



**Congress of Neighboring Communities
2014 Annual Report**

July 2015

*A special thanks to our funders, community collaborators and partners, and the
University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public and International Affairs*

Planning for the Future

2014 was an important year for the Congress of Neighboring Communities (CONNECT). Since our inception in 2009, the organization 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. We developed a three-year strategic plan that will create a stable organizational and financial future, established a framework for the expeditious transfer of multijurisdictional trunk sewers to ALCOSAN (put forth in *the CONNECT Multijurisdictional Sewer Study* in June 2011), and successfully advocated for a pilot that resulted in the installation of LED streetlights in our member municipalities. Thanks in large 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 open forum we provide for their voices to be heard. The trust and camaraderie developed among our leaders has created an organization that in its sixth year is confidently looking forward to a long, thriving future.

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.

Thank you for your interest in CONNECT. We welcome your input and engagement in our work. We encourage you to learn more about our strong coalition of governments and the incredible accomplishments that we've achieved thus far. While our accomplishments are many, there is much work left to be done. We are looking ahead with confidence and are ready to tackle these challenges collectively.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kathy Risko". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kathy" and last name "Risko" clearly legible.

Kathy Risko
Executive Director
Congress of Neighboring Communities

A Mission (Re)Defined

As CONNECT entered its sixth year, our members decided that the organization needed a formal three-year strategic plan to lay out a path for success and to review and address issues that all organizations face as they mature. We hired nonprofit management consultants in the fall of 2013 to guide the process for CONNECT. We held a strategic planning retreat on January 30, 2014 which included CONNECT staff and 29 members who represented a variety of CONNECT municipalities.

Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto attended the retreat and provided important insight on how CONNECT can be



CONNECT Members Discuss Priorities at the Strategic Planning Retreat

involved in his administration's efforts around intermunicipal cooperation. As part of the background material for the retreat, the consultants developed a 'report of findings' sharing insights gained from interviews with CONNECT funders, stakeholders, members and partners. The findings helped the organization determine priorities and also identified issues in need of addressing and/or clarification. A revision of our mission and purpose statement to bring clarification to what CONNECT does, as well as the development of an action plan to implement the plan is being addressed at this time. The strategic planning process concluded in August 2014.

Our strategic plan is helping us to better understand how CONNECT can add capacity to our member municipalities, how we are perceived by funders, stakeholders and partners and most importantly, how we can articulate what we do and share the successes we have achieved. The development of the plan has been informative for all involved and we are in the process of implementing year one goals.

One major aspect of our plan was the revamping of our mission statement to better articulate our activities, which primarily focus on affecting policy change. Our new mission statement reads:

"CONNECT brings together the City of Pittsburgh and surrounding municipalities to identify common public policy challenges and advocate for collective change on behalf of the urban core."

We measure our success by our ability to:

- ***Advocate for public policy change***
- ***Engage municipalities***
- ***Develop and maintain effective partnerships with stakeholders***

The plan addresses issues of sustainable funding, member engagement, governance structure, mission impact, community awareness and how to work with municipalities who have shown an interest in joining CONNECT (Forest Hills became a member at the April 2015 Congress and Churchill, Oakmont, Verona and Clairton have recently inquired about membership). Our action plan addressed these issues and implementation is currently underway.

Policy Issue Areas

Each 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 111 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 2014 and early 2015.



Kathy Coder of Bellevue passes the gavel to CONNECT's Chair Bill Peduto at the 2015 Congress

Sewer Regionalization

With financial support from the Colcom Foundation, the Sewer Regionalization Implementation Committee (SRIC) was created in the fall of 2013 through a partnership of 3 Rivers Wet Weather (3RWW) and CONNECT in order to implement a process for sewer regionalization in response to the charge of the ALCOSAN Sewer Regionalization Review Panel, chaired by Carnegie Mellon University President Emeritus, Dr. Jared Cohon and administered by the Allegheny Conference on Community Development (ACCD). The Regionalization Review Panel's formal findings recommended that the municipalities within the ALCOSAN service area should transfer "Intermunicipal Conveyance Lines and Wet Weather Control Facilities to ALCOSAN," and charged those municipalities in its "Specific Action Steps" to "immediately initiate an expeditious process to determine how intermunicipal conveyance lines, other trunk lines and upstream wet weather facilities will be conveyed to ALCOSAN."



ALCOSAN Facilities

The SRIC effort has been driven by stakeholders from more than a dozen municipalities including officials, managers, solicitors and engineers; representatives from ALCOSAN, Allegheny County, Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority, non-profits, and private business. Since its inception, the SRIC has worked to facilitate the transfer of approximately 200 miles of intermunicipal pipes, other trunk sewers, and upstream wet weather facilities to ALCOSAN. The intended outcome of this effort is a more integrated regional sewer system that will help ALCOSAN to meet the standards of the Clean Water Act and will ultimately provide our region with a more equitable distribution of the costs to operate and maintain a regional sewer system.

Throughout the SRIC process, the Committee focused on the three-pronged mission of the SRIC:

1. Develop the framework needed for an expeditious transfer of intermunicipal conveyance lines (at least 10" or larger), trunk sewers and upstream wet weather facilities to ALCOSAN, including any proposed wet weather infrastructure included in the municipal feasibility studies
2. Develop an efficient and coordinated consensus process to create incentivized source reduction programs through amended municipal service agreements between the communities and ALCOSAN; and

3. Create a consensus process, including the County Executive and local elected officials with the goal of establishing a regional management system that will allow for the voluntary conveyance of municipal wastewater and stormwater collection systems to a regional entity.

The subcommittees met diligently throughout 2014 and created the framework needed to transfer the multi-municipal trunk lines to ALCOSAN –and while the meetings of the SRIC have concluded, the work on sewer regionalization continues to gain momentum. Throughout 2015 CONNECT and 3RWW will implement a municipal outreach process to engage all 83 of the ALCOSAN service-area municipalities, convene a regional source reduction policy process whereby the municipalities will cooperatively create a source reduction plan that maximizes returns for the region, and oversee the due diligence process of ALCOSAN and its service-area municipalities to aid the negotiations that will result in ALCOSAN taking ownership and operations responsibility of the intermunicipal conveyance pipes, other trunk lines, and upstream wet weather facilities beginning in January 2016.

Sewer regionalization is a necessary component of cleaning up our regional waterways and achieving compliance with the Clean Water Act, and despite the challenges set forth here, the SRIC representatives and its sponsoring organizations stand ready to support the stakeholders and lead the requisite discussions to ensure success for our region.

Infrastructure Coordination

CONNECT Utilities Summit

In an effort to reduce duplication of road repair and to lessen the hardship to residents and businesses, CONNECT held the first-ever regional Utilities Summit on March 12, 2015 with the goal of developing a collaborative partnership between the utility companies and municipalities. At the Summit, nearly 140 attendees, including representatives from utility companies and municipalities, discussed planning processes, established relationships, and had a discussion that set the groundwork for future communication and coordination.



Mark Kempic, President of Columbia Gas Shows the Audience a Pipe in Need of Repair at the CONNECT Utilities Summit

Recommendations that emerged from the discussions included the creation of a common data location for all the capital plans of the governments, authorities and companies, and the means by which those plans can be shared; the establishment of regular face-to-face meetings between parties; the coordination of permitting, including emergency permitting and fees; the development of common permitting and restoration standards; and the coordination of capital priorities and “best plans” across utilities and municipalities.

CONNECT is working to determine next steps in this effort and to establish a plan for future coordination. Stay tuned.

Emergency Medical Services

CONNECT Community Paramedic Program



Launched in November of 2013, the CONNECT Community Paramedic Program has changed the face of healthcare provision in the region, and has established in a ground breaking and effective way to provide in-home care to at-risk individuals that has resulted in massive cost savings for the system. The program trains EMS personnel to provide in-home customized care to residents of the urban core of Allegheny County who are struggling to manage such chronic diseases as diabetes, asthma, and chronic heart disease.

Patients are referred to the Community Paramedic Program by EMS agencies, hospitals, Highmark and UPMC. To date, the program has received close to 700 referrals. The people being

served by this program are the truly vulnerable:

- The average patient is 63.2 years old (oldest patient was 90, youngest was 21)
- Average number of emergency room visits per patient in pervious year was 6.4
- They have (on average) three chronic illnesses
- 70% have at least one mental health issue
- 40% have more than one mental health issue
- 42% live alone
- Many cannot afford their rent, do not have access to reliable transportation and do not have health insurance

One patient stated that in the year prior to becoming a client of the CONNECT Community Paramedic Program they called 911 39 times. A year after their enrollment in the program, that patient has only called 911 twice, which equals an estimated \$55-\$60,000 in reduced health care costs, and a significantly improved quality of life for this patient.

Additional Program benefits have included decreased emergency department and EMS utilization, more effective use of limited EMS resources, better-coordinated care between local social service agencies, and better care and follow-up services for patients relying on emergency services.

The Program was developed after 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, and while the funding shortage has not been resolved, the CONNECT Community Paramedic has made great strides in regards to cost savings and health care provision.

Energy & Sustainability

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 light bulbs with energy efficient bulbs. However due to regulations, they were unable to do so. In order to assist them in achieving this goal, CONNECT advocated for a tariff change

that would allow for energy efficient street lighting to be installed in these municipalities, while also establishing a partnership with Duquesne Light to pilot LED lights in CONNECT municipalities. With the assistance of Penn Future, CONNECT succeeded in the approval of a tariff change by the Pennsylvania Utility Commission which includes the addition of LED and other energy efficient lighting options for municipal streetlights.

Under the settlement that Penn Future argued, Duquesne Light will establish an LED street light pilot program agreeing to install up to a total of 1,500 LED lights per year at nominal lamp wattages of 43 and 106 watts, which are the 70 watt and 150 watt High Pressure Sodium Light equivalents, respectively. The distribution rates for these LED lights will be \$11.16 per month and \$12.82 per month, respectively, down from their original proposed price tag of \$12.16 and \$13.97.

As of June 2015, 12 CONNECT municipalities are participating in this pilot program and have had an average of 28 lights installed. This is a great example of CONNECT bringing a municipal issue to a partnering organization to achieve an objective that benefits the municipalities financially. Moving forward CONNECT will work with Penn Future to assess this pilot program will promote the expansion of the program to additional municipalities.



CONNECT's Sixth Legislative Session

Community Outreach & 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 Penn Future, 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, 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, GTECH Strategies and Allegheny County Economic Development, among many others.



CONNECT Fundraiser 2014

In the fall of 2014, CONNECT held its first “Fundraiser,” at Wigle Whiskey in the Strip District. The event brought together CONNECT members, partners and friends, to celebrate the organization’s accomplishments in an informal setting. The event was a celebration of the hard work of the many organizations and individuals who have made CONNECT the success that it is today.

CONNECT Financials

Since establishing a requested municipal contribution from our member municipalities in 2012, CONNECT has raised more than \$171,000 from our membership to support our work. Since our inception, CONNECT has been successful in raising over \$1 million dollars from a variety of sources and we continue to diversify our funding to ensure long-term sustainability. We are currently in year three of the three year funding cycle provided by our generous foundation partners who along with our municipal members generate the operating revenues needed to support the important work of CONNECT.

2014/2015 Media Coverage

CONNECT continues to garner tremendous throughout in the Pittsburgh region. Below is a sampling of the media coverage of CONNECT's work in the last year. A link to all articles can be found at <http://www.connect.pitt.edu/IntheNews.aspx>

[Pittsburgh-area communities find shared interests at CONNECT event](#)

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, April 10, 2015

[Congress of Neighboring Communities Meets in Pittsburgh](#)

CBS News, April 3, 2015

[Solving county sewer problems will require a regional approach, officials say](#)

Pittsburgh City Paper, April 2, 2014

[Switching on: Installing LED streetlights to save Pennsylvania taxpayers money](#)

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, March 25, 2014

[Group promoting cooperation between Pittsburgh, neighboring towns wants to keep Aspinwall in loop](#)

Aspinwall Herald, March 19, 2014

[McNeilly Avenue, split between Dormont and Pittsburgh, set for upgrade](#)

Pittsburgh Tribune Review, February 19, 2014

[Promise of LED grabs attention of Allegheny County Communities](#)

Pittsburgh Tribune Review, February 12, 2014

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.