achieve these ends, public accountability requires that governments employ the best methods of service delivery at reasonable costs. Governments may do this alone, or they may cooperate with one another in providing services. The principal means to work together is through “Intergovernmental Cooperation.”

The Intergovernmental Cooperation Law, PA Act 180 of 1972 (as amended) (53 Pa. C.S.A. § 2301) is the enabling legislation for intergovernmental cooperation in Pennsylvania. This law allows counties and municipalities to cooperate with one another in any action or service that the governments have the authority to do alone. For the purpose of this Act, the term “municipality” is defined as “...a county, city of the second class, second class A and third class, borough, incorporated town, township, school district or any other similar general purpose unit of government which shall hereafter be created by the General Assembly.”

There are two general methods of intergovernmental cooperation. These include: (1) formal Act 180 agreements and (2) councils of governments. In addition, there are many “handshake agreements” in effect throughout the Commonwealth. Handshake agreements include unwritten working arrangements between municipalities, and any written agreements not formally adopted.

Formal intergovernmental cooperation agreements are legal contracts among two or more municipalities. They are usually single purpose agreements for the joint provision of a specific service. Act 180 agreements can be generally structured in two ways: (1) a provider/purchaser structure whereby one municipality sells a service or program to another, and (2) a joint program whereby two or more municipalities implement a joint program, sharing ownership and control of the program.

Councils of Governments (COGs) are a special kind of organization. A COG is a voluntary organization of member governments whose purpose is to discuss, plan and undertake joint, intergovernmental activities agreed to by its member governments. The purpose of a COG is further defined in its bylaws. A COG formed for general purposes may:

- Serve as a forum for the identification, discussion, and examination of intergovernmental issues and concerns;
- Facilitate agreements and cooperative actions for specific purposes and programs agreed to by the member governments; and,
- Administer, undertake, and execute projects and programs assigned to the COG as agreed to by the member governments.

COGs may be comprised of any combination of counties and municipalities. COG activities, like all other intergovernmental arrangements, are also controlled by the codes or laws applicable to the participating governments.

The challenge for intergovernmental cooperation is this: All across Pennsylvania the boundaries of the local municipal governments do not encompass complete communities. More often than not, our communities span several 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.

The boundaries of the local municipal governments artificially divide our interdependent, geographic, social, and economic communities. Moreover, Pennsylvania laws appear sound on the surface, but lack depth. This lack makes it nearly impossible to achieve real and meaningful changes. 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.

Unfortunately, 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 huge 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.

These problems underscore the difficulties of our cities, boroughs and townships, and significantly impact the ability of entire economic regions in the Commonwealth to plan for improving the future quality of life and to define and target objectives regarding economic growth, community development and land use.

Continued lack of local governmental cooperation and coordination is totally unacceptable. At the same time, Pennsylvania’s laws and policies pertaining to the local governments have remained largely unadjusted and must be changed.

With all this in mind, 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 structural changes for improving services in our true regional communities.

The current means of local governmental coordination through very incremental cooperation and extremely difficult boundary changes is not enough. If we are truly going to get serious in ways that will make substantial and meaningful differences in the economic competitiveness and quality of life of our communities, then the Commonwealth and local decision makers must adopt much more active legislative and policy changes, and much better incentives to support greater coordination among local governments. These actions would result in much greater functional cooperation, and structural changes, resulting in much improved economic performance.

There are currently two general purpose councils of governments in Erie County undertaking functional cooperation. They are the Erie Area Council of Governments and the Northwest Tri-County Council of Governments.

The Erie Area COG has historically served the areas receiving Erie City water and sewer, but recently the COG has moved beyond those boundaries and is taking on a greater county-wide presence. The current members of the Erie Area COG are

the County of Erie, City of Erie, the Boroughs of Girard and Wesleyville, and the Townships of Fairview, Franklin, Harborcreek, Lawrence Park, Millcreek, North East and Summit.

The Northwest Tri-County COG has historically served the southeastern portion of the County, encompassing the City of Corry and surrounding areas. It too is becoming increasingly more active. The current members of the Northwest Tri-County COG are the City of Corry, the Boroughs of Spartansburg, Union City and Wattsburg, and the Townships of Amity, Concord, Union, Venango and Wayne.

There are also four special purpose COGs in Erie County. They are the East Area County COG and West Erie County COG. Both have historically provided emergency dispatch services for police and fire departments. There is also the special purpose West Erie County Emergency Management Agency (Albion, Cranesville, Franklin, Elk Creek , Girard Twp., McKean Borough and Twp., Platea, Washington) Conelway Regional Emergency Management Agency (CREMA) (Corry, Elgin, Amity, Concord, Venango, Wayne) and the Northwest PA Uniform Construction COG.

Many other intergovernmental organizations and arrangements exist throughout the County. They include fire organizations, the Erie County Association of Township Officials, Erie County Associations of Boroughs, Erie County Association of Municipal Administrators, Erie County Public Works Directors group, Erie County Real Estate Tax Collectors Association, and the Erie County Zoning and Code Enforcement Officials Association.

Multi-Municipal Collaborations	(Improving)
Cooperative Planning	(Neutral)
Electronic Government	(Improving)
Emergency Management	(Improving)

Pennsylvania has more than 2,600 county and municipal governments. Within Erie County there are 38 municipalities, consisting of two cities (Erie and Corry), 14 boroughs, and 22 townships. The municipalities are fully autonomous from the County government. Many of the municipalities are quite small in population and some are challenged to provide even the most basic services. In addition, many

find it difficult to obtain adequate numbers of competent persons to serve on their legislative bodies, boards, and commissions.

It is essential that the municipal governments cooperate and coordinate with one another for the provision of services in order to achieve maximum efficiencies, economies of scale, high quality services, and modern governmental processes. Active cooperation and coordinated among the governments, through vehicles such as Councils of Governments (COGs) and other intergovernmental organizations, can also go a long way to supporting economic growth and vibrancy in communities.

This form of 'functional cooperation' among two or more governments can lead to substantial and meaningful changes in economic competitiveness and quality of life. Therefore it is important that local decision makers be encouraged and supported by the larger community to explore and adopt ways to provide greater functional cooperation through multi-municipal collaboration. This is different from 'structural consolidation' such as municipal mergers and consolidations intended to eliminate governmental units.

The following are some of the current and potential areas for additional collaboration in Erie County:

1. Blighted Property

Application of best practices and development of a coordinated multi-municipal blighted property program for legal processes, identification of blighted properties, acquiring land and structures, demolition, and other activities. (In March of 2012 the Corry Industrial Benefit Association, with funding from the Erie Community Foundation invited the Center for Community Progress to assess and recommend strategies to more effectively address blighted property in Erie County. The Report made a wide range of recommendations for action planning and implementation.)

2. Recycling and Garbage Collection

Coordinated recycling and garbage collection among municipalities through joint contract negotiations, shared clean-up and recycling days, and other programs.

3. Emergency Management Agencies

Cooperative activates among municipalities for sharing of personnel, equipment and capacity for joint emergency management planning and activities. Considerable activity is currently taking place in this regard across the County, primarily through the Conelway and West Erie County EMAs.

4. Erie County Broadband, eGovernment and Technology Implementation Program developed by the Erie Area Council Governments.

This program, which is already underway but requires significant additional support, is putting in place joint interactive, state-of-the-art, internet and intranet web networks to house, link, and share substantial information about the participating communities and local governments, and the implementation of individual and common objectives. This program can provide modern document management services, and can be the communications 'backbone' for nearly all the multi-municipal collaboration projects.

5. Joint Purchasing

Joint purchasing for equipment, materials and supplies needed by the municipalities for the purpose of producing lower costs through sharing and economies of scale.

6. Municipal Officials and Staff Capacity Building

Formalized and locally provided training and education forums for elected and appointed officials in an academy style format could be undertaken.

7. Planning, Zoning and Code Enforcement

Planning tasks among municipalities, joint municipal permitting portal for public use, and other facilitation and implementation tasks among municipalities.

8. Public Safety

Cooperative activates among municipalities for sharing of technology, personnel and capacity, including regional policing. One identified opportunity is to bring about modernization of the current county-wide radio based Traffic Signal Emergency Preemption System as recommended by the Erie County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).

9. Public Works

Formal equipment sharing programs and joint and contracted public works services among municipalities.

10. Recreation and Parks

Joint investments, marketing and implementation of activities for programmatic coordination among municipal recreation programs and school districts.

11. Stormwater Management

Implementation of the recommendations coming out of the current Erie County Stormwater Management Intermunicipal Collaboration Project.

Additional Ideas for Collaboration

Apply Principals and Standards of Service

At the present time little regard is paid to “Standards of Service” for municipal government activities. A local point of coordination through a COG could be established for the review and application of standards of service for upgrading the delivery of municipal functions. The governments could then jointly adopt and apply standards of services to their undertakings. This would help enable more informed decision-making and ultimately more efficient services.

Conduct Coordinated Land Use Planning, Transportation, Zoning

At the present time, each municipality conducts its land use planning and zoning largely independent of the others. This is counter productive for an ultimately vibrant Erie region because it unnecessarily divides the region as a whole for planning purposes into disconnected parts of the whole from a land use point of view. Future land use planning and zoning decisions would be better made on the basis of a single land use plan encompassing the entire regional community. In this way, each municipality would not be required to provide every conceivable type of land use within its area of jurisdiction. As a result, land use decisions would be made on the basis of geography, encompassing economic, social, and

environmental values for the whole of the area, as opposed to actions that can be driven by political competition between the governments for a limited pie of wealth in the region. In addition, true joint land use planning and zoning would open the door to jointly determined and implemented tax revenue and tax base sharing among the governments so that all would benefit and share the costs from development in the region regardless of where it might take place.

There should be much more active regional, joint and multi-municipal coordination of land use planning and zoning, and this should be tied to transportation planning.

Once the joint planning and zoning is in place, tax revenue and tax base sharing should be instituted among the municipalities. Perhaps revenues derived in this way could be targeted to support public safety services such as police and fire.

Emphasize Parks, Recreation, Open Space

There is presently no organized planning process taking place among the municipal governments and the county for coordinated provision of parks, recreation, and open space services. Much more emphasis should be placed on this function as a quality of life value.

A professional regional and countywide recreation, park, and open space plan should be undertaken in partnership with the municipalities. This plan should include participation of County government and be administered by the Erie County Department of Planning. The Lake Erie Region Conservancy should be included as a planning partner.

Recognize Changing Roles for County Government

Erie County government is a logical unifying catalyst to help implement some intergovernmental programs and changes that impact most or all of the municipalities. Erie County government could take on a greater role supporting intergovernmental cooperation to assist the municipalities.

Transform the General Purpose Councils of Governments

The existing general purpose Council of Governments in Erie County, presently consisting of the Erie Area Council and the Northwest Tri-County COG could be transformed from largely intergovernmental meet and discuss associations of municipalities to a much more active means for the provision of services sponsored by their member governments. Both COG's are currently actively moving in this direction.

Utilize Community Data

Erie Vital Signs, developed by the Erie Community Foundation with significant assistance from the civic community, is a regional resource for identifying additional areas in which the governments, nonprofit organizations, and businesses might work together. Continued efforts should be made to integrate local public policy decision making with data provided through Erie Vital Signs and other sources.

Welcome Cooperative Governance Advocacy

Additional community support could be provided to the governments to recognize and encourage their joint initiatives. A project could be established to engage the broader community about the existence and need for better coordination among the governments. A Cooperative Governance Advocacy program could be established. This effort would be targeted toward the public at large to enable better understanding of the connections between local public policy decisions and actions and economic and community outcomes. With greater support around them emanating from such an effort, governmental officials would be able to act much more confidently in the realm of intergovernmental cooperation. This project could be undertaken through a partnership of the non-governmental, civic-based organizations.

Civic – Governmental Partnerships

(Improving)

The Erie County community has become a “hot bed” for partnerships among civic, business and governmental organizations. These partnerships are the key to the

transformation of the total community for economic vitality and prosperity. The partnerships must continue to be nurtured.

Building Regional Capacity

(Neutral)

In order to help bring about positive changes in all of the indicators across all sectors of the community, in all areas measured by Vital Signs, it is essential that conscious efforts be made to build the capacity of the citizens and business, civic and governmental leaders to work together collaboratively. This indicator is a call for action to develop more and better programs to help people see their common interests and the need for cooperative actions which will place everyone on the “same team” for improved communities across Erie County.

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