A special thanks to our funders, community collaborators and partners, and the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public and International Affairs
LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE FOLLOWING A YEAR OF SUCCESS

The Congress of Neighboring Communities (CONNECT) has grown into a formidable regional institution that continues to collaboratively address the most pressing challenges facing the urban core of Allegheny County. Our successes in this past year alone have been tremendous, including developing uniform solar codes and ordinances for our municipalities; having our recommended option to turn over the multijurisdictional sewers to ALCOSAN (put forth in the CONNECT Multijurisdictional Sewer Study in June 2011) emerge as one of the findings in the Sewer Regionalization Evaluation commissioned by ALCOSAN; and working closely with our partners to begin to develop our region’s first land bank to help us mitigate the effect of blighted and abandoned properties in our communities. Thanks in part to our committed members and consistent outreach efforts in the civic community and the media, the power of CONNECT has never been stronger.

CONNECT stands apart from other intergovernmental cooperation efforts because of our unique membership and the forum we provide for their voices to be heard. The trust and camaraderie developed among our leaders has created an organization that in its fifth year is confidently looking forward to a long, thriving future. In 2014 CONNECT will unveil its strategic plan which will not only outline the future of our organization, but also the future of our region.

Our successes could not have been achieved without the commitment, time and resources contributed by all of our member municipalities, our partners and our funders. We also thank the extraordinary efforts of the staff and students of the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh, Coro fellows and volunteers.

Thank you for your interest in CONNECT. We welcome your input and engagement in our important work. We encourage you to learn about what we have accomplished, what we seek to accomplish together, and why this coalition of local governments is one of the most exciting innovations our region has ever seen.

Kathy Risko
Executive Director, Congress of Neighboring Communities
POLICY ISSUE AREAS AND RESOLUTIONS

Every year at CONNECT’s annual Legislative Session member municipalities adopt a slate of resolutions that guide the work of this innovative organization. Since our first legislative session in June 2009, the legislative body has passed 94 resolutions on issues ranging from emergency medical services (EMS) and blighted and vacant property to transportation, economic development and water and sewer infrastructure. As CONNECT has evolved, so has the sophistication and depth of the issues we address. Below are a few highlights from 2013.

CONNECT COMMUNITY PARAMEDIC PROGRAM

In 2009, CONNECT member municipalities identified the funding shortage facing EMS providers as a major concern that threatened the stability of this vital public service. In response, CONNECT partnered with the Allegheny County EMS council to find a solution for service providers operating in the urban core.

In September 2013 CONNECT, the Allegheny County EMS Council and the Center for Emergency Medicine of Western Pennsylvania, Inc. launched the CONNECT Community Paramedic Program with funding from Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield and the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. This program provides in-home care to patients with non-emergency medical issues, keeping them from making unnecessary visits to hospitals and emergency rooms.

The goal of the program is to determine the impact of an EMS-based community health initiative on healthcare costs and quality metrics by calculating the projected savings, gaps in care or social support, and health related quality of life for patients receiving the intervention when compared to their historical use or published data for similar populations. At the end of the two-year pilot we expect to demonstrate to local health plans that having EMS agencies provide these services reduces the total expense for patients and healthcare providers, and improves the quality of care.
CONNECT Community Paramedic Program Story of Initial Impact

While it is too early to determine the impact of the CONNECT Community Paramedic Program on patient healthcare utilization, the program has already recorded early successes and has received more than 130 patient referrals since its launch. Eight emergency room department visits were avoided by just one patient who had become a familiar face at a city hospital, coming in once a week for the past year. Since the patient has been engaged with a Community Paramedic, she has not returned to the Emergency Department.

SEWER REGIONALIZATION

CONNECT, 3 Rivers Wet Weather (3RWW) and regional stakeholders have created a partnership to develop an implementation plan for sewer regionalization, working towards the goal of establishing a system that equitably distributes the cost of pipe operation and maintenance.

CONNECT’s engagement in this effort began in 2011 with the CONNECT Multijurisdictional Sewer Management Study which recommended that the multijurisdictional trunk sewers should be transferred to ALCOSAN. In March 2013, our recommendation emerged as one of the findings of ALCOSAN’s Sewer Regionalization Evaluation. This project is the next step in the ongoing efforts of stakeholders in our region to develop the framework needed for the voluntary transfer of intermunicipal conveyance lines (at least 10” or larger), trunk sewers and upstream wet weather facilities to ALCOSAN. This exciting initiative will continue throughout 2014 with updates provided at regular intervals to all interested stakeholders. The successful conclusion of this effort will result in the largest real estate transfer our region has ever experienced.
ENERGY EFFICIENT STREET LIGHTS

For a number of years, the CONNECT communities have expressed a strong interest in building a more sustainable future by reducing their carbon footprint and energy costs. One way they sought to do this was by replacing their high pressure sodium street lights with energy efficient bulbs. Unfortunately, the lack of an officially assigned charge for Light Emitting Diodes (LED) and other energy efficient lighting on the Pennsylvania Utility Commission tariff prevents the use of these types of lighting on Duquesne Light owned fixtures. To address this issue, CONNECT has been advocating to have energy efficient lighting options added to the rate tariff and this year we finally succeeded! In August 2013, Duquesne Light submitted a tariff change to the Pennsylvania Utility Commission. The opportunity for municipalities to install energy efficient lights on poles in their communities will soon be a reality.

LAND BANKING

With the passage of Act 90 in December 2012, the development of a regional land bank is now a possibility. CONNECT has been partnering with a variety of organizations and the City and County to determine how best to develop a land bank for our member municipalities.

As this effort develops, it will be vital that all community stakeholders are active participants in these discussions. In April of 2013, CONNECT brought together the superintendents and school board presidents of the 18 school districts that operate in CONNECT communities to start a conversation about how we might improve working relationships. CONNECT plans to expand on this initial meeting and to ensure that the school districts are involved with other stakeholders in land banking discussions moving forward.

Land banking conversations will continue in 2014 and will be a large component of our policy agenda.

Resolution 13-06   Adopted at the Fifth Congress - 11.21.13

WHEREAS state enabling legislation for the incorporation of a land bank, Pennsylvania Act 153, became effective December 24, 2012; and WHEREAS a land bank is a public authority or nonprofit organization created to efficiently acquire, hold, manage and develop foreclosed property as well as other vacant and abandoned properties; and WHEREAS the land bank will have the authority of property acquisition and disposition, as well as borrow money and issue bonds and notes and be involved in income generating activities.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that CONNECT recognizes Act 153 and will, with our partners research land bank best practices, develop a protocol for a land bank and conduct necessary outreach to bring together all of the partners needed to develop a multi-municipal land bank that will meet the needs of our member communities.
COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND PARTNERS

We could not accomplish our work without our many valued community and government partners. As we have in years past, we continue to collaborate with a variety of organizations including the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, 3 Rivers Wet Weather, Allegheny Conference on Community Development, Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission, PennDOT, Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group, 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania, Port Authority of Allegheny County, Wilkinsburg Community Development Corporation, Economic Development South, Carnegie Community Development Corporation, Sustainable Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Environmental Council, McKees Rocks Community Development Corporation, Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership, Local Government Academy, Allegheny County EMS Council, Center for Emergency Medicine, Pennsylvania Energy Aggregation Program, Green Infrastructure Network, Citizens for Pennsylvania’s Future, Coro Center for Civic Leadership, GTECH Strategies and Allegheny County Economic Development.

INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

CONNECT provides organizations operating in our urban core access to local governments, which has led to the development of some exciting new partnerships like the GTECH/CONNECT reclamation garden in Dormont. This project was funded by the Sneer-Reinhart Charitable Foundation and has transformed a blighted, highly visible property on West Liberty Avenue in Dormont into a temporary sunflower garden that will ultimately be transitioned for permanent use. The transition plan for the property is being developed in partnership with a neighborhood group, the Borough of Dormont and GTECH.
2013 MEDIA COVERAGE

CONNECT continues to garner tremendous interest in the Pittsburgh region. Below is a sampling of the media coverage of CONNECT’s work in the last year.

Connected Peduto: The next mayor teams up with the suburbs
*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 25, 2013

Peduto pushing Pittsburgh-area shared services
*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 25, 2013

Newsmaker: Kathy Coder
*Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, November 21, 2013

Letter to the Editor: Better Transit Bill
*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 17, 2013

Paramedic Program Aims to Cut ER Visits
*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, September 5, 2013

United Way "Be There" Campaign Takes Aim at School Attendance
*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, August 19, 2013

CONNECT - Congress of Neighboring Communities
Our Region's Business – WPXI, May 26, 2013

Ross Native Ready to Lead Township as Manager
*Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, April 24, 2013

Group Can Connect Aspinwall with Stormwater Plans
*Aspinwall Herald*, April 10, 2013

Pilot Program Aims to Provide Preventative Care through EMTs
*Essential Public Radio*, March 20, 2013

Highmark, UPMC in Rare Partnership
*Pittsburgh Business Times*, March 18, 2013

Baldwin Not Alone in Efforts to Reduce Street-Lighting Costs
*South Hills Record*, February 13, 2013

Model Ordinance to Streamline Solar Panels Installation Offered to PA Municipalities
*Essential Public Radio*, February 13, 2013

Heinz Endowments gives grant to promote water control technology
*Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, January 31, 2013

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**Connected Peduto: The next mayor teams up with the suburbs**
November 25, 2013 7:18 PM

City Mayor-elect Bill Peduto is a month from taking office and already he’s set his sights on the suburbs. And for good reason.

CONNECT, the Congress of Neighboring Communities, is an association that includes Pittsburgh and its 36 inner-ring suburbs for purposes of finding better ways to deliver key public services, improving the lives of its nearly 690,000 residents and collaborating on enhancing mutual prosperity.
FINANCIALS

Since establishing a requested municipal contribution from our member municipalities in 2012, CONNECT has raised more than $80,000 from our membership to support our work. Since our inception, CONNECT has been successful in raising almost one million dollars from a variety of sources and continues to diversify our funding to ensure long-term sustainability.

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ABOUT CONNECT

CONNECT was established in 2009 as an innovative model of intergovernmental cooperation that helps to address common public policy issues facing the City of Pittsburgh and its first-ring suburbs within Allegheny County, a county often cited as one of the most jurisdictionally complex and fragmented in the United States.

CONNECT’s mission is to coordinate the activities of the City of Pittsburgh and the 36 neighboring municipalities that comprise the region’s urban core through: advocating for and voicing the collective interests of the urban core and its nearly 690,000 residents; developing and enhancing ways the 37 municipalities work together to deliver important public services; and maintaining a forum for the discussion, deliberation and implementation of new ways to maximize economic prosperity for Western Pennsylvania. CONNECT emerged as a response to the absence of a formal structure for dialogue among the communities that comprise the economic and political powerhouse of Southwestern Pennsylvania. CONNECT’s thirty-six neighboring municipalities, with a combined population of 378,781, together with the City of Pittsburgh, with a population of 305,704 creates a core community of 684,485.

www.connect.pitt.edu