

CONNECT Economic and Environmental Development

Launch meeting

Thursday | October 10, 2019 | 1PM
Dormont Rec Center | 1801 Dormont Ave



Municipal Attendees: Bill Stout, Millvale; Darrell Rapp, Swissvale; Brittany Reno, Sharpsburg; Patty DeMarco, Forest Hills; Ben Estell, Dormont; Kyle Thauvette, Collier; Ian McMeans, Mt Lebanon

Other Attendees: Jim Sloss, Duquesne Light; Eric Giles, Covestro; Holly Stefanski, Covestro, Melissa Trbovich, Covestro; Jenna Caputo, Covestro; John Werling, WIN, LLC; Alyson Fearon, Allegheny Land Trust; Kinsey Miller, Tree Pittsburgh; Ashley DiGregorio, PRC; Curt Conrad, Pittsburgh; Alicia Carberry, Pittsburgh; Justin Stockdale, PRC; Jim Price, Sustainable Pittsburgh

GSPIA Capstone students: Ally Walker, Zixuan Dong, Chang Xu, Lingzi Liu, Fan Chu

CONNECT/GSPIA Staff: Lydia Morin, CONNECT; Edward Bakos, University of Pittsburgh; Tess De Jong, CONNECT

Roundtable Goals for the Day: To look for ways to partner, to encourage others' projects, to learn how to enhance our own projects, here to support people/organizations working on these issues, here to learn more about how to get rid of our trash, to learn what other people are doing, to hear other municipalities' other top priorities, to become better educated to help our residents better.

Reviewing the scope of the working group:

- What issues/projects are in the phases of Exploring, Monitoring, and Implementing?
- We are spending the most time on recycling today because it is new to CONNECT but has risen to such a high priority
- 7 municipalities are participating in ICLEI - we could be doing more things like this with more forethought/collaboration across CONNECT
- Recycling Partnership (national nonprofit) has a similar inventory/tracking tool that could be useful if we could leverage GSPIA/student power similarly, they want to work with us

Recycling Briefing from Patty DeMarco, Forest Hills:

- The unintended consequences of convenience
- Pittsburgh is the center of a lot of green chemistry, and this is a very profitable field we should take seriously
- Remove single use plastics, increase stream purity and educate consumers
- Municipal/authority management of MRF and incentivize reuse
- Wishcycling – putting things that are not recyclable into the recycling and hoping so badly that it will be recycled (when in fact it contaminates the stream)
- The ethics of using something that will last for centuries for only 12 minutes – the structure and function of the item to not align

- Chemicals are being produced in large quantities without fully knowing the long-term effects. Put the pressure on producers to prove it is safe rather than consumers to prove they were hurt.

Recycling Briefing from Jim Price, Sustainable Pittsburgh:

- The Straw Forward campaign got people realizing how much plastic they actually use without thinking about it
- At the same time single use plastics were becoming more obvious, the recycling market was crashing. We also learned how much “recycled” material was actually going into the trash. The public became more engaged, and it’s public awareness that really turns the tide on an issue
- We are at the top of the 3rd largest water basin in the world; what we put in our water affects a big area
- The market for single-use plastic alternatives needs to grow
- Look for a Google Drive folder with a lot of information to be shared with our partners (not public)

Recycling Briefing from Justin Stockdale, Pennsylvania Resources Council:

- PRC just turned 80! They work at the intersection of municipalities, citizens, and industries, so this CONNECT E&E working group is a sweet spot for them
- What is recyclable is not intuitive. They try to solve challenges for residents such as glass collection and hard to recycle items
- The numbers on the bottom of a container are basically meaningless – to be really recyclable, it needs to stay in the market, which means it must be demanded. If no one wants it, it’s not recyclable.
- To keep an item in the recycling cycle/market, all parts of the cycle must be filled, from hauling the item away, changing the item, selling it and then having someone rebrand it to sell as a new item
- Everything in the recycling industry is privately owned, which means at the end of the day it is profit based. This will affect what can be recycled
- Thinking into the future: What would an independent authority look like that is able to make big decisions?
- I hope the vision of collaboration among municipalities continues to grow, as we need programs that work for the whole region or what’s the point?
- *Comment: It costs my municipality the same amount to recycle my residents’ glass as it does to recycle glass from all of my neighboring municipalities, because I’m charged by the bin. We don’t ID, so my residents only make up a fraction of the people who come to our recycling events. This just goes to show that we need to look at it from a more regional level.*

CONNECT Capstone Project Update by GSPIA Students:

- They gave their planned deliverables and asked the members and partners for feedback and collaboration. Fine tuned the survey to be sent out to members
- International examples of recycling best practices, and models from the U.S. as well
- Paper is the most recycled material, plastic is the least
- We are trying to get a baseline assessment of where we are as a region now so that we can better understand how to improve

Covestro SkillShare Program

- Doing a lot of plastic research and testing right now
- How can you change plastic pollutants into other things?
- Are there ways to quickly break down plastics? Can we make the molecules in them easier to break apart?
- Our job/goal is not necessarily to come up with ways to reduce plastic, but we are finding through research that you really do have to stop it at the source

Concluding thoughts:

- “Getting this feedback from industry is exciting, sometimes we municipalities can feel like we have no control. I’m excited about this dialogue because there’s no other way to let you know that we all have this shared problem of trash piling up.”

Adjourn 2:47pm