

COUNTY TRANSPORTATION IN THE NEWS MAY 2016 – FEBRUARY 2017

Authority selects company for possible terminal design work

24 May 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

By ANNE REINER

Stewart-Amos Steel Inc., of Harrisburg, has been selected, at \$45,000, to create structural steel designed for the new Williamsport Regional Airport passenger terminal.

During a special meeting Monday afternoon, the Airport Authority approved just the design work for the project, not the actual construction. Stewart-Amos is one of two companies bidding for the construction of the project, but while it is the lowest bidder, neither project has been chosen so far, according to the authority.

"This is just to save us time at a later date," said member Atwood Welker.

The construction design work will begin Wednesday and the company will have 60 days to complete the drawings, according to Director Tom Hart.

On June 10, Standard Iron Works, of Scranton, presented a bid of \$1,499,800 and Stewart-Amos presented a bid of \$1,323,000, during a special meeting of the authority.

Later, on June 13, bidding was opened for construction contracts for general trades; fire protection; plumbing; heating ventilation and air conditioning; and electrical work. These will be due to the authority by 1 p.m. on June 8, when they will be opened, Hart said.

The structural steel construction contract will not be chosen until after the June 8 bid opening, according to Authority Chairman Christopher Logue.

The \$15.9 million project is set to begin construction within the next few months and the estimated construction time on the building is between 14 and 16 months, Hart said. Once the new terminal is finished the old terminal will be demolished.

Authority members present were Logue, Welker, Rebecca Burke and State Rep. Garth Everett, R-Muncy.

The next Airport Authority meeting will be at 1 p.m. on June 8.

A modest bridge ceremony marks start of historic highway

25 May 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

It was just a ceremonial groundbreaking for bridge construction that began in December.

But it was actually symbolic of so much more.

Transportation and government leaders held ceremonies Friday for a \$155.6 million span over the West Branch of the Susquehanna River at Winfield.

The work is the first big piece of the game-changing \$669 million Central Susquehanna Valley Transportation Project, a 13-mile limited access highway that will carry Route 15 around the congested Shamokin Dam area.

Anyone who has ever traveled from our region to points south knows that this area carries the only real stoplights between Pennsylvania and Florida.

It's the ultimate commerce-clogger.

An indicator of how difficult the path has been to creation of a way around this albatross is a simple fact: Contraction officially began on the new corridor with a study in 1959 and construction due to be completed in 2024, 65 years later.

The beauty of this highway is that it will allow transport of goods and services above and below it so much easier and inspire business and industry growth because of that. And for those with the itch to get to the many retail and other entities on the Shamokin Dam strip, there will be several easy paths off the limited-access highway.

The corridor is a much larger version of what happened with construction of the Beltway in the Greater Williamsport and eastern Lycoming County area a half century ago. That Beltway, Interstate 180, did not stunt commerce on the Golden Strip in Loyalsock Township, but it did take travel throughout our region to another level of expediency, promoting business growth at several points along the highway.

"This is a keystone for Northcentral Pennsylvania," state Sen. Gene Yaw, a Loyalsock Township Republican who represents much of our region, said.

Don't be fooled by the modest bridge groundbreaking. This is history in the making.

Traffic shifts on Interstate 180 begin
01 Jun 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

Traffic shifts began Tuesday on Interstate 180 east and westbound over the Fairfield Road bridges.

Eastbound, the right lane will be dedicated to the exit and the left lane will be for through traffic, the state Department of Transportation said. It will be opposite in the westbound direction.

The contractor will repaint lines on the road and install traffic separators. The set-up will remain for the next three weeks.

Also, a bridge replacement project began Tuesday along Route 554 on Hagermans Run in Armstrong Township.

The bridge will be closed with a detour along Route 2001 on Elimsport Road and Route 15, according to PennDOT.

The bridge is expected to be open in late August.

Also on Tuesday, single lane closures began along Route 15 and will continue until late September in Lewis Township.

PennDOT will pave the highway and the on ramps to Trout Run as well as complete base repairs, guard rail upgrades and pavement markings.

Site to open during World Series week
03 Jun 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette



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By MARK MARONEY

The new Trade and Transit Centre II building is starting to evolve in time for a grand opening planned for the weeks of Little League World Series, city officials said.

The glass windows are in and the \$9 million building and plaza and streetscape work are moving along under schedule, according to William E. Nichols Jr., city finance director and general manager of River Valley Transit, the building owners.

The first floor is the bus station where passengers will board and exit the buses, as they do at Trade and Transit Centre I along Transit Drive.

Construction has been overseen by Reynolds Construction Management.

The transit hub allows River Valley Transit 12 buses downtown instead of eight and an additional 40 spaces of nearby parking. The transit company continues to purchase natural gas buses as part of its fleet changeover to be a more responsible environmental partner in the state and region, Nichols said.

There will be a restaurant, comfort facilities and bus driver lounge, he said.

The second floor will be occupied by the Uptown Music Collective, a music school that also will be able to perform on the stage outside in the transit plaza.

The third floor can double as a community organizational meeting room.

Outside, a sculpture "Germination" by Roger Shipley, of Lycoming College, will grace the front entrance to the building.

The grand opening ceremony had been scheduled for the July 4 holiday, but officials decided to wait until Little League, Nichols said.

Mayor Gabriel J. Campana also said the grand opening of the building and plaza during Little League would be received by many hundreds more individuals.

City Council is considering whether to add more funding in a proposed \$2.5 million bank financing package for additional streetscape, Nichols said.

Streetscape has occurred in and around the plaza, including on William Street, between West Third and West Fourth streets. Paved crosswalks were installed this spring with more design work planned.

While the project is on the west side of Market Street, the transit portion with buses on Transit Drive is meant to connect the other parts of the city, including the Destination 2014 Liberty Arena project and East Third Street Gateway revitalization, Nichols said.

Timing of it could not be better, with the state Department of Transportation preparing to pave and reconstruct portions of Third Street, between Campbell and Basin streets in 2018.

Efforts are underway by Larson Design Group to conduct a traffic study on the East Third Street corridor, including part of East Fourth Street, to examine if two-way traffic is feasible.

Unfair siphoning

05 Jun 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

The passage of Act 89 of 2013, Pennsylvania's transportation funding measure, was praised in some quarters as one of the most important legislative accomplishments of the last several

decades. Just two and a half years later, the benefits of that act are being derailed as an increasing amount of transportation revenue is diverted for another purpose.

Our state constitution requires that all revenue derived from liquid fuel taxes, vehicle registrations, drivers' license fees and some fines go into the state's Motor License Fund. From there, the revenue can only be used "for highway purposes."

While that pertains to patrolling our highways to assure the safety of the traveling public, the diverted amount has grown to represent a full two-thirds of the State Police budget. It is increasing at an alarming rate and threatens to eventually wipe out the revenue increase that Act 89 brought.

This year, \$755 million of the \$1.2 billion State Police budget came from the Motor License Fund. That represents about 12 cents per gallon in the price of gasoline. For the next fiscal year, the Wolf administration has proposed to increase the diverted amount to \$814 million, which would represent another penny in the cost per gallon.

While no one can cite with certainty the difference between the cost of highway patrol operations and the amount of revenue being diverted from the Motor License Fund, there's a very good chance that it has strayed outside the bounds of what the constitution would permit. Also, as a member of the Act 89 Task Force, I'm very aware that the intent of the legislation was to focus on highway construction.

State Police operations include a variety of law enforcement services. Its website lists the following: major case team, patrol services, forensic services, collision analysis and reconstruction, vehicle fraud investigators, Pennsylvania Criminal Intelligence Center (PaCIC), Amber Alert activations, liquor control enforcement, polygraph, Fire Marshal,

K-9 unit, aviation patrol, drug recognition services, Special Emergency Response Team (SERT), Clandestine Lab Response Team, hazardous device and explosives, equestrian detail and computer crime unit.

Moreover, the decision by some communities to dismantle their local police forces and take advantage of "free" coverage from the State Police drives up costs for the state and creates an inequity for residents of communities who have their own local police forces. They pay twice - once for their own force and again for the "free" coverage provided by the State Police.

Pennsylvania has 2,561 municipalities, and 67 percent receive some level of State Police coverage. A total of 1,274 - barely under half - receive no police coverage other than from the State Police, and the number is growing.

The diversion of highway funding has been a bipartisan undertaking, beginning in the administration of Republican Tom Ridge, gaining more steam during the tenure of Democrat Ed Rendell, still growing under Republican Tom Corbett and reaching an all-time high in the proposed budget of Gov. Tom Wolf.

At its current growth rate, the revenue diverted from the Motor License Fund will reach \$1 billion within the next five years, and the number of transportation projects that Act 89 was intended to fund will be reduced.

Act 89 was promoted with the promise of "A Decade of Investment." Yet, just two years after passage, local transportation officials are receiving less revenue for local projects than had been projected.

The Pennsylvania House has directed the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to determine the actual cost of patrolling highways as opposed to other law enforcement efforts. This study is to be completed by the fall of 2016. The State Transportation Advisory Commission is also looking into the matter.

Until this matter is settled, the General Assembly and the administration should immediately freeze the diverted amount at the current level of \$755 million, and then begin walking it back to the constitutionally appropriate amount.

A sound transportation system is a crucial component for economic growth and a prosperous future. Each billion spent on transportation creates about 28,000 jobs, and an efficient system for moving materials, goods and people raises our quality of life.

Continuing to siphon off revenue that was intended to bring the transportation system up to an acceptable standard will not serve the best interests of Pennsylvania residents.

C. Alan Walker

Chief Executive Officer

Bradford Energy

Former secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development

Project broadens appeal of nature trail, park
07 Jun 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette



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By MARK MARONEY

SALLADASBURG - The trickle of Larry's Creek provided a serene soundtrack to the recent dedication of a fishing pier and a third phase of construction at the Mifflin Township Park and Trail near here.

What began as a project envisioned by the township supervisors after the township bought the land in 1993 has matured to become a tourist attraction, where one can walk a gentle pathway surrounded by the sounds of the creek and view nature.

The nature trail was made a reality by the labor of a Boy Scout, John Terrill, on a quest to become an Eagle Scout with Troop 53.

The park has numerous features such as benches, a children's playground, covered pavilion and athletic fields.

"We started this path with wood chips," said Terrill, who grew up nearby and devoted his time at the park and trail as part of his projects to become an Eagle Scout.

"I cut grass at the township building," he said standing on the wooden fishing pier where one can toss a line into a hole along the high value trout stream running behind the township building.

Larrys Creek is a pristine body of water that beckons the angler to it.

Beside the cleared pathway lies greenery and forests, but it's all within about a five-minute drive from Route 220 and two minutes from the borough of Salladasburg. It's only a 15-minute trip from Williamsport.

To make the project happen, the township invested its own Act 13 natural gas impact fees and received a state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources grant of \$43,500. Efforts by Kim Wheeler, deputy planner in the county Department of Planning and Community Services, wrote the grant.

"The township matched half of the grant," said Renee Shetty, township secretary. The county provided legacy grant funding, she said.

It takes "vision and commitment of the local officials and the community" for this to happen, county Commissioner Tony Mussare said.

Commissioner Rick Mirabito, who spent six years in the state Legislature, said the park is an example of what can be done by the the community. It is what happens when older and younger people join together and people get involved, he said.

It also is an example a community being strengthened by a grant of this type, he said.

Later in the day, state Rep. Garth Everett, R-Muncy, attended to hand out gift bags and winning tickets for door prizes

City Parking Authority looks at long-term plan

16 Jun 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

By MARK MARONEY

Williamsport Parking Authority wants to take part in a strategic planning session to look ahead for the next three to five years and focus on new technology working in other cities.

William E. Nichols Jr., city finance director and general manager of River Valley Transit, said Wednesday the focus likely is to be on the East Third Street redevelopment east of Market Street.

Larson Design Group has begun a traffic survey to look at the potential of two-way traffic routes on portions of East Fourth and East Third streets.

The parking authority staff recently attended a conference in Nashville, Tennessee, which covered a number of issues related to technology improvements to customer service.

"Our purpose is to provide parking and enforce parking law," said Dr. Anthony Cipolla, authority chairman. Technology enhancements play a major role in this, he said.

Already, the authority has pay stations for those parking in the lot outside of the Liberty Arena and lots outside of the James V. Brown Library.

The authority is looking at pay stations for "Lot L," which is on West Fourth Street in the business district, just west of Pine Street.

Panel endorses \$88M transportation plan
17 Jun 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

By ANNE REINER

Planners have endorsed bridge renovations and road improvements for Lycoming County but also are advocating for additional options.

Mark Murawski, Lycoming County transportation planner, presented the 2017-2020 Williamsport Area Transportation Study's Transportation Improvement Program to the Lycoming Planning Commission for endorsement Thursday evening.

"It's one of the most aggressive funding projects we've had in this county for a long time," Murawski said.

The \$88 million plan encompasses 76 different projects throughout the county, including road and bridge work.

Some project construction highlights include:

Work on the Newberry section of West Fourth Street that is expected to be completed in 2019.

Third Street between Campbell Street and Basin Street, also expected to be completed in 2019.

Renovation to the Interstate 220 and Route 405 intersection by adding turning lanes and a traffic signal to help with truck traffic.

Renovation or replacement of the English Center Suspension Bridge that spans Pine Creek in Pine Township. The bridge currently is considered unsafe for emergency vehicles to cross, said Murawski.

The majority of the funding for the project will come from the federal and state levels, while the local level will pay a small percentage of roughly 5 percent, Murawski said.

Once endorsed by the Planning Commission the program will be adopted on July 18 by the study's Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Commission member and Armstrong Township Supervisor Jim Dunn raised an issue with the study's selection process for bridge renovation throughout the county.

Murawski said there are 54 structurally deficient bridges throughout the county, but only five are on the improvement program for 2017-2020.

Dunn said asked that a structurally deficient bridge in McIntyre Township, that is part of the program but sees little road traffic, be replaced with a structurally deficient bridge in Armstrong Township that provides access to the township municipal building as well as to the Williamsport Area Filtration Plant on Mosquito Valley Road.

Murawski cautioned that once money has begun to be spent on a bridge it can't be taken back without consequences, and money already has been allocated and spent on the McIntyre bridge.

The commission endorsed the Transportation Improvement Program with a 6-0 vote with Dunn abstaining. However, in addition to the endorsement the commission recommended the study re-examine the process for selecting bridges for the program.

In light of the lack of movement on bridge renovation through the improvement program, Dunn proposed the commission recommend a bridge bundling program to the county commissioners. According to Dunn and Murawski, this would enable the bridges to be packaged together at a lower rate and would decrease the time of construction.

In 10 years, 33 bridges will have severe weight limit reductions, but the county does not have the \$24 million necessary to make renovations, according to Murawski.

The commission unanimously approved a bridge bundling program that will be presented for approval before the commission at some point in the future.

Voting at the meeting were Howard Fry, Christopher E. Keiser, Carl Nolan, James Crawford, Dunn, and Brett Taylor.

Hearing canceled due to lack of interest
23 Jun 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

A public hearing regarding grant funding for River Valley Transit was canceled due to a lack of interest.

Officials for the city bus and regional bus service said they are being "transparent," but nobody wanted to comment ahead of the hearing and it was canceled.

The hearing was expected to go over the details of a \$1.6 million grant from the Federal Transit Administration for this year and next for operating expenses, said William E. Nichols Jr., transit service general manager and city finance director.

A notice of the cancellation was published in the legal ads in the Sun-Gazette on Saturday.

"The grant application process has been public," Nichols said. It was first reviewed by the Williamsport Area Transportation Study group, an open meeting held routinely, and it is reviewed again each year by City Council during the budget season, he said.

"We still offer to hold a public hearing as another step," Nichols said.

The grant is applied for annually by River Valley Transit. The amount awarded to the transit services is driven by population density served and its performance.

"We are one of only 10 city transportation services in the nation meeting these performance factors set up by the department," Nichols said.

Loyalsock Township to begin river walk connection project
29 Jun 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

By SETH NOLAN

The Loyalsock Township supervisors voted unanimously to approve the first steps in connecting the township to the Susquehanna River Walk at Tuesday's meeting.

Voting were Marc Sortman, Virginia Eaton, Rick Wheeland, John Bower Jr. and Paul Nyman.

The township isn't very accessible to the river walk as it is now, said Bill Burdett, township manager.

"People have to cross Third Street or Route 180 and would almost have to drive if they want to go," he said.

The authorization is the first in a phase project that will create what the township is calling the Miller's Run Greenway Trail connecting parks, residents, schools and other community areas with the river walk, Burdett said.

"We are calling it a greenway because it's centered around Miller's Run," he said.

The first phase of the project will begin connectivity projects at various locations throughout the township leading to the Faxon area, Burdett said.

In other business, the supervisors unanimously voted to sell a 2009 International truck used by the township to Bobby Gerhart for \$40,200.

The next supervisors meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m. July 12 in the township building, at 2501 E. Third St.

Gas, water mains improvements to disrupt traffic on city streets
02 Jul 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

Over the past couple of weeks, UGI Inc., a natural gas company, and Williamsport Municipal Water Authority, have had their contractors out and about digging up streets and replacing aged mains with newer products.

The work continues Tuesday after the July 4 holiday, according to John Grado, city engineer and director of the department of community and economic development.

Much of the work involves replacing the cast iron pipes with more pliable and longer-lasting materials, he said.

Several street projects related to installation of gas and water mains continues starting Tuesday in the city.

The following jobs are expected to begin after the holiday and may affect traffic patterns:

Gas main replacement on Vine Avenue, between Maynard and Rose streets; in the 900 block of Second Street, between Maynard and Park and Race Street, between West Fourth and Glynn Avenue in Newberry.

Water line repair of the berm along Four Mile Drive at Leader Drive.

Streetscape work along William Street, with both lanes open but sidewalk work continuing.

West Third Street down to a single lane outside of the Trade and Transit Centre II building. Traffic open in the right lane only.

Bridge deck replacement on West Fourth Street over Lycoming Creek. Traffic down to a single lane in each direction.

Entrance ramp closed at Maynard Street to the eastbound lanes of Interstate 180. State Department of Transportation officials indicate this project will continue until at least mid-August, just before the Little League World Series begins.

"Gas, water mains improvements to disrupt traffic on city streets" Williamsport Sun-Gazette 02 Jul 2016: A3

Committee approves \$88 million transportation plan
05 Jul 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

By ANNE REINER

The county's \$88 million transportation plan was approved by the Williamsport Area Transportation Study Technical Committee on Thursday and will go on to final approval by the coordinating committee on July 18.

The 2017-20 Transportation Improvement Plan's 76-project endeavor encompasses bridge repair, road maintenance and traffic efficiency across the county.

Since its prior approval by the county Planning Commission, the plan was open for a period of public comment and received letters from two municipalities and the Eastern Shawnee Tribe.

Armstrong Township requested the addition of a structurally deficient bridge to the plan, according to Mark Murawski, Lycoming County transportation planner. The bridge provides access to the township municipal building as well as to the Williamsport Area Filtration Plant on Mosquito Valley Road.

Murawski said that while the bridge is structurally deficient, the project has already invested money in other bridge projects and it would not be cost-effective to cease one of those projects to begin construction on the Armstrong Township bridge. Currently construction on that bridge is slated to begin in 2019, he said.

The committee also received a letter from Muncy Borough requesting the addition of some maintenance to an intersection on the borough's main street to the transportation plan. Murawski said that while a decision was not made by the committee it will look into funding the roughly \$250,000 project.

The committee also received an update from Tom Hart, director of the Lycoming County Regional Airport Authority. The authority hopes to award contractor bids in the next few weeks and "hopefully be breaking ground in the next couple of months."

Concerning
17 Jul 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

Over the past several years, I have seen a concerning trend in the construction industry. I have over 15 years experience in the highway construction industry, I and our workforce are struggling to maintain 40 hours a week while PennDOT maintenance forces are doing more and more work that used to be contracted out to private industry through competitive bidding.

This concerns me since they are not held to and do not practice the same standards in quality and safety as PennDOT requires for private industry or are held accountable to a competitive budget once they start the work they self preform.

In a time where every dollar counts, it seems irresponsible and down right negligent to be having a lesser product be placed at a higher cost when crews with thousands of hours more experience are not given the opportunity to bid/perform the work.

I am not questioning the value PennDOT's Maintenance employees; they are important for snow removal during the winter months, and seasonal maintenance activities (drainage work, culvert cleaning, crack sealing, mowing, sign work, etc.) are important to maintain our infrastructure. They are considered maintenance, which in my mind means maintaining the existing roads not building or reconstructing them.

Paving roads, building bridges, and installing boxes should be left to the competitive bid construction industry with qualified personnel who are required to have industry certifications and have the expertise as well as the experience to give the taxpayers, "the best bang for their buck."

Otherwise, all of the trained men and women working in the private construction industry will be forced to change occupations, and we will be left with crews not held accountable for providing the quality of infrastructure the Commonwealth needs and deserves.

Charles N. Welshans II

Williamsport

\$88 Million area transportation plan approved
19 Jul 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette



MURAWSKI

By ANNE REINER

The final county-level approval was given for an \$88 million "ambitious" transportation plan during the Williamsport Area Transportation Study Coordinating Committee meeting Monday afternoon.

"This is a big day today," said Mark Murawski, Lycoming County transportation planner. "We are about to adopt a very ambitious transportation plan for the county."

The 2017-20 Transportation Improvement Plan includes 76 projects related to bridge repair and pavement improvement, according to Murawski. The county transportation plan will be included with the total 24 plans across the state and final approval from the state level will be given on Oct. 1, at which time construction may begin.

Murawski added that after two years the plan will be reviewed and updated depending on needs that arise and progress that is made.

In order to complete all 76 of the projects, another \$52 million will be needed in a subsequent transportation plan, according to Murawski.

"Once we commit to this, we've got to follow through with these," he said. "It's very rare when you have a (Transportation Improvement Plan) and all the money you have available fully funds everything."

One of the largest projects in the plan is a \$20 million project to renovate the 6-mile Route 220 corridor between Jersey Shore and Williamsport. That section of road is rife with traffic flow issues.

State Department of Transportation secretary Leslie Richards has awarded the county \$20 million in state funds for the project as it is deemed a high priority and the county would not have the funds to complete in one lump sum, according to Murawski.

"We're very grateful to secretary Richards for making that investment in Lycoming County," he said.

Other projects include work on the routes 220 and 405 intersection, to increase traffic flow, as well as 40 structurally deficient bridge improvement projects.

Amendments may be added to the plan in the coming months, as work continues to move forward with the project.

Committee members voting at the meeting were Robert Cronin, Jeff Stover, Bill Nichols, county Commissioner Rick Mirabito, county Commissioner Jack McKernan, Carey Mullins and Sandra Tosca.

The next coordinating committee meeting will be at 1 p.m. on Oct. 24.

Reimbursement for adult probation office salaries sought
20 Jul 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

By ANNE REINER

Lycoming County commissioners approved an application for state reimbursement of over \$1 million in Adult Probation Office salary costs during their Tuesday morning meeting.

The application will go to the state Board of Probation and Parole, however, while the board had at one time promised to reimburse counties 80 percent of salary costs, that number has decreased every year and last year the county only was reimbursed 30.8 percent, according to Mya Toon, chief procurement officer for the county.

"We definitely will get something," Toon said. "It's just a matter of how much."

The Adult Probation Office currently has 23 officers.

A new application for reimbursement is sent every year, Toon said, and each year the reimbursement from the state goes down about 1 percent.

The commissioners also considered approval of two agreements with engineering groups for bridge repairs and inspections in the county.

The first agreement is with Larson Design Group for construction on two bridges, the Buttonwood covered bridge and a small bridge on English Run Road just north of the English Center suspension bridge. The agreement is for \$41,180, according to Mark Murawski, Lycoming County transportation planner.

The second agreement is with Bassett Engineering, in Montoursville, for a year-long contract of small bridge inspection over the next year, at \$126,270, according to Murawski.

"The inspection tells you how the bridge is worsening," said Britt Bassett, president of Bassett Engineering. "We are doing it just because we want to head off future problems."

Bassett also added that often smaller municipalities do not know how bad the bridges are and when they must be fixed.

In other business, the commissioners considered approval of a \$125,000 allocation to the Williamsport Municipal Airport Authority for relocation of its fuel farm and runway work to enhance the ability of planes to land in hazardous conditions.

A quote of \$200,657.72 for Microsoft licensing software on all county computers from CDW-G, a multi-technical solutions provider, also was considered during the meeting. This is the third and final payment for the licensing and the county will re-negotiate prices with the company for a new agreement in the fall, according to Jerry Kennedy, network engineer.

Kennedy also asked for approval for purchase of a large digital scanner, at \$10,575, used to scan large-scale drawings in the Planning and Community Development office.

Present were commissioners Jack McKernan, Tony Mussare and Rick Mirabito.

These and other items will be voted on during the 10 a.m. Thursday meeting.

Plan takes a stab at reducing county highway angst
27 Jul 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

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There probably is not a day when motorists in Lycoming County don't curse the condition of some street, road or bridge.

It feels like our leaders, their decisions and the funding necessary to pay for those decisions can never keep up with the infrastructure needs of the county.

A big step to change that was taken last week, when the final county-level approval was given to an \$88 million transportation plan.

The plan still needs state-level approval expected on Oct. 1 for construction work to begin.

Lycoming County Transportation Planner Mark Murawski called it an "ambitious" plan.

How ambitious?

The 2017-20 Transportation Improvement Plan includes 76 projects related to bridge repair and pavement improvement.

It includes some high-profile work, such as a \$20 million project to renovate the six-mile Route 220 corridor between Jersey Shore and Williamsport, a section of highway rife with dangerous traffic flow issues. Another major undertaking is work on the intersection of routes 220 and 405 to increase traffic flow.

But the plan includes less obvious but vital work on 40 structurally deficient bridges.

And it includes a host of other under-the-radar paving projects.

Of the \$88 million in the plan, \$52 million is needed in a subsequent transportation plan to complete all the work. That is not unusual. Transportation plans are rarely fully funded when originally approved.

The need is clearly there. Hopefully, all the necessary funding will follow.

And one day, just maybe, we won't feel so frustrated when we are traveling local streets, roads and bridges.

Trade and Transit II and Midtown Landing near grand opening
04 Aug 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

By MARK MARONEY

Finishing touches are being applied to the Trade and Transit II building and Midtown Landing plaza.

The grand opening of the \$12 million project at West Third and Laurel streets is set for 11 a.m. Aug. 26, according to William E. Nichols Jr., city finance director and general manager of River Valley Transit. That's also the date of Williamsport Welcomes the World, a daylong activity downtown on the eve of the Little League World Series championship weekend.

While the building will provide additional amenities for bus service and drivers on the first floor, including a small restaurant, the second-floor space will be leased by Uptown Music Collective, an amateur musical school that has about 250 students, he said.

Leading up to the grand opening, those passing by can see how the modern building and the Midtown Landing, as the plaza will be called, are taking shape.

The plaza will provide 35 to 40 spaces of parking, flexible space for downtown outdoor entertainment and events, and an area to showcase artists' work, such as the Germination sculpture by Lycoming College professor Roger Shipley.

Interior work continues on the transit building's first and third floors, with second-floor construction complete, Nichols said.

The surrounding "streetscape" includes new sidewalk and crosswalks, with brick overlay at the intersections, shade trees and period lighting on William, Pine, West Third and West Fourth streets.

A sports walk will be installed in coming months with medallions placed in the concrete featuring the names of those who have or will make their mark on athletics in Lycoming County. This can include athletes, coaches and teams, Nichols said.

This project required no general fund money from the city and primarily was paid for through funds from the Federal Transit Administration and state Department of Transportation, along with money from the state Office of Budget through its Redevelopment Capital Assistance grant program and a donation by the First Community Foundation Partnership of Pennsylvania.

Airport concerns continue to loom for commissioners
19 Aug 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

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By ANNE REINER

A \$2 million agreement was unanimously approved by the Lycoming County commissioners to install water and sewer to a portion of Clinton Township to include the White Deer Golf Course complex.

During their Thursday morning meeting the commissioners weighed the importance of creating public water and sewer systems to entice new businesses to the county against the importance of building a new terminal at the Williamsport Regional Airport.

"It is a tough decision," said Commissioner Jack McKernan. "But we need both."

The Williamsport Municipal Airport Authority has asked for \$2 million in Act 13 funds, collected from gas drilling impact fees for the area. This is money that is essential to finishing the terminal project.

Commissioner Rick Mirabito is not sold on the proposal for a new terminal and the funds that have been previously dedicated to it by prior commissioners. Currently \$1 million of Act 13 funds have been given to the airport, but \$2 million more also was promised.

"We have to make choices between the problems we have and the funds we have," Mirabito said. "I think it's important for us to critically analyze all the projects we are doing, such as the airport and so forth."

Mirabito said that instead of using general revenue funds to pay for public water and sewer systems to create a growth area for the county, the Act 13 funds could have been used instead. This would take the funds away from the airport terminal project.

However, Tony Mussare cautioned against making decisions now that could hurt the county in the future.

"It's very important as a commissioner that we need to not be short-sighted in our decision-making process," Mussare said. "To terminate something as important as the airport could exclude us from many opportunities."

McKernan said that no new airlines have pledged to begin bringing service to the new terminal, but Allegiant Air has expressed interest in bringing a couple flights a week if the terminal were upgraded.

"The authority will come here at some point to address some of these questions," McKernan said.

Much more than bus stop reshapes downtown area
27 Aug 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette
[More](#)

By MARK MARONEY

It is possible to be stunned in a good way.

That's exactly what happened during Friday's grand opening of the River Valley Trade and Transit II Centre and Mid-Town Landing projects.

Just ask Ryan Deeter, who became an instant star at the event. The recent South Williamsport Area High School graduate, sporting a Star Trek uniform, slid down a zipline onto Laurel Street.

Seconds later, when he landed on his feet, Deeter was joined by a select few individuals who'd been handed Star Trek phasers, which they aimed at a large white banner.

The crowd roared as the banner fell and the city welcomed in the first day of operations for a new generation of those using public transportation and viewing public artworks.

As fireworks exploded, sparklers ignited and red, white and blue confetti was sprayed from a cannon, the party-like atmosphere went up a level.

"Williamsport, a proud past and promising future ... for the next generation," said William E. Nichols, general manager of River Valley Transit and city finance director.

Nichols, who is a confirmed 'Trekkie' (a fan of the Sci-Fi television series "Star Trek"), said he wanted to hold the grand opening when the city was on the world stage - during the Little League Baseball World Series.

With music by The Repasz Band and Uptown Music Collective, emcees Gary Chrisman and Ken Sawyer welcomed the guests and those who received certificates of appreciation for their efforts on the projects.

Behind the tent stood the brick and glass building, with a large video screen, showing pre-season professional football action.

The transit facility is a modern bus station and so much more. For those who need bus transport, the facility provides comfortable places in which to wait for a bus to arrive.

On the first floor are climate-controlled rooms and a restaurant named "Paddlewheel Stop," a homage to the Hiawatha paddlewheel riverboat that River Valley Transit operates.

The second floor of the Trade and Transit Centre II is a new home for Uptown Music Collective. The group has a recording studio, office and classroom space and rooms in which to practice.

On the third floor, the Michael Ross Event Center has ample space for holding employee training sessions for the 60 employees working for River Valley Transit as well as rooms for conferences, said Kevin Kilpatrick, planning manager for River Valley Transit.

Midtown Landing supports 35 parking spaces, has an outdoor covered passenger waiting area that can double as a performance stage and sidewalks connecting to the rest of the business district.

Multiple community leaders addressed the day as a benchmark and said it is a destination years in the making.

"This is the culmination of 14 years of planning to revitalize the downtown and there's more to come," said Mark Murawski, county transportation planner.

"Had it not been for several 'lead partners' who began in 2002 with a vision to rebuild the Market Street bridge ... other projects, such as the Church Street Transportation Center, Kohl's and Liberty Arena and Williamsport Green, wouldn't have gotten off the drawing board," Murawski said.

Those "partners" included the city, the county, River Valley Transit, First Community Foundation Partnership of Pennsylvania, state and federal government officials, Williamsport/Lycoming Chamber of Commerce, Our Towns 2010 and Williamsport Parking Authority, said Vincent Matteo, president and CEO of the chamber.

"Credit needs to be given to the public business leaders who pushed us to think harder and deeper of the possibilities of this building and plaza," said City Council President Jonathan Williamson. "This is an asset for what has become an energized and cultural arts community."

"Our synergy continues in the city of Williamsport," Mayor Gabriel J. Campana said of the projects. Campana said the transit facility and plaza are part of the city's Destination 2014 project.

"This is about bringing tax dollars to the area the way it should be," said U.S. Rep. Tom Marino, R-Cogan Station. Indeed, said Nichols, adding that most of the \$20 million project was paid for through Federal Highway Transit funding. Some of the funding was through the state Department of Transportation, the First Community Foundation Partnership of Pennsylvania and local shares.

The dynamic facility is part of the the community's urban design vision, which has resulted in more than \$100 million dollars of public and private investment downtown, Nichols said.

"This almost didn't happen," said Dr. Anthony Cipolla, chairman of the Williamsport Parking Authority.

The facility was going to be a multi-level parking deck, but several area business owners got together and convinced council and the authority it would be better to have "boots on the ground," rather than "tires in a garage," Cipolla said.

Project on state Route 220 begins
02 Sep 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

By SETH NOLAN

After public meetings and an extensive study addressing the stretch of area highway known as the Route 220 corridor, the state Department of Transportation is in the beginning phase of a project to make it safer for motorists.

The Route 220 Access Management Study focusing on the corridor of Route 220 between Route 287 in Piatt Township to the Fourth Street interchange - began in early 2012 and was completed in late 2014.

The corridor sees more than 22,000 vehicles per day and has numerous access points that local residents and PennDOT officials have been hoping to improve for years, according to previous Sun-Gazette reports.

According to PennDOT crash reports, since 2006, the corridor has had as few as 17 annual crashes and as many as 47 in 2011.

While that crash rate is relatively low for the amount of travel, the number of crashes that are fatal or cause severe injury are high and are largely "right-angle" crashes caused when drivers have to pull out onto the road across lanes of traffic traveling in the opposite direction, PennDOT traffic engineer Alan Kelly previously told the Sun-Gazette.

Kelly also said the corridor is a unique challenge among the nine counties that make up PennDOT's District 3-0, not only because it is situated between two interstates but also because of the number of access points.

In addition to the complications with the corridor, traffic in the corridor and the rest of 220 has increased tremendously since the 1970s, said Chris Smith, highway safety specialist for the Community Traffic Safety Project.

"If you look at the increase in traffic, it's normal that you'll have to change to accommodate the increase," Smith said.

During the two-year study, there were four public meetings, said Dave Thompson, PennDOT community relations coordinator.

During those meetings, three main subjects of input were added by the public, he said.

They asked why PennDOT can't install more traffic signals, but national studies show that turning volumes in the Route 220 corridor can be accommodated by other access management treatments which have lower accident rates in other similar corridors. "The addition of signals could increase the accident rate," Thompson said.

The public also wondered why the speed limit in the corridor couldn't be lowered, but repeated studies have shown that changing the speed limit has little affect on most drivers unless there is continuous enforcement, Thompson said.

Many wondered why the money for a big project on the corridor couldn't instead be used toward completing the I-99 corridor, but that project is not on PennDOT's current 12-year plan.

"The main issue with the corridor is that it is what we would call an interstate look-alike," Thompson said. "There are two lanes in each direction with a speed limit of 55 mph and people drive on it as if it's a limited access highway with fewer conflict points and ramps, but here you have people entering and exiting the roadway at many accesses."

During the current preliminary engineering phase of the project, PennDOT will investigate the environmental impacts of construction, said Chris Neidig, project manager.

After an environmental clearance, it will begin the final design phase.

"Once we get that clearance we will develop the preliminary plans in more detail and figure out the sequence of the projects," Neidig said.

Regardless of the sequence and other details, construction will meet objectives determined during earlier stages, he said.

"Basically, there will be no left turns and no crossover traffic," Neidig said.

There will be median crossovers to prevent left turns and a jughandle that will allow motorists to turn around while in the corridor.

The plans for the project estimated to cost around \$16.5 million will be prepared in late October 2018, which will allow contractors to work on the roadway beginning in the early spring of 2019.

With a multi-year project on I-180 that began earlier this year, a bridge project involving traffic shifts, a multi-year project in District 2-0 west of Jersey Shore, utility work wires being installed across the highway several times already this year and other typical road work, the future project will add to the construction on Route 220 and I-180.

But it's all to make the highway safer for motorists, Neidig said.



AIR TRAVEL HURDLES

‘Economic generator’ for county needs secure, modern terminal

By ANNE REINER
areiner@sungazette.com

The Williamsport Regional Airport is a gateway to rest of the world, according to local airport and business leaders. But is it worth investing \$2 million into it?

“One mile of runway allows you to go almost anywhere in the world,” said Christopher Logue, chairman of the Williamsport Municipal Airport Authority. “This airport terminal building is our

exit ramp for people on that aviation highway.”

“This is your county’s gateway to the future for economic development,” authority member Frank Pellegrino added.

The journey to build a new terminal at the Williamsport Regional Airport began in 2012 and has progressed into a \$16 million project. Over the years \$13 million has been raised through grant funds from six federal and state agencies and roughly \$3 mil-

(See AIRPORT, Page A-6)



ANNE REINER/Sun-Gazette

Passengers arrive Wednesday afternoon at the Williamsport Regional Airport and exit the plane onto the tarmac outside the terminal, top photo. Above, security personnel screen passengers preparing to board a flight. Below, planes — Allegheny and United — sit outside a busier terminal in 1965.

Local aviation’s rise and decline

By ANNE REINER
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On July 29, 1929, what was to become the Williamsport Regional Airport was dedicated, but it would be nearly a decade — 1938 — before the first airline service began there.

is not only safe, but a vital necessity,” said a program from the 1929 dedication.

The rise of aviation was evident in the 1920s when local business and government leaders came together to create the Williamsport Airport Co., according to documents provided by the airport authority.

The company, created in

Airport needs modern t

From Page A-1)

lion remains before the project is completely funded.

According to the authority, this money must come from the county level in accordance with the grant money given for the project. The authority is asking the county commissioners to approve the remaining \$2 million of a \$3 million request for natural gas impact fees, generated from the gas industry, to complete the project. These are not general revenue funds, Pellegrino said.

State Rep. Garth Everett, R-Muncy, an authority member, said he is happy the commissioners are asking questions about the project, but hopes ultimately to convince them it is an important investment in the community.

"If we do not do this, we will be forever stuck with a very few flights back and forth to Philadelphia," Everett said.

Without these funds, the completion of the new terminal project would be very difficult, according to Thomas J. Hart, airport executive director.

The importance of a new terminal is paramount, according to members of the airport authority, travel world and business community.

"If we don't build a new terminal, we will not get service," Pellegrino said. "You will stay status quo."

Recently, members of the community and county commissioners have asked if the airport is worth investing money into. While the need for an airport is evident, is it important enough to spend \$2 million on?

A 2011 state Department of Transportation Bureau of Aviation study determined that the airport contributes \$66 million to Lycoming County annually. The airport employs about 253 people and impacts 701 jobs throughout the county, the study reported.

Additionally, roughly half of the airport's customers are businesses, according to David Frey, director of marketing.

"Business travel is the backbone of the use of the airport," Frey said. "It is the economic generator in the community, there is no doubt about it."

More than simply passenger travel, the airport also provides transportation for other business products throughout the community, such as UPS or FedEx services, according to Vincent Matteo, president and CEO of the Williamsport/Lycoming Chamber of Commerce.

"It's extremely important for local business to have a viable airport," Matteo said. "The loss of that airport would be truly an economic blow to Lycoming County."

Without a new terminal, the airport will be unable to process any plane with a complement higher than 50 passengers, due to security requirements, according to Hart. Additionally, other airlines that have considered providing service to Williamsport have been forced to decline because the small terminal is unable to handle the requirements of the larger jets.



"What may have been the first official meeting of a municipal Williamsport Municipal Airport Authority setting the precedent," Williamsport Sun-Gazette on Oct. 3, 1948. The authority was so arrived, the members were en route to Washington to tour the headquarters." The authority was created in 1947 — a year before — by Williamsport, Montoursville and Lycoming County to over-

The Bombardier Dash 8, or regional turboprop airliner, currently is the only commercial plane that flies into the airport. However, American Airlines is discontinuing the model in the next few years and providing a 50-passenger plane instead, according to Julie Johnston-McManus, with Travel World Inc.

Johnston-McManus, while not affiliated with the airport, has held office space there for 22 years. She makes travel plans for individuals across the country and in Lycoming County, but often schedules flights with Elmira, State College or Harrisburg airports instead of Williamsport.

"We've got to keep moving forward if we're going to keep air service here," Johnston-McManus said. "A

city without

A high volume of flights are looking for it, it's impossible at the moment," Johnston-McManus said.

Hart said the airport would not grow without Williamsport. "It's an opportunity for growth between airports," he said.

"It's not a matter of luck they will

By MARK MARONEY

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Local officials recently gathered to unveil the new Trade and Transit Centre II and Midtown Landing, which adds a host of new features to downtown Williamsport. The Sun-Gazette takes a closer look at the new facility and its features in a five-day series. Today we offer the first installment.)

The city's second transit facility was designed with a purpose.

It's meant to provide a central transit facility for this and the next generation and to link them and others to the rest of the downtown, according to William E. Nichols Jr., general manager of River Valley Transit and city finance director.

Trade and Transit Centre II and Midtown Landing represent the second half of Mayor Gabriel J. Campana's plan called Destination 2014, the first of which was construction of the Liberty Arena and Williamsport Green three blocks to the west.

But it goes beyond that, with ideas that date to the lead partners of the earlier part of this century.

"I consider it not only useable for our 4,500 daily bus passengers, but also central to downtown redevelopment," Nichols said.

Ridership increasing

In 1999, the transit system averaged 3,800 daily passengers, he said. "We've seen an increase of 19 percent in ridership."

The system added several routes, and additional routes are planned over the next year and will be served by the facility, he said.

The Trade and Transit Centre I, named after former U.S. Rep. Joseph M. McDade, was not large enough for the bus service's growth and expansion, Nichols said.

"It was built like the Flatiron building in New York," said Mark Murawski, county transportation planner. "Certainly, it wasn't the right fit for a transit service looking to expand its reach to many municipalities and across county lines."

On the transit side, the new Trade and Transit II adds four bus stops.

The first-floor lobby provides additional room for daily operation for bus drivers as well as a seating area for passengers waiting for a bus, particularly during foul weather.

It has a small store, Paddlewheel Stop, a homage to the Hiawatha Paddlewheel Riverboat operated by River Valley Transit, where people may buy a bite to eat or a drink while they wait.

"The Trade and Transit Centre II and Midtown Landing are an important part of a plan ... that includes Liberty Arena and Williamsport Green as one big project," Campana said.

Campana said those projects will provide synergy to one another and help to connect downtown businesses.

It goes beyond serving the bus-riding public and aspires to complete the vision for revitalizing the city's downtown as developed by the "lead partners" at the start of the century.

It improves connectivity throughout the downtown with links to the rest of the city by way of sidewalks and safer pedestrian access points.

"We've added streetscape improvements and I foresee more foot traffic downtown," Campana said.

Linked to nature

Outside, Midtown Landing serves as a showcase for music and public art, including several murals, carvings and sculptures - all linked to nature and the West Branch of the Susquehanna River - and a performing arts stage.

It achieves the goal of connecting the community with the river.

The project went through multiple design schemes through the years, but in every way - either by public survey or designers' sketches - the West Branch of the Susquehanna River has been linked to its evolution, Nichols said.

"I think we always wanted to see the river incorporated in the design for the outer area of the facility," he said.

Many groups and people had a say in the new facility, dating to the redesign and replacement of the Market Street bridge.

It was the cusp of a new century, and the downtown was on the brink of a renaissance. Ideas were swirling about ways to bring business downtown, Murawski said.

Those ideas led to the formation of the Greater Williamsport Alliance in 2001, and a meeting at Lycoming College led to the formation of a new group of visionaries - the lead partners.

Recalling partners

"We met in the room behind the commissioners' meeting room once a month, discussing ways to improve the downtown economy, and to bring in public input," said Jerry S. Walls, then county planning director and a member of the original lead partners. The purpose was to "get something exciting downtown and bring more people," he said.

The lead partners were the county, the city and the Williamsport/Lycoming Chamber of Commerce. Also involved was Our Towns 2010, a nonprofit organization whose goal was to formulate - with community support - a countywide vision, including incorporating art and culture into designs and plans for the future, Walls said.

"The first decision was to conduct a survey, and when it was returned a common response was, 'Fix up the downtown' and 'Reconnect it to the river,'" Walls said.

"We found people wanted to see a reconnection between the city and river," Murawski said, adding that connection was lost since the construction of the levee in the 1950s and Beltway (Interstate 180) in the mid-1970s.

"Two of the things they wanted to see were better recreational opportunities and transportation linkages into downtown," Murawski said. The results of the survey revealed 98 percent of the respondents gave those a high priority, he said.

In conjunction with those concepts, the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership, in one of its first demonstrated projects, pursued the development of a walkway along the river - the Susquehanna River Walk -which was designed to reconnect individuals with the water and its history as well as provide recreational opportunities and linkage to the local economy, Walls said.

Improving transit was, of course, part of the vision and plan, Murawski said.

'Multi-modal'

"We had a mix in the original revitalization plan to move people safely and efficiently and to improve multi-modal connectivity," Murawski said. Multi-modal is transportation language for vehicles, buses, bicycles, airplanes and taxis, he said.

"We needed a new and modern facility that would meet more needs, especially for those who can't afford a vehicle and who look for public transit to save costs or need it," Murawski said.

Another key element missing from the first Trade and Transit building was space to hold meetings, regional conferences or a community room that could double as an emergency operations center, Murawski said.

While a convention center was eyed for the Holiday Inn, that plan presented "complications," he said. The group looked at use of the Masonic building on Market Street, but that fell through as did some other sites, he said.

Changing needs

"We realized at the start of the decade to have a major convention center in town was not supported by market forces," Murawski said.

"Economic drivers are not necessarily fixed in time," Murawski said. "The scope of work evolved based on the changing needs in the community, which is vital in any planning process."

That evolution took in the years when natural gas industries required the city to create additional parking spaces and replace the aging Mid-Town deck.

"It was a challenge because the original plan was for a parking facility," Campana said. The business community said they wanted another destination and attraction, he said.

Campana said the administration received "criticism" about deviating from the parking garage plan.

"We listened to the downtown businesses who would be impacted by this facility and we came up with a better plan, one that is another destination or attraction."

"Sometimes, you have to expect that," he said of the highs and lows of seeing a project to fruition.

For now, the mayor is hopeful these facilities will serve their purpose and generate pedestrian traffic as well as help to improve the downtown business climate.

"New transit facility reconnects with river" [Williamsport Sun-Gazette](#) 25 Sep 2016: A6



High-tech rides

Mobile device app to provide information in 'real time'

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Local officials recently gathered to unveil the new Trade and Transit Centre II and Midtown Landing, which adds a host of new features to downtown Williamsport. The Sun-Gazette takes a closer look at the new facility and its features in a five-day series. Today we offer the second installment.)

By MARK MARONEY
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From helping bus patrons track their next ride to accommodating conference needs, the latest technology is featured in the new Trade and Transit Centre II.



Next month, River Valley Transit plans to launch "My Ride," an application for mobile devices that will provide users with up-to-date bus information.

"My Ride" is going to provide riders with easier access to information, said Skip Cochran, a transit system spokesman. "It will provide 'real time' data, such as where the bus is and when it can be expected to arrive for all routes," he said.

For those who are downtown and waiting for a bus, the new modern building features screens to display information on departure times and arrivals.

The building also features a large video screen outside that staff may use to deliver live feeds, including games of the Little League Baseball World Series or possibly movies.

Also outside, on the lower floor along West



KAREN VIBERT-KENNEL

Board, above, shows information on bus arrival times for waiting passengers at the Trade and Transit Centre II. It is among the technological features to be used in the center. In top photos, passengers sit in the waiting area where another digital board displays bus information.

ty and holding two meetings at once."

The fully-integrated room control system available on the touch pad on the wall or by the users' mobile device or computer is easy to operate. Staff also may be on hand to assist, and a user guide is available, Warfel said.

The building has wireless capability throughout, Warfel said.

Information coming in 'real time'

(From Page A-1)

carts, and anyone with a device can link into the system to connect, Warfel said.

Two video screens also are on the Susquehanna Terrace, an outdoor patio on the third floor that overlooks Midtown Landing.

The touch pad offers users audio control, wireless microphones and those with cords. It enables a conference speaker to use a wireless microphone on his or her lapel, giving them the ability to walk freely around while conducting a conference, Warfel said.

Multiple video sources may be played at once, for presentations to

groups, he said.

Energy saving technology is built into the design of the third floor. The window blinds may be controlled by a touch of the button on the third floor. Lights too may be controlled and are labeled, such as ceiling, chandelier, and the intensity of the light source may be adjusted.

"If there's no movement in the room, the lights go off," Warfel said of the floor, which is equipped with sensors to detect movement and may control climate when the air conditioning and heat it is not needed.

Located just outside of the event center on the third floor is a pre-function space leading to a fully fur-

nished caterer's kitchen, which can provide the heat or cold needed for the caterer to provide food and refreshment service.

The event center offers what Warfel called "room wizards," touch pads that are tied into the main River Valley Transit office. From there, individuals may reserve a room and punch in the desired time and date.

On the top of the Midtown Landing performance stage, which doubles as a bus passenger stop solar panels provide supplemental electricity for use at the Trade and Transit Centre II, or the unused power generated can go back into the grid, Warfel said.

Project reflects connection to nature through artworks

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Local officials recently gathered to unveil the new Trade and Transit Centre II and Midtown Landing, which adds a host of new features to downtown Williamsport. The Sun-Gazette takes a closer look at the new facility and its features in a five-day series. Today we offer the fourth installment.)

By **MARK MARONEY**
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From Roger Shipley's latest bronze sculpture to a series of murals and even a rescued piece of concrete from the old Mid-Town Parking Deck, the new Trade and Transit Centre II and Midtown Landing are rich in art elements.

"Most of the art is representative of the connection to the river," said William Nichols Jr., general manager of River Valley Transit and city finance director.

Shipley's "Germination" is representative of a rebirth downtown.

"The downtown is not the same as it was 20 or 30 years ago," Shipley said. Entrepreneurs are opening restaurants and artists are painting murals and carving pieces to share, he said.

The retired Lycoming College art professor's three-piece bronze sculpture was commissioned by Public Artworks, a sub-committee of the Lycoming County Arts Council, and found a home on a stone and grass landscape in Midtown Landing.

"It's a seed growing, much as the city has expanded in different directions, including its arts community and culinary presence," said Yvonne DiRocco, who, with Laura Flynn, co-chairs Public Artworks.

The committee has been adding pieces of art downtown since Michael Pilato's mural project in 2005, Flynn said. Pilato also created more



SUN-GAZETTE STAFF
Roger Shipley's "Germination," top photo, is displayed at Midtown Landing. Murals abound at the landing and the Trade and Transit Centre II building, including on a building on William Street, above. Inside the building are plenty of historic photos, including the one at middle left. The "Last Infielder" statue, the newest addition to "Bases Loaded," is in Midtown Landing, lower left.

Downtown rocking new home

Project reflects art nature connection

From Page A-1)

murals for the new city development.

The three parts of Shipley's "Germination" put together make up a sphere, the sculptor said.

It is representative of nature's course of erosion in organic material, much of it found nearby and along the river.

"The idea is to have the seed open up on a stone and grass landscape," Shipley said. "It's germinating, a symbol of the regeneration downtown."

Much of the artwork on display here and streets and buildings nearby is reflective of a rebirth, regeneration and reconnection to nature's elements and the river.

"Art and design are important when it comes to planning and taking care of our city," said Judy Dlinisky, vice president of the arts council.

"One thing we need is a strong downtown," she said. "By adding art and design we impact the quality of life, making it a better place to live and do business ... It's important that we have beautiful and shared public spaces because it increases our sense of community."

For muralist Pilato, and his business partner, Yuriy Karabash, creating two murals for the new development was a spiritual journey.

They created "Spirit Creatures," a mural on the east side of the Girard Trust building on William Street opposite the entrance to Midtown Landing, and "Four Seasons," a mural on the east side of the Trade and Transit II Centre facing Laurel Street.

One of those "spirit creatures" is a red tail hawk, which visited Pilato after the loss of his daugh-

ter, Skye, and other creatures representing his loved ones, he said.

Mark Twain is a centennial feature for his visit to the city in 1869, as are environmentalists Bob Way and Bill Worobec, both of whom were instrumental in watershed restoration and Cynthia Bower, an environmental servant more than 40 years, whose hand may be felt by the cleanliness of those living near the Rose Valley-Norfolk Creek watershed.

"Four Seasons" designed by Karabash features animals in their natural habitat in winter, summer, spring and fall.

It also features the Susquehanna Boom, a system of cribs and chain logs on the river that was used to store lumber from saw mills could operate year-round, and tribute to animals lost.

But there's more. The steel silhouette of the river represents a portion of the river that flows within the boundaries of the city from west to east.

Hand-carved artwork by Sue Landerm breathes life into plaques affixed to the new transit building's exterior. The work features images of the Repasz Band and the Uptown Music Collective and elements of the city's transit system.

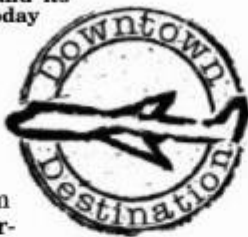
A restored version of Peter "Wolf" Toth's original red oak carving of American Indian Chief Woapalane, which stands at the entrance to Brandon Park for 100 years, is facing the plaza.

To preserve another piece of the past, part of the former Mid-Town Parking Deck's helix, a concrete ramp used to leave the parking garage was saved and used as what Nichols calls "a helix garden."

Partnerships key to future projects

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Local officials recently gathered to unveil the new Trade and Transit Centre II and Midtown Landing, which adds a host of new features to downtown Williamsport. The Sun-Gazette takes a closer look at the new facility and its features in a five-day series. Today we offer the final installment.)

By MARK MARONEY
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A new brand of “lead partners” should form to adapt to new opportunities for the city’s continuing revitalization.

That’s what Mark Murawski, the county’s transportation planner and an original member of a group of lead partners who pushed for developments in 1999 and onward, said he envisions following the recent grand opening of the Trade and Transit II Centre and Midtown Landing projects.

“The original lead partners can play a vital role in bringing in new part-

The Trade and Transit Centre II is all lit up at night. The view above is from the Midtown Landing side. Below, the new transit facility sits next to the Trade and Transit I building on West Third Street.

ners,” Murawski said.

“They had great vision, but not total vision, but were able to adapt the right-size projects,” Murawski said of the original lead partners, a collective of county, city and local officials.

Mayor Gabriel J. Campana agreed that forming more partnerships and continuing to work on plans that were started such as the East Third Street and Park Avenue redevelopment concepts are among his goals.

Campana said the East Third Street Gateway Commission has a lot of ideas in the works, including a traffic study to examine two-way traffic and a gateway entrance to Lycoming College and redevelopment of buildings on Basin Street.

He said he’s leading an effort and partnering with Lycoming County to hold meetings with groups interested in redeveloping Park Avenue between

(See PARTNERSHIPS, Page A-6)



Setting record straight
02 Oct 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

Recently there has been erroneous information, as well as a lack of crucial information that the public should be made aware of in regards to the Williamsport Regional Airport project.

First is the fact that the Dash 8's now serving our airport are set to be phased out over the next three years to be replaced with 50 seat aircraft. Our security screening area only accommodates 40 passengers.

They will also only load via a jetway which our existing building cannot provide.

The baggage system is totally antiquated.

Secondly, while a new terminal does not guarantee more service or lower fares, the lack of a new facility does indeed guarantee that no new airline or additional routes will be added to the existing building. People keep asking for more flights, bigger planes, lower fares, then a new terminal must be built.

As a travel agent for over 35 years, I would like to express how important this project is to our entire area, whether you travel or not.

We handle air arrangements for Susquehanna Health Systems, as well as several major corporations in our region. We fly in physicians, surgeons and top recruits for job interviews.

Let me assure you they will not be taking positions in a town without air service.

This also goes for any new industries scouting locations for new facilities. Not to mention a number of senior citizens for whom driving to another airport is no longer an option.

I am concerned that some of the county commissioners do not seem to understand how vital this New Terminal is to everyone in Williamsport and all of Lycoming County.

A city without air service is not a city, it's a town. Please contact Rick Mirabito, Jack McKernan and Tony Mussare to voice your support for this project.

The new Williamsport Regional Airport is a must if we want to see Williamsport and Lycoming County thriving for the next several decades.

Julie Johnston McManus

Cogan Station

County officials: Partnerships vital to continued growth

09 Oct 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette



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By ANNE REINER

One of the largest and most comprehensive economic plans for Lycoming County is on its way to fruition, and the county Planning Department says its success is due to partnerships.

"The day has come and passed where municipalities can do these things on their own," said Kurt Hausammann, director of the county Planning Department.

Members of the planning team visited the Williamsport Sun-Gazette offices recently for an editorial board on the progressing comprehensive plan and the final steps before its completion.

The comprehensive plan is nothing new, but the most recent version, an update of the 2006 plan, is the best one the county has ever had, according to Mark Murawski, county transportation supervisor.

The 2006 plan, while thorough, lacked implementation, Murawski said. He added that it failed to anticipate the 2008 gas industry boom when an influx of Marcellus Shale industries and workers came to the county.

The update relies heavily on public input and partnerships among key municipalities and will be ready to implement next July, he said.

Work to create it began in September 2015 with a series of public meetings in key growth areas of the county, including Trout Run, Hughesville, Jersey Shore and Williamsport.

Staff of the county planning department looked at areas for growth in the county as well as in specific communities. Six growth areas were identified. They are the Greater Williamsport Area, Lower Lycoming Creek, Montoursville/Muncy, Muncy Creek, Route 15 south of the city, and the Route 220/Interstate 99 corridor west of the city.

Outside of those areas are three rural planning areas, according to Megan Lehman, lead planner. Those areas have been dubbed East, North Central and West.

Besides growth areas, 15 key issues were outlined by the planning department, with issues varying in importance from one area of the county to the next, Lehman said.

Additionally, the planning department will also decide what projects are big enough for the county government to take on, rather than leaving them to the individual municipalities. So in total there are seven comprehensive plans, one for each of the six growth areas and one for the county, Hausammann said.

The community's involvement through public meetings that began a year ago and an online survey in the past two months helped to shape the plan's priorities and "give elected officials more confidence in making decisions," Murawski said.

The online survey conducted in August and September showed which issues local people believe are the most pressing. The top issues were identified as education and jobs, crime, roads and bridges, parks and downtowns, according to Lehman. Over 1,100 people from across the county completed the survey, she said.

Community involvement through the meetings and the survey was important, Murawski said. "If you don't have buy in you're doomed to fail," he said.

Public involvement has made this plan "bigger than us," said Kim Wheeler, deputy director of planning.

Once the plan is finished, a plan for implementation will be outlined for each of the municipal partnerships. Those partnerships will benefit from the assistance of team members from the planning department who will help those in each growth area achieve certain "mile markers" that will be laid out for them.

Wheeler said the planning department is in the process of outlining priority projects for each growth area and how to implement them.

Funding for the various projects outlined in the plan will be made partially through county funds, but they also plan to seek state and federal grants, according to Hausammann.

He added that grant funds are more likely to be awarded to the county if an in-depth comprehensive plan is created with input from throughout the county.

"County officials: Partnerships vital to continued growth" Williamsport Sun-Gazette 09 Oct 2016: A1

Comprehensive plan update sets table for county future
09 Oct 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

The update of the Lycoming County comprehensive plan is the product of exhaustive public outreach and strict planning principles over the past 18 months.

"This plan will not sit on a shelf. It's all about the implementation," Mark Murawski, county transportation planner, said.

We've heard that many times before with government reports on all levels. But this time, it is clear county officials really believe they have a document that will carry sway in hundreds of public decisions over the next decade.

Their confidence is based on an unprecedented amount of outreach public meetings, government meetings and a detailed online survey with more than a thousand respondents that they believe give this update realistic and practical grounding.

Their research established 15 priorities and recommendations that were custom-fitted to nine areas of the county six of the more populous regions and three rural sectors.

Survey respondents told them education, jobs, crime, roads and bridges, parks and trails, downtown Williamsport, history and the arts and housing are their top seven concerns.

Recommendations have been tailored in the plan to give those priorities the proper attention in each part of the county.

Perhaps more than any single planning recommendation, the professionals found a municipal understanding among officials on the imperative of sharing services, systems and land use priorities in the future.

It's an attitude we have been advocating and hoping to see for years in the name of local government sanity.

That sharing mentality is finally here, out of necessity.

The plan can only give a view of what the future should look like. Correct implementation, with all municipalities embracing vision and practicality, are needed to bring it to life.

The table has been set.

"Comprehensive plan update sets table for county future" Williamsport Sun-Gazette 09 Oct 2016: A4

Plan seeks to engage youth
09 Oct 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

By ANNE REINER

Engaging youth in Lycoming County's economic growth is key to future development, county planners say.

"The future is our youth and if they're not engaged in this in a meaningful way, we're missing out," said Mark Murawski, recently promoted to transportation supervisor for the county Planning Department. "We're missing out on their ideas and they're missing out on being a part of their community."

The new comprehensive plan has increased its focus on youth by creating an online platform on its website with links, graphs and maps outlining the plan. Additionally, an online survey conducted in August and September was meant to bring in a younger audience that would be less likely to go to a public meeting, according to Megan Lehman, lead planner.

A total of 1,132 people responded to the survey and roughly 21 percent were 35 and under, according to Lehman, who added that the survey participants ranged from ages 15 to 95.

The Planning Department also devoted a day in the spring to youth engagement, according to Kim Wheeler, executive director of planning.

Six school districts participated in the Youth Plan the Future day, when they learned about the planning process and even gave some ideas for what they wanted to see in the future.

"They want to be incorporated into the infrastructure of decision-making," Wheeler said. "They think that the older generations don't think they have something to offer."

"And they wanted us to know they do," added Kurt Hausammann, director of the Planning Department.

Lehman said one of the goals of the plan is to create a community that youth will want to invest in and where they can create a life.

Parking Authority office move on target
20 Oct 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette



Bookmark

Mark Maroney

Williamsport Parking Authority continues to plan a move to a redesigned and build out section of the West Third Street garage just down the street.

"We're still moving ahead with the project estimated to cost about \$350,000," said Dr. Anthony Cipolla, authority chairman during an authority meeting Wednesday.

An estimate for the architectural renderings for the rebuild is \$19,665, down from an original estimate of \$22,000, Cipolla said.

"The next step will be to produce a working drawing and receive a cost analysis," he said. If all goes as planned, the authority could be in the garage by the end of next year, he said.

Authority members were given copies of the 2015 audit, which showed a clean audit and the authority able to generate \$200,000 of income that was put back or reinvested into surface lots, said William E. Nichols Jr., city finance director and general manager of River Valley Transit.

Income in 2015 was \$917,000, while expenses were \$204,000, Nichols said.

"Our income was up because of our efficiency with our operating expenses," Cipolla said. "The \$200,000 was used to improve the quality most of the 15 surface lots for customers," he said.

Rates for parking remain the same at \$40 a month for surface lots, or \$50 for reserved spaces on surface lots, according to the authority rate chart.

For customer convenience, the authority discussed placing cover over the pay stations to protect individuals from inclement weather.

Additionally, the authority is looking at mechanical changes to the pay station at the Midtown Landing to make it acceptable for those wanting to insert dollar bills. The machine on William Street takes tokens, credit cards and coins.

COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Will Cloud 9 be in the new terminal?

By ANNE REINER
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A new terminal for the Williamsport Regional Airport may not include space for Cloud 9 restaurant, a current staple at the airport.

"Are we a restaurant that happens to have an airport, or are we an airport that happens to have a restaurant?" asked Thomas Hart, airport executive director. "Obviously we are an airport."

Hart said that over the past few years the Williamsport Municipal Airport Authority has had to make some difficult decisions, one of them being changing the design of the new terminal from a two-story to a single-story structure. This drastically limits the space available to Cloud 9 and could mean the restaurant is moved out of the airport.

Commissioners Tony Mussare and Rick Mirabito encouraged the authority to consider honoring the agreement with the restaurant as an existing lease is still in place.

Members of the Daniele family, who own the restaurant, previously said the space that will be provided to them with the new structure is not enough to sustain the type of business they have built at the airport in the past.

Regardless, Hart said, the authority "saved a lot of money by not building a two-story building." He added the goal of the authority is to keep the costs of the terminal at \$16 million, and in order to achieve this, the second floor, and space for the restaurant, had to be cut.

The new terminal will have concession area and should Cloud 9 decide the space is not sufficient, the authority would need to buy the owners out of the remainder of their lease, Hart said.

"The building is being designed for expansion in the future," Hart said, leaving room for the possibility of a full-sized restaurant in the future, should there be a demand.

Commissioners OK \$2M for new terminal
21 Oct 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

Anne Reiner

The Lycoming County commissioners on Thursday unanimously approved \$2 million in funds for the Williamsport Regional Airport terminal project.

"It sounds like we've all come to an agreement on moving forward with this," said Commissioner Jack McKernan. "We just have to figure out the logistics of funding it that is the best option for the county."

"We have been putting our heads together on this problem," said Commissioner Rick Mirabito, who was originally opposed to giving the funds. "We have worked very hard to come up with a solution rather than just sticking to a position."

The source of the funds is still up for debate as McKernan and Mirabito would like to take out a state loan, while Commissioner Tony Mussare is in favor of taking it all out of the county's gas drilling impact funds from the state, as originally planned.

"I don't want to leave debt to our children's children," Mussare said. "We have the money in Act 13 (gas drilling impact funds) ... and we should use that money, and not borrow more."

Mirabito and McKernan said they are concerned about the money currently available in the county's general fund and a deficit projected by the county Fiscal Department of more than \$4 million by the end of 2017.

McKernan said he could have a change of heart if the county is able to cut enough costs over the next year to nullify the projected deficit.

As it is, McKernan is in favor of keeping \$2 million of the gas drilling impact funds in the county account and getting the money from a different source, so as to spread it out over 10 years at a fixed interest of 1.75 percent. The fund balance would deplete by \$200,000 per year over the next 10 years, rather than \$2 million in the first year, he said.

Mirabito said a decision should be made on where the money will be drawn by the end of the year.

Tom Hart, executive director of the airport, reiterated that building a new terminal does not guarantee more airline service, but it will increase the chances of getting another provider in addition to American Airlines.

While the terminal project has continued to progress at a slower rate, the approval of the funds means the project will go out for bid in December or January, and Hart hopes construction will start in March.

It may take up to two years before the terminal is finished, Hart said.

The next commissioners meeting will be at 10 a.m. on Tuesday.

State allocates \$1.3M for 2 area projects

Gov. Tom Wolf and state Department of Transportation Secretary Leslie S. Richards recently announced that 37 highway, bridge, bike and pedestrian projects will receive \$40 million in Multimodal Transportation Fund grants from PennDOT.

“Communities across Pennsylvania rely on infrastructure improvements to support economic growth and attract new residents and businesses,” Wolf said. “These projects support improved transportation for all residents, whether they walk, bike or drive.”

In northcentral Pennsylvania, two projects will be funded in Lycoming and Clinton counties.

The Armstrong Township Board of Supervisors in Lycoming County will receive \$95,000 for roadway

construction along Mosquito Valley Road that will improve structural stability, safety, and pavement drainage and safely provide for multimodal uses.

In Clinton County, \$1.225 million will be given to Wayne Township for the reconstruction and widening of Shoemaker Road. The existing road serves two commercial parks but is posted as a 10-ton limit due to the lack of roadway base and narrow width.

“The fund allows us to assist communities with needed transportation improvements that otherwise may not move forward,” Richards said. “This process represents an opportunity for worthwhile local projects to secure the support needed to come to fruition.”

PennDOT evaluated 251 applications totaling more than \$282 mil-

lion and made selections based on safety benefits, regional economic conditions, the technical and financial feasibility, job creation, energy efficiency, and operational sustainability.

The Multimodal Transportation Fund was created by Act 89, enacted in November 2013, Pennsylvania’s far-reaching transportation funding plan. For the first time, transit, aviation, rail freight and pedestrian and bicycle modes obtained dedicated sources of funds, putting the modes on a firmer footing for future initiatives.

For more information about the program, including the application form, visit www.penndot.gov and click on Multimodal Transportation under the “Projects & Programs” button.

County gives \$2M to airport

Commissioners make correct decision to preserve airport

The Lycoming County Commissioners correctly decided last week to approve \$2 million in funding for the Williamsport Regional Airport terminal project.

The funding was essential for the modernization of air services out of the airport.

Without that modernization – set to start in March – the county might as well get out of the air services business. As it stands now, the local airport can barely compete with other regional airports.

With modernized services, the local airport may be able to snag a second carrier, improving choice and pricing for local air travelers, both individuals and businesses.

The tougher decision still remains for the commissioners: Where will the \$2 million come from?

Natural gas drilling impact fees have been the previously designated source for the funds. But it's worth pointing out that taking \$2 million out of that fund next year to pay for the airport work would limit use of impact fees for a host of other worthy causes in smaller municipalities throughout the region. In most of those cases, the impact fees remain one of the few discretionary sources of income.

On the other hand, should the county choose to take out a loan to pay for the work, it would add an annual cost that the county can ill afford, with projections of a \$4 million deficit at the end of 2017.

It's worth noting that stretching the loan over 10 years at a 1.75 fixed interest rate would keep the loan repayment at a reasonable amount.

In a perfect world, the county would loan the money, freeing up the impact fees for dozens of uses throughout Lycoming County, and proceed now with spending cuts over the next 18 months that could significantly cut into the projected deficit at the end of 2017.

The commissioners at least started by correctly deciding to make the airport an asset rather than an archaic embarrassment.

TRANSPORTATION GROUP OPTIMISTIC

11 Nov 2016 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

Anne Reiner

A new president will mean a "significant change" in transportation infrastructure throughout Lycoming County, according to local transportation experts.

"With elections come new ideas and new opportunities," said Mark Murawski, transportation supervisor for the county, at the Williamsport Area Transportation Study Transit Advisory Committee meeting Thursday afternoon at the new Trade and Transit II building on West Third Street.

President-elect Donald Trump highlighted infrastructure in his very first speech after winning the election, likening the United States to a third-world country in terms of its transportation infrastructure.

"There is no doubt about it that we have been under-investing in infrastructure for years," Murawski said. "Are we ready and will we be able to take advantage of opportunities coming as early as next year?"

Murawski said that the county has projects ready to go as new funding opportunities and federal investments become more likely. Projects such as a new terminal at the Williamsport Regional Airport, renovation on Route 220 between Jersey Shore and Williamsport and multiple bridge renovations across the county.

According to Murawski, the projects are either in progress, or ready to start and would enable the county to jump to the front of the line when money became available.

"We can deliver quality infrastructure projects," he said. "We're open for business."

In other business, the committee gave an update on River Valley Transit's ongoing effort to convert the public busses to run primarily on compressed natural gas.

According to Kevin Kilpatrick, planning manager for River Valley Transit, the buses will use locally sourced gas from the transit organizations local dispenser on West Third Street. The new buses will be cheaper to fuel and more environmentally friendly, he added.

The full conversion of the 29 buses owned by the city transit company, will take between 6 to 10 years, Kilpatrick said.

Additionally, Kilpatrick said a new ride app will be coming soon for local residents to track the transit buses. The app will enable them to see when their bus will arrive at a certain stop, and also will send them text alerts about delays.

STEP Inc's. transportation service is also moving forward with a regionalization effort that will encompass eight counties including Lycoming, Clinton, Union, Center and Northumberland, according to Daniel Merk, agency's transportation program manager.

The next advisory committee meeting is scheduled for April 13.

The city Planning Commission Monday began to review a proposed bicycle ordinance that would make it safer for those on bicycles to navigate throughout the city.

The proposed ordinance includes possible bicycle routes and suggestions for safety improvements that could be designed by engineers.

"If we have a complete streets ordinance, one that includes bicycle improvements and designated routes, the overall safety of bicyclists, motorists and pedestrians will be improved," said David Stone, who was appointed a year and a half ago by Mayor Gabriel J. Campana to coordinate the committee.

Marvin Staiman, commission chairman, said the committee views these progressive ideas as positive and they should be further explored as a means of improving safety for the motoring public, those on bicycles and pedestrians.

Stone said he couldn't agree more.

"What we want to do is get a framework established," he said. *"Part of it is a designated route to connect and build bridges (figuratively) between neighborhoods,"* he said.

"A lot of the neighborhood streets are fine for biking on, but there are places in the city where it is dangerous to get from one area of the city and the other," Stone said. *"That's what the routes are and we want to identify the more arterial routes across town,"* he said. *"That would give the city a means to look for engineering solutions."*

The other part of the framework is a national concept of complete streets, an initiative occurring throughout cities in the nation, one that educates individuals that city streets are not only for moving vehicles, but for bicyclists and pedestrians who have to cross them.

Scott R. Williams, a county transportation planner, said more than 500 people recently completed a survey, the results of which were returned to the county planning department in October. Some 67 percent of those surveyed supported a bicycle route map and 96 percent believe the city should provide infrastructure enhancements on the streets to make it safer for bicyclists, Williams said.

"We can designate the routes," he said. The next step will be to enact in the city ordinance steps to make it safer for bicyclists.

“No. 1, it’s a starting point,” said Mark Murawski, county chief transportation planner. Among the more important facets of the plan moving forward is educational, he said. *“We’ve got to educate both bicyclists and motorists and pedestrians on the rules of the road,”* he said. *“We have to see that the city ordinance is consistent with state law and there is an appreciation and respect for all users of the road.”*

Jerry Walls, volunteer chairman of the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership, said whatever changes occur are to be consistent with the River Towns revitalization efforts.

The city has been designated a River Town and bicycling routes and bicycling amenities are among the goals for river towns.

Active and healthy lifestyles are linked to lowering costs of health care, with many insurance plans escalating, largely due to individuals who choose a sedentary lifestyle, Walls said.

Grant destined for East Third Street gateway

Top News

Dec 8, 2016

Mark Maroney

Reporter

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Two state lawmakers have secured a grant of \$777,395 for a city project envisioned to connect Lycoming College to Old City, Trade and Transit Centre I and II and businesses on Via Bella.

The grant, from the Commonwealth Financing Authority, an agency established in 2004 to administer economic development programs, will be used toward an ongoing downtown project, which is estimated to cost \$2.5 million.

State Rep. Jeff Wheeland, R-Loyalsock Township, and state Sen. Gene Yaw, R-Loyalsock Township, assisted the city in receiving the grant.

The project is designed to improve traffic flow, bicycle and pedestrian safety and to connect the city revitalization efforts, Wheeland said.

“It was very competitive,” he said of the grant application and award process.

“The authority saw the cost-to-benefit ratio of this project. I think it’s very exciting for the city of Williamsport and for Lycoming College,” Wheeland added.

The plan includes a pathway and streetscape improvements for East Third, Basin and Franklin streets, and pedestrian connections at the future Russell Inn Heritage Park and Willow Street, he said.

The inn was the first one established in the city after Williamsport's founder Michael Ross had settled in the community, which expanded into a borough in 1806. The heritage park version is planned to be a steel structure outline of the inn at an outside park at the corner of East Third and Mulberry streets, according to John Grado, city engineer and director of city community and economic development.

"It's not going to be a brick-and-mortar structure," he said.

Wheeland believes the grant will go a long way toward encouraging private investment and helping to address traffic problems that have hindered economic development.

"The connection between Lycoming College and the business community will be a great step in the entire reshaping of the area," he said.

Yaw also was happy with the grant award.

"I'm pleased that the Commonwealth Financing Authority approved the needed funding to help move the Old City, East Third Street Gateway Redevelopment project forward," he said. *"This transportation project will not only be important to our regional economy and safety of motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians, but also improve the entrance to Lycoming College from the south. This project will be a real boost to the city."*

Petersburg Road will get \$308K for improvements

Top News

Dec 8, 2016

Anne Reiner

Reporter

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ELIMSPORT — Petersburg Road, a severely deteriorated road in Washington Township, will receive a \$308,000 state grant for road improvements, according to local legislators.

“This funding is going toward badly needed work on Petersburg Road and will be a help in improving safety and travel for residents,” said state Rep. Garth Everett, R-Muncy. *“I am grateful for all the work that was put into securing this grant.”*

State Sen. Gene Yaw, R-Loyalsock Township, also was an advocate of the project and requested the funds.

“Our community and citizens will be the beneficiary of this important investment,” he said.

The funds come from the Commonwealth Financing Authority under the Multimodal Transportation Fund and will be used for culvert replacement and roadway improvements. The specific improvement will go toward correcting the surface of the road as well as drainage concerns along the roadway, according to Everett.

With the upcoming improvements, the road will be safe for trucks, school buses, automobiles, farm equipment and horse-drawn vehicles.

Petersburg Road is the sole access to commercial businesses, farms and several residential properties in the township, according to township officials.

The transportation fund provides financial assistance to municipalities, councils of governments, businesses, economic development organizations, public transportation agencies, rail freight and ports to enhance communities, pedestrian safety and transportation.

Local projects to get grants from the state

[Top News](#)

Dec 15, 2016

Anne Reiner

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Just over \$400,000 in state grants for parks and recreation is coming to Lycoming County for three projects in Greater Williamsport.

Funds administered by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources were approved after representatives of the county, South Williamsport and Williamsport sent in applications during the past year to support upcoming or ongoing projects, according to state Sen. Gene Yaw, R-Loyalsock Township.

“This funding will assist with the completion of park and other land and water conservation projects,” Yaw said. “Even more importantly, these dollars will generate additional revenues through increased economic, tourism and recreation activities locally.”

Susquehanna River Walk extension

The design phase of an extension to the Susquehanna River Walk will be covered with \$75,000 in state funds, according to Mark Murawski, transportation supervisor for the county.

“This was a great Christmas present Harrisburg provided us,” Murawski said. “You’re going to see more river walk coming in the next few years.”

The funds will be used primarily for the design work of the project and another \$2 million will need to be acquired at a later date to begin and complete the construction work, according to Murawski.

The future costs of the river walk potentially could be paid with grant funds as well, in addition to county gas impact funds. Murawski added that the current river walk was roughly 95 percent paid for through grant funds.

The upcoming project will extend the riverwalk 2.4 miles from Maynard Street to the Susquehanna State Park.

“I think it’s a really exciting recreational asset for this region, and the county is very pleased with the ability to make the river walk even bigger and better,” Murawski said.

South Williamsport Community Park

Renovation to the South Williamsport Community Park now will be made possible through \$75,800 in grant funds and a partnership with STEP Inc., according to Michael Miller, South Williamsport borough manager.

“It is a high level of interest for our residents,” Miller said, adding that the park renovations are part of an effort to bring in varying age groups in the community. “We’re trying to address all ages and demographics.”

The work on the park will include renovations to the parking lot, construction of a pedestrian walkway and installing fitness stations.

Additionally, Miller said the park is a destination for many people in the county, not just residents of South Williamsport.

“It’s a smaller part of our budget, but it’s a major interest to our people which is why it’s great to bring that support in,” Miller said.

Brandon Park

Set to receive the largest portion of grant funds, Brandon Park will get \$250,000 for further development to the park including increased lighting, a natural play area for kids and pedestrian walkways, according to John Grado, director of Community Development.

The total project is estimated to be roughly \$500,000, according to Grado. The remaining funds will be taken out of the Community Development Fund, he said.

A recent survey showed that lighting and security were key aspects of the park where residents wanted to see improvement, Grado said. He added that construction on the parking lot would increase handicap parking and connecting the pedestrian walkways to the parking lot would make more of the park handicap accessible.

The children's nature play area will be located where the park pool previously was located and filled in, according to Grado.

Renovation to the tennis courts and increased stormwater control measures also will be included in the upcoming development. Grado added that the current project is set to be completed by June 2018.

In addition to Lycoming County, state funds also were approved for park and recreation projects in Bradford County, set to receive \$141,000, and Union County, set to receive \$250,000 for further development of Kidsburg Park in Lewisburg.

With grant, East Third Street gateway gets close to reality

Editorials

Dec 21, 2016

Revitalization of the commercial district in the eastern extreme of downtown Williamsport and a connection to the Lycoming College south entrance has been a dream of city leaders for a long time.

It's getting closer to reality.

The latest tangible step is a \$777,395 state grant that can be used to connect Lycoming College to Old City, trade and Transit Centre I and II and businesses on Via Bella.

The ongoing downtown project carries a \$2.5 million price tag with it, so the grant amounts to about a third of the needed financing.

The project would dramatically transform the southeast corner of Williamsport, with stated goals of improved traffic flow, bicycle and pedestrian amenities and safety improvements and a host of revitalization projects.

The plan includes a pathway and streetscape improvement for East Third, Basin and Franklin streets, and pedestrian connections at the future Russell Inn Heritage Park and Willow Street.

The Russell Inn was the first house built in Williamsport.

The log structure was built in 1786 by James Russell and 11 years later, in 1797, hosted the first courthouse in this frontier village laid out by Michael Ross.

In 1797, there were only three houses — all log — and it would not be until 1806 that Williamsport was incorporated as a borough.

The heritage park will feature a steel structure outline of the historic inn at its original site, the corner of East Third and Mulberry streets, a prime but vacant downtown parcel for years.

The cherry on top of this development sundae is the physical connection that will emerge between Lycoming College's south boundary and the business community in that section of Williamsport.

That will, in turn, open up all sorts of economic opportunities.

These are all great ideas full of practical vision. But money is the fuel necessary to turn them into reality.

With this grant, the drivers of this project have the collateral to transform ideas into physical development.

It remains to be seen where the rest of the money is going to come from, but the ideas and the location and the potential speak of a private investment opportunity.

HUGHESVILLE BRIDGES TO BE REPLACED IN 2017

HUGHESVILLE — An open house for the replacement of two bridges was held at the Hughesville Area Public Library Wednesday afternoon.

The bridges, on Dark Hollow Road and Green Valley Road, both about 3 miles east of Hughesville, were deemed structurally deficient by the state Department of Transportation and are being replaced under the Rapid Bridge Replacement Project, spearheaded by PennDOT in conjunction with Plenary Walsh Keystone Partners.

Construction on the Green Valley Road bridge is expected to begin on March 15 with the bridge opening by May 29. The Dark Hollow Road bridge replacement is expected to begin April 1 and be completed by June 15. Both roads will be closed with detours for construction.

“Nobody wants a road closure,” said Andy Dressler, the traffic and public information coordinator for the project. *“But (construction) takes less time this way.”*

The bridges are two of 558 being replaced through this project, which is expected to be completed by the end of 2017. More than 150 bridges have been completed since construction began in June of 2015.

“As far as the schedule, it’s pretty good,” Dressler said. *“It’s hard to tell because we didn’t start 2017 yet, but things are moving right along.”*

So, how does the company expect to finish another 400 bridges in one year when it took one and half to finish 150?

Throughout 2016, Plenary Walsh spent a lot of time waiting for bridge supplies as well as construction, environmental and other permits and clearances. Those necessities all are ready to go for 2017, Dressler said.

“It’s pretty fast-paced, that’s for sure. It’s a big goal,” Dressler admitted. *“But now the bridges are just waiting to be built.”*

If weather or other problems do persist, the project’s contract does allow for building in 2018.

Two more bridges are expected to reopen in Union County today, on Crossroads Drive just outside of Lewisburg, Dressler added.

Construction projects will be put on hold through the holiday season, however, and won’t resume until mid-January.

Dressler addressed the low attendance he’s experienced at the several open houses he’s held for the bridge replacement project in Lycoming and other nearby counties.

“In this area, we really haven’t had many concerns,” he said. *“I think they’re just happy the bridges are being taken care of.”*

AIRPORT TERMINAL A KEY DECISION

Perhaps one of the most tumultuous decisions of the year, the Lycoming County commissioners agree that dedicating \$2 million to a new airport terminal ultimately was the right one.

“I think we made the right decision,” Commissioner Jack McKernan said.

Commissioner Tony Mussare agreed, but added that it took a long time to get the entire board on the *“same page.”* He referred to his fellow commissioner Rick Mirabito, who was on the fence about giving the money for some time.

The allotment of funds to the new Williamsport Regional Airport terminal originally was promised years prior by a different board through a verbal agreement with the Williamsport Municipal Airport Authority. At the time, \$3 million was promised from natural gas impact fees, and \$1 million was given.

The authority came to the commissioners in 2016 to ask for the remaining \$2 million and were met with hesitation from some of the new members, primarily Mirabito.

“We don’t necessarily have all the cash to give away,” Mirabito said.

In the years since the money originally was promised, the county’s financial situation changed, according to Mirabito.

The commissioners deliberated their decision for a number of months, opening the conversation to community members and bringing in the airport authority to give a public presentation to show the benefits a new terminal would include.

The presentation highlighted the airport’s need for a new terminal, stating it had outgrown its current building and that due to the limited size in the security holding area the airport had no chance of bringing in additional airlines with larger jets to the airport.

Thomas Hart, executive director of the airport, said that according to a study conducted by the state Department of Transportation’s Bureau of Aviation, the airport provides \$66 million in economic benefits to the county each year. This is not only done through personal travel, but also primarily through business-related use, Hart said.

However, after the presentation and some community feedback, Mirabito did not change his mind until McKernan presented the idea of funding the airport through a low-interest bond, instead of using gas drilling impact fees, as originally promised.

McKernan and Mirabito were hesitant to take the money out of the impact fee funds as that would lower the county fund balance and stop them from using the money for something else.

Additionally, McKernan said if the airport were to be used by community members for years to come, then it seemed only right that future residents pay into it as well.

Mussare ultimately disagreed with the decision, stating that the airport fits the criteria to receive gas impact funds and should receive that money, instead of taking out more debt on the county.

But despite their differing opinions, the commissioners agree that supporting the new airport terminal ultimately will help the entire county, and they hope the revenue they invest will be returned to the community as the airport grows.

MEGAN LEHMAN AND KIM WHEELER: ‘THE POWER TO SHAPE THE FUTURE’

EDITOR’S NOTE: Today the Sun-Gazette continues its sixth annual Person of the Year series. Each day will shine a spotlight on each of the six finalists. On Saturday, the Sun-Gazette will name its 2016 Person of the Year.)

Showing that individuals in the community *“do have the power to shape the future,”* Kim Wheeler and Megan Lehman have spent much of this year reaching out to community members and leadership as they updated the county comprehensive plan.

“I think part of it is inspiring them to realize that they do have the power to shape the future,” Lehman, lead planner for the county, said of ordinary citizens. To that end, it was important to Lehman and Wheeler, executive director of the county Department of Planning and Community Development, to reach out to the community as much as possible while developing the new plan.

The goal, Lehman said, was *“to proactively take that vision of what our community should be and make it a reality, to the extent that it is possible.”*

As leaders of the project, it was an especially daunting task. While both Wheeler and Lehman were well prepared and had a wealth of experience, guiding the county through the creation of a plan that will be a powerful force for change in years to come was not taken lightly.

Jerry Walls, who retired as department director after decades with the county, characterized the job the women have undertaken as *“courageous.”*

“In the context of all the governmental and private-sector dynamics today, it takes courage to be willing to stand in front of a group of citizens and say ‘What do you really think?’ Because you just don’t know what they are going to come out with,” Walls said. *“It takes a level of intelligence and thoughtfulness, which I think both Kim and Megan have, to see where any given comment can best be addressed and make good use of those ideas.”*

But it’s not just the women’s courage that has catapulted this year’s plan into the public eye and engaged a wide range of community voices.

“They are just very personable people,” Walls said. *“They are friendly and just positive in their outlooks.”*

He added that in public meetings they are “*welcoming and encouraging*,” prompting input and asking open-ended questions that invite people to think about what they really want to see changed in their community.

Judy Olinsky, a member of Lycoming Arts and heavily involved in Our Town and the Volunteer Main Street Committee, has nothing but praise for the two women.

“They are wonderful.” Olinsky said. *“They’re young, very smart, hard working and really professional.”*

Lehman and Wheeler’s ability to be open and warm during public meetings encouraged those present to speak and contribute to the conversation, according to Olinsky.

“They’re people that are really good at what they do,” Olinsky said. *“They really care and they work really hard.”*

Mark Murawski, transportation supervisor for the county and a team leader on the comprehensive plan, said this one is the best one yet. He has been involved in three plans since he started working with the county in 1986.

One of its most progressive aspects is the focus on youth and reaching out to the public online, he said.

Lehman, being a young lead planner, *“hit the ground running,”* Murawski said.

“Megan is outstanding,” he said, adding that in addition to her wide array of skills, she speaks the language of the youth and is able to connect with them in a way the planning department previously was not been able to do.

“Of all the plans I’ve been involved with, the youth aspect of this has never been so pronounced, both in house and out in the community,” Murawski said.

Since September of last year, Wheeler and Lehman have spent a great deal of time in community outreach, presenting town hall meetings, compiling in-person surveys, meeting with municipal officials and conducting online surveys.

As the leader of the effort, Wheeler learned quickly that *“I couldn’t be part of everything.”* She had to trust her team and let each member use his or her own unique skills to contribute to the plan, which has involved the entire planning department.

The 2016 plan is substantially different from previous comprehensive plans. In 2006, the plan was handled, to a large extent, by an outside contractor. While that may have taken some of the work off the shoulders of the county staff, Kurt Hausammann, department director, said that ultimately the planners are the ones who know the county best.

“Because we are doing this differently, it makes this plan infinitely more challenging,” Wheeler said.

Additionally, keeping the plan in-house substantially reduced the overall cost to the county, she added.

“They are doing a very good job,” Hausammann said. *“We have a lot of staff and we have a lot of expertise on our staff ... it really is an A-team of planning.”*

Olinsky also was quick to give her support of the entire planning department, saying they are a good team of young professionals.

“It’s not just a job to these people, they care,” she said. *“They’re bringing a new young perspective.”*

But that’s not all. The process was better for the communities in the county as well as the planning department.

“We’re all going to come out stronger planners because of this process,” Lehman said.

DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT: NEW AMENITIES RESHAPE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

(EDITOR’S NOTE: Today the Sun-Gazette continues its annual review of the past year’s major news stories.)

Downtown Williamsport experienced plenty of progress in 2016, culminating in the grand opening of the Trade and Transit II project and all of its related amenities.

One of those amenities, the Sports Walk, helped to connect the downtown area with the city’s rich sports history, said William E. Nichols Jr., city director of finance and general manager of River Valley Transit.

“Because we have such a sports history here, we thought a walkway or pathway that uses sports as its connection would be important,” he said. *“It just provides more connectivity for people to walk downtown and encourages people to walk downtown and experience what the downtown has to offer.”*

The Sports Walk showcases names of sports figures in the city’s past. The names are displayed on sidewalk inlays as people walk along the path. Nichols said a committee nominated 20 individuals to be in the walk this year because of their impact on the area, with room for more names to be added in coming years.

It begins at the Trade and Transit Centre II, goes up

William Street to West Fourth Street and around to the Liberty Arena

“This will be an annual thing we do, nominate between one to three individuals,” he said. “We’re looking forward to adding to that for part of the sports walk ... Next spring, we’ll be adding names. We’re working right now on getting together to identify up to three people and announcing this winter.”

He said the new names should be expected for next spring.

“The idea behind it was to develop a theme to connectivity, connecting areas downtown,” he said.

In going with that theme of connectivity, the opening of the Trade and Transit Centre II lifted the downtown to another level.

“This particular project ... we’re most proud of. It was first recommended back in 2001. We started working on it 12 years ago,” Nichols said. “It took a number of years to get the funding we needed.”

Nichols said it has so much more than just transportation amenities, and the goal was to make it a place for the community, including a convenience store and a pavilion that can serve as a venue for groups to perform.

“Next year, there’s been a lot of suggestions about having concerts at that location,” he said.

Nichols said there also are options for conferences.

“The event center really is a neat development. It’s a conference center where people can access technology,” he said. “It can hold over 300 people from various organizations for groups that want a unique place to have an outing in downtown Williamsport.”

They are not finished connecting the area to downtown life, and he said there is talk of new events to celebrate Mardi Gras.

“There’s a lot of different elements that should promote activity downtown. We’re looking for a group to have an event downtown during Mardi Gras,” he said.

Jacqueline Engel, Community Theatre League artistic director, said the Community Academy of Stage and Theatre opened in February, and over 200 students have participated in classes since opening.

The academy offers vocal classes, acting classes, improvisation, a show choir and more.

With the new developments, the Jason. J. Moyer Studio Theatre also was opened.

“That’s like a small flat-box kind of theater. We’ve already had cabaret performances there and a few shows,” Engel said. “We have a bit more on our schedule. There’s only 10 weekends a season that we don’t have some event going on here.”

The Community Arts Center underwent a new direction this year. After Rob Steele’s departure as executive director in 2015, and Jamie Grady’s brief stint as executive director, Dave Whitnack was named the operations director for the interim, from his previous position as the center’s technical director.

In October, the center and the Pennsylvania College of Technology announced a transition into a new dual-leadership model that will have two top co-working positions rather than one executive director.

The new model has half of the leadership with Whitnack. The other position, which will act much like a partner to Whitnack, is vacant.

William J. Martin, board chairman, said the arts consulting firm SiG Production really helped the center renovate and work over a new business model.

“We really asked these folks to come in, look at our organization in terms of best in the industry and find what are some areas we can improve,” he said. “Given the changes in staff that we have had, it was a good exercise.”

He said that any organization needs to occasionally reflect on ways to improve, even an organization that has been in operation for over 20 years like the Community Arts Center.

“I think we learned some things about the organization and how to guide the organization as a board in the future,” he said. “I think any organization can benefit from taking a good, hard look back at yourself.”

Getting the opportunity to restructure will help the CAC thrive.

“They’ve given us a better way of restructuring the organization,” Martin said. “It will give us an organization that’s better positioned to guide the arts center over the next five years.”

Tying everything buzzing downtown together, the new Avenue of the Arts map that took off in June helps guide visitors to hot spots downtown. The map is available in most businesses, stores and the visitor’s center.

“It shows people what a town we are,” said Judy Olinsky, vice president of Lycoming Arts, the new names the arts council adopted this year. “I think something like 80 percent of tourism is arts and culinary tourism ... One of the great things about our area is we’re a combination of great outdoor activities, and we have a nightlife in Williamsport. We have a lot to offer for tourism.”

The map includes culinary arts, so it shows off where the restaurants may be found. It also provides information such as live music, where concerts are and even includes where art, from galleries to sculptures, can be enjoyed. It was designed by John Yogodzinski, CEO of The Graphic Hive.

In the future, Olinsky said the map might include spots for architecture.

“I think in the next incarnation of the map we’ll include the design arts, like architecture and design,” she said. “Architecture is an art form.”

2016 PERSON OF THE YEAR FINALIST: WILLIAM E. NICHOLS JR.

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Much of Williamsport expected a second bus station downtown this summer.

It got much more.

Besides the Trade and Transit Centre II, it seemed that a city block was transformed practically overnight into a new intersection of travel and commerce, of the arts and sports, of culture and life here.

Anyone who blinked might have missed the moment when it happened, but the project was actually more than a decade in the making, bringing together multiple concepts and desires for downtown that date to the lead partners at the turn of the century.

Orchestrating this symphony of reconstruction was William E. Nichols Jr., general manager of River Valley Transit and city finance director, who surrounded himself with a team of architects, engineers and designers to fuse together many ideas and amenities into one consolidated project.

“He’s been the driving force all along,” said Vincent Matteo, president and CEO of the Williamsport/Lycoming Chamber of Commerce. The chamber, along with the city and the county, made up the lead partners, which used the Market Street bridge reconstruction in 2000 as the catalyst to transform downtown into a more progressive and modern place.

In August, the Transit Centre II was dedicated, along with Midtown Landing and the Williamsport Sports Walk with its initial induction of nearly two dozen local sports stars. During the dedication, another *“Bases Loaded”* statue, dubbed the *“Last Infielder,”* was unveiled, as was Roger Shipley’s *“Germination”* sculpture, the latest PublicArtworks commissioned piece.

Around and throughout is a wealth of artwork, much of which aims to connect the downtown with the river and natural beauty of the region.

“As a professional, he puts his heart and soul into River Valley Transit,” Matteo said.

“For me, it was interesting working with Bill and members of the community to get a variety of opinions and ideas for the site,” said Michael J. Snyder, chief architect with L.R. Kimball of State College. *“Working with Nichols helped to identify various aspects of design that fit nicely with the rest of the city landscape,”* he said.

Out of those discussions came a new version, one to serve as a modern bus stop, but also a conference center and room for a non-profit — ultimately the Uptown Music Collective. Once the existing Mid-Town deck was torn down, other members of the community added their thoughts.

“Bill has great ideas and the ability to direct the team, while taking care of financing to make it possible and then directing members of the team who work with him to deliver on the vision,” Snyder said.

Others who lent their design expertise shared how Nichols went along with their ideas.

Christopher Keiser, project manager, landscape design, with Larson Design Group, brought his ideas of connectivity to the projects. It would be an aesthetic fit into the downtown’s urban fabric and complement the first Trade and Transit Centre next door.

“I was trying to incorporate a pedestrian aspect,” Keiser said. *“We tried to better connect the pedestrian with the space and help to integrate the streetscape conditions with those proposed.”* The pedestrian connection and synergy with the rest of the business district and the Liberty Arena vision continued to be forwarded by Nichols, Keiser said.

Construction took about 16 months to complete and involved 124 construction workers and regular communication with members of City Council and the mayor, and Nichols helped in that facilitation, said David Witmer, on-site construction manager with Reynolds Construction Inc.

“It was a pleasure working with a visionary such as Nichols to look at the future concept of the building and then have the mayor and council’s backing,” Witmer said.

“Nichols assisted greatly in that task,” Witmer said. What emerged was a steel-framed structure, with masonry backup in the interior and an exterior of brick and glass curtain rolls with some timber, Witmer said.

Nichols also credited the members of his team. He said the project didn’t happen without Kevin Kilpatrick, planning manager and number two man under the general manager at River Valley Transit.

“Kilpatrick was able to help to secure the necessary funding to keep the financial part of the project moving,” Nichols said.

Joshua Warfel, information technology specialist with River Valley Transit, added touches of technology that are beyond state-of-the-art, Nichols said.

For example, the Michael Ross Event Center on the third floor has wall-mounted, touchable and programmable devices that control lighting, audio and video feeds, and can send a message to the marquee or record live activities on the entertainment stage that doubles as the bus stop outside in the Midtown Landing.

Nichols said he believes the final product exceeded expectations.

“Elements in the final product are tied into the community as a tribute to its history and looked to its future in terms of bus transportation, incorporating technology, serving as a main conference center and integrating the arts and entertainment in a space that is walkable and connects to the rest of the Central Business District,” he said.

“It’s also practical for the 1.4 million passengers of River Valley Transit who use the buses each year, giving them a centralized hub that makes their riding experience that much better, with times of departure and arrival heard and seen,” Nichols said.

“The end result is important for downtown revitalization and River Valley Transit’s growth,” Nichols said.

Added touches, such as the sports walk were Nichols’ concept.

He said it took input from Gabe Sinicropi, vice president, marketing and public relations for the Williamsport Crosscutters; Ken Sawyer, noted radio sports broadcaster; Gary Chrisman, noted radio personality and sports broadcaster; and Paul “Babe” Mayer, retired teacher, coach and sports broadcaster, to make the sports walk happen.

When asked his favorite part of the project overall, Nichols said it was working with so many professionals involved to make it a reality, and the special touches.

“It’s a beautiful place,” said Lycoming County Commissioner Jack McKernan. He credited Nichols for overseeing the added touches of cultural and entertainment aspects otherwise not seen in transportation and conference centers.

“Contrary to certain individuals’ beliefs, these things don’t happen by themselves,” Mayor Gabriel J. Campana said. *“It takes vision, planning, development of a master plan and financials,”* he said, adding Nichols brought that together as a part of the lead team to bring the completion of Destination 2014.

ANOTHER YEAR BRINGS HIT AT PUMP – AND RESULTS TOO SUBTLE

Part of the New Year noise in Pennsylvania included an 8-cent-per-gallon gasoline tax hike, which went into effect Sunday.

While it is not mandatory, the gasoline station where you fell 'er up almost certainly passed that wholesale gasoline tax onto you, so the price at the pump probably went up 8 cents about midnight Saturday.

With that increase, drivers filling up at a Pennsylvania pump are paying about 76 cents per gallon in tax. The state's portion of that is about 58 cents, while the federal tax is 18.4 cents per gallon and the underground storage tank fee is 1.1 cents per gallon.

The state's gasoline tax is the reason you drive from Pennsylvania to Florida and wonder why you see the price at the pump go down, for the most part, as you drive south. Or as you drive north toward Maine, for that matter.

To be fair, Pennsylvania has the nation's fifth-largest road network, with more road miles than New York, New Jersey and all the New England states combined.

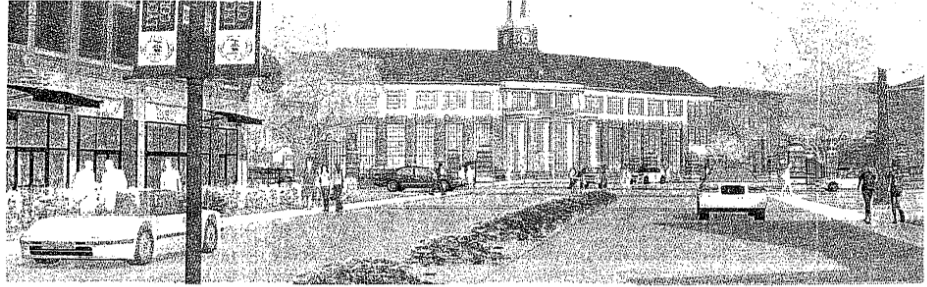
Pennsylvania's gas tax funds road construction and infrastructure maintenance. Is also has been used to funds state police operations, a practice we have questioned.

The latest gas tax hike was plugged in when the state Legislature passed a massive road construction bill three years ago. As part of that bill, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation has fixed thousands of structurally deficient bridges and boosted road construction spending by about \$1 billion.

Pennsylvania's tangle of road and bridges that traverse its countless streams and creeks make for a tough system to keep up to date and the system clearly was in rundown shape when the bill was passed. Getting that system up to date – with a limited construction season due to climate – is nearly impossible. At the very least, it's work measured in years, not weeks, days or months.

We suppose all these gas taxes are a necessary evil component to a modern transportation system in Pennsylvania. But as Pennsylvanians grind their teeth while watching the pump meter go around faster these days, we suppose they would feel a little better if all the improvements were a little more noticeable. They would like more roads to be smoother and would like to see fewer construction cones, indicating there is less work needed to be done.

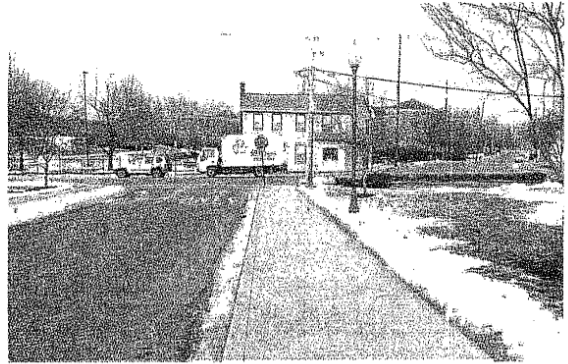
The state has a national reputation for being a difficult state to travel in, mainly because of the condition of roads. Is the perception fair? Maybe. Maybe not. But it remains a perception difficult to argue with. We don't doubt the need for the work. We don't doubt it is getting done. We just wish it was more noticeable.



TRANSFORMATION AHEAD

**'Gateway' vision
may become
more solid over
next few months**

By **MARK MARONEY**
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KAREN VIBERT-KENNEDY/Sun-Gazette

Basin Street, looking north from East Third Street, would be widened and transformed into a boulevard leading to Lycoming College's planned Gateway building, as illustrated in drawing at top. Gone would be the house/barbershop in middle of photo, and the street would be opened to two-way traffic.

Just before the holidays, city businessman and commercial property developer John Albarano II had a smile on his face.

The developer of the Basin Street Shopping Plaza, Panera Bread, Starbucks and U-Haul in the city's eastern edge of the Central Business District and chairman of the East Third Street Gateway Commission seemed to be energized.

"We had not formally met in over a year," Albarano said of the gateway commission. His comment came after hearing the city was awarded a \$777,395 grant from the Commonwealth Financing Authority toward widening and improving portions of Basin Street leading up to Lycoming College.

"I heard of plans to widen Basin Street, making it two way between East Third and East Fourth, and to fix the confusing intersection at Franklin Street," Albarano said, adding he'd learned of a possible divider down the middle of Basin Street with streetscape

and plans for a more "collegiate appearance."

But Albarano said he'd doesn't want planners to forget Basin Street at its mouth or southern terminus at Via Bella.

"There's never been a good way to get from the Basin Street Shopping Plaza on foot to Wegmans," he said. And those who want to walk or ride their bicycles on the River Walk have few ways to access it other than to go through Maynard Street or Market Street, he said.

"U-Haul rents bicycles," Albarano said, describing a vision for a pedestrian- and

bicycle-friendly design.

"There's all kinds of possibilities," he said.

"Part of the design is to widen Basin Street at the new college entrance," said Patrick Marty, executive director of college communications and external relations.

That entrance, which would face south looking toward the river with a proposed Gateway building that will anchor a new arrival sequence to the college, is among the plans the college has as its officials collaborate with the city and county planning department.

(See GATEWAY, Page A-6)

DEVELOPMENT

'Gateway' vision may become more solid over next few months

(From Page A-1)

The building on campus will provide a much-needed home for admissions and new programs that focus on outdoor education and leadership, internships, study abroad and student-faculty research. It's meant to contribute to the economic revitalization of the city's eastern end and deepen connections between the college and city, according to Dr. Kent Trachte, college president.

Speaking to some concerns Albarano had about the southern part of Basin Street, "Lycoming College also would value the access for its students, staff and visitors to downtown and to the River Walk," Marty said. "Our goal of strengthening our connections to the city is part of the \$65 million capital campaign that goes along with the East Third Street Gateway revitalization concept," he said.

As to the land closer to the college's proposed new entrance, the college already has been buying properties in the area. Near the intersection of Basin and East Fourth, for instance, a three-unit apartment house once stood. Today, it is an empty lot.

Of particular concern to all is the realignment at the intersection of Basin, East Fourth and Franklin streets.

Marty and others consider it hazardous and the college envisions a four-way intersection that will hopefully end the confusion and improve safety for students, staff and others, Marty said. The plan or vision of the college, in conjunction with the city and county, is a realignment at East Fourth and Franklin and Basin streets, he said.

The county's lead transportation planner agreed with the proposed realignment.

"It is an intersection that is both confusion to those trying to cross it in vehicles and on foot and not efficient for the traffic flow needed for those entering the college gateway building which is envisioned to be facing that realigned intersection," said Mark Murawski, lead county transportation planner.

The proposal includes additional streetscape improvements, such as a middle divider on Basin Street, which would be more inviting to college students and businesses in the area, Murawski said.

As for the connection to the bike path, the county also is looking at a new connection to the Susquehanna River Walk — from Basin Street.

"We're working with the SEDA-Council of Governments Joint Rail Authority to look at alternatives to crossing the railroad to access the path," Murawski said.

The ideal location would be near the Basin Street overpass, with a grade leading up to the tracks, he said. It would include lights and safety gates and allow access over the tracks, rather than below in a tunnel, he said.

A tunnel exists under the tracks, but it's on property farther east owned by Williamsport Municipal Water and Sanitary Authority and not for public use, he said.

City Council's economic revitalization committee is expected to take up the East Third Street Gateway concepts when it meets at noon Jan. 16, according to Councilman Randall J. Allison, committee chairman.

"We have a plan and funding and we are moving forward," Mayor Gabriel J. Campana said.

Allison said he is looking forward to moving the project forward.

"We've been in a kind of holding pattern," Allison said about waiting for final approval from the state Department of Transportation for a traffic study of the area.

Proposed two-way traffic on a portion of East Third Street and on Basin Street has been given preliminary approval, Allison said.

"That's important to Lycoming College and to the city," Allison said.

And as in any government grant, there's limitations on its use.

The recently approved grant, which was obtained, according to Campana and others involved through the efforts of state Rep. Jeff Wheeland, R-Loyalsock Township, and state Sen. Gene Yaw, R-Loyalsock Township, who both made the announcement of the grant award shortly before Christmas, is not to be used for the River Walk connection from Basin Street, Murawski noted.

"We'd have to find additional grant sources for that," he said.

Funds OK'd for Pathway to Health, Millers Run projects

Two local transportation projects have received state funding after a highly competitive initiative to improve transportation alternatives was completed across the Commonwealth.

“We did very well considering we’re a rural county here,” said Mark Murawski, transportation supervisor for the county. *“Investing early in developing sound project concepts is imperative to getting money.”*

The county received roughly 5 percent of the \$33 million in federal funds allocated for the state, Murawski said. The money was distributed to 51 state Department of Transportation projects.

“You have to show the state that you can deliver quickly,” he said.

The Williamsport Pathway to Health Project will receive \$798,500 to finish the project’s fourth phase to renovate the streetscape and sidewalk area of Campbell Street between Third Street and Little League Blvd. It also will add a gateway into the historic district of the city, Murawski said.

The money for the pathway will finish the project, which has encompassed various road construction efforts around the UPMC Susquehanna hospital for the past 10 years, Murawski said.

“Now it is a fully functional hospital both inside and out,” he said.

Murawski also said the project is in the design portion of phase three with construction on Maynard Street, between East Third Street and Campbell Street, set to begin in May. The entire project is expected to be finished by the end of 2018, he added.

The Millers Run Greenway will receive \$765,000 for phase one of its project to construct a trail at the end of the Susquehanna River Walk along Millers Run and the construction of a pedestrian bridge across East Third Street to eventually connect the river walk with the Bruce Henry and James E. Short parks in Loyalsock Township.

“The Golden Strip has been a barrier for that community to access the riverwalk,” Murawski said.

Gov. Tom Wolf, who approved the projects, said they are imperative to enhancing communities across the state and building stronger economies with better infrastructure.

“Making these improvements will enhance pedestrian and bicycle facilities, improve access to public transportation, create safe routes to school, preserve historic

transportation structures, provide environmental mitigation, create trails that serve a transportation purpose, and promote safety and mobility,” Wolf said.

Muraski said this is a process that takes place every year, so the Millers Run project could apply for further funding as it continues with the remaining phases.

BIDDING AHEAD FOR TERMINAL PROJECT

After the recent receipt of a \$1 million grant, the Williamsport Municipal Airport Authority is able to move forward with a new terminal project that is years in the making.

The grant was awarded by the First Community Foundation Partnership of Pennsylvania in November. The grant, plus the promise of \$2 million from Lycoming County, gives the authority the funds they need to move forward with the project.

Thomas Hart, executive director for the airport, said he hopes to open the bidding process by the end of January and then begin construction by April. The authority is waiting for approval from the Federal Aviation Administration and the Bureau of Aviation that they hope to receive by Jan. 19.

During its meeting Thursday night, the authority board adopted a resolution thanking the foundation for the grant and its support of the new terminal.

“(The authority) goes on public record extending its sincerest thanks and appreciation to that Board for the generosity they have bestowed upon the Williamsport Municipal Airport Authority,” the resolution stated.

In other business, the authority has applied for roughly \$6,500 in federal aid for damage sustained in the Oct. 21 flash flooding. The flooding took out a length of fence and scattered debris around the airport property, according to Hart.

Approval of the funds has not yet been given, he said.

The authority also voted to approve its 2017 budget at an income of \$1.17 million and expenses of \$1.15 million, showing a surplus of roughly \$19,000, Hart said.

Additionally, the authority reelected chairman Christopher Logue, vice chairman Atwood Welker secretary William Martin and treasurer Frank Pellegrino. Scott T. Williams also was retained as solicitor.

Authority members present were Logue, Welker, Martin, Pellegrino and Rebecca Burke.

The next authority meeting will be at 5:30 p.m. Feb. 9

COUNCIL COMMITTEE HEARS PLAN FOR 2-WAY TRAFFIC ON PINE STREET

15 Jan 2017 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

A strategy referred to in local transportation circles as "Connect Williamsport" could lead to more two-way streets downtown.

One of those streets, Pine between West Third and West Fourth, was reviewed this past week by City Council's public works committee. Also up for consideration, though not yet reviewed by the committee, is two ways on East Third Street between Market and Mulberry streets.

Overall, the goals of Connect Williamsport are to ease congestion downtown, improve commerce and perhaps save River Valley Transit some headaches and big bucks.

"Our goal is to connect Williamsport motorists from Basin to Elmira streets to access points on Market Street and to the interstate," William E. Nichols Jr., city finance director and general manager of River Valley Transit, said.

Connect Williamsport also will make it easier and safer for pedestrians and provide linkage between the business district and Interstate 180, Nichols said.

The proposed changes will make it easier for bus drivers to navigate the central business district and ease congestion for motorists. Congestion is often experienced on West Fourth and West Third streets. That can be exasperating when delivery trucks block one lane, often testing motorists' patience, or it is rush hour.

"We want to make it easier and better to get across town in the business district," Nichols said. More two ways and intersection realignments are expected to reduce driver headaches and save the bus service money, he said.

"We estimate \$70,000 less a year in operating costs by making Pine Street two ways," he said. Pine Street would then become an access point and not just an exit for buses entering the Trade and Transit Centre stops, he added.

With the current network of one-way streets, bus drivers have to travel up to eight additional blocks to access the transit facilities.

By eliminating the distance that drivers use on West Fourth and William streets to enter Transit Drive, the bus service would save in fuel and operating costs, Nichols said.

Part of the Connect Williamsport strategy is to make East Third Street two ways from Market to Mulberry streets, which would enable the bus drivers to turn off Market and onto Church Street to access Pine Street.

Mayor Gabriel J. Campana also believes in making Pine Street two ways between the city's two main thoroughfares to assist businesses and open the way for more parking spaces on Pine Street.

"Pine Street in this section is one-way and when it was closed to traffic a number of years ago, business died," Campana said. "When the city has two-way traffic, it has the ability to gain more interest from commerce and businesses."

The mayor also said reconstruction of Pine Street would permit the city to install more on-street parking.

"People want accessible parking on the street," he said.

The public works committee indicated it sees value in changing Pine Street to two ways at that location. It did not review the East Third Street two-way proposal.

"Our consensus was, it looked good," Councilman Clifford "Skip" Smith, committee chairman, said. "The devil is always in the details," he said, expressing concern for pedestrian safety with an increased volume of traffic and as buses enter the terminals.

Among those details is the cost. Funding for such changes may come from a \$750,000 grant that the city is eligible to receive from the Appalachian Regional Commission, according to Mark Murawski, Lycoming County's lead transportation planner.

"The county fully supports the city going after the grant which the city is eligible to receive," Murawski said.

The grant is expected to be reviewed by the city finance committee Tuesday.

Various proposed improvements as part of Connect Williamsport are anticipated with the reconstruction of West Third Street between Campbell and Penn streets by the state Department of Transportation, Murawski said.

The transportation strategy links directly to Lycoming College's gateway project. The college is working with local government agencies to widen Basin Street and make it two ways from Interstate 180 to East Fourth Street, part of which is already open to two-way traffic.

Another possibility involves opening East Fourth Street to two-way traffic from Mulberry to Basin Street.

Finally, Connect Williamsport calls for the creation of a walking and bicycle path using Willow Street, which would remain open to motorists as well. It would be called the Willow Street Green Infrastructure Pathway.

Such a pathway might also provide more convenient access points to the Susquehanna River Walk, Murawski said.

FOUNDATION GRANTS \$1 MILLION TO CITY, COLLEGE FOR GATEWAY

15 Jan 2017 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

Lycoming College and the River Valley Transit Authority will share in a \$1 million grant for revitalization of the east end of Williamsport's downtown.

City, college and business leaders have collaborated on transforming the area as part of the Old City and East Third Street Gateway Revitalization Project.

The grant, awarded by the First Community Foundation Partnership, was greeted with enthusiasm by city and college leaders on Thursday morning.

"It's a great opportunity to collaborate with Lycoming College," said William E. Nichols Jr., River Valley Transit general manager and city finance director.

He noted that the foundation is the catalyst for making the plan happen.

"This grant provides the needed catalyst to begin revitalization efforts east of Market Street and leverages a \$10 million project which is the final component of the Downtown Connect Williamsport Revitalization and Gateway Plan," Nichols said.

In addition to the \$1 million grant, the possibility exists to leverage up to \$7 million in state matching funds for the project.

So far, \$800,000 of matching dollars have been secured through the state Department of Community and Economic Development.

Half of the \$1 million foundation grant will be used to restructure Basin Street for improving traffic patterns on East Third Street to Market Street and a portal entrance into the redevelopment of Old City.

A streetscape project known as the "Willow Street Green Infrastructure Pathway" will connect the college to the city's downtown.

Dr. Kent C. Trachte, Lycoming College president, noted that the project includes the school's construction of a building for admissions, academics, leadership components, and classrooms.

"I believe it will stimulate interest in the east end," he said. "We are getting our gateway building."

Construction of the building could be completed by 2019, he added.

Overall, Trachte said the project will help transform the neighborhood and hopefully bring about a stronger bond between Lycoming students and the city.

"Students don't have a good perception of areas surrounding the college," he said.

The neighborhood's transformation can serve as a means of bringing more talented people through the college to Williamsport, he noted.

Franklin Street is to be relocated to allow a more "open and welcoming entrance" to the college, according to officials. Plans also call for Basin Street to be restructured as a two-way street to open access to the entrance of the college and introduce new retail and housing development opportunities.

"I am very, very excited to work with Lycoming College," said Williamsport Mayor Gabriel J. Campana. "We have a great partnership. We are truly going to make this city grow economically."

Nichols said the neighborhood, already a work in progress, will become a corridor for all sorts of activities.

Jennifer Wilson, foundation president, said the collaboration between River Valley Transit and the college has the potential to transform the downtown and "improve a college town atmosphere reflective of a community that is home to more than 6,750 college students annually."

PLANS APPEAR RE-ENERGIZED FOR E. 3RD ST. REDEVELOPMENT

City Council's economic revitalization committee met Monday focusing in part on continuing redevelopment plans for sites east of Market Street near Lycoming College.

Officials, including the East Third Street Gateway Commission, consisting of local businessmen and others, went on a hiatus for more than a year and want to restart talks on the redevelopment strategy.

"We've been in a quiet period to secure funding and get a traffic study done and get the East Third Street Gateway commission back involved in the plans," Councilman Randall J. Allison, chairman of the committee, said. *"We're raring to go."*

John Albarano II, commission chairman, attended the meeting. He remained quiet but did question the potential impact of proposals to change some one-way street corridors into areas for two-way traffic.

"Would two-way traffic negate on-street parking?" he asked.

"Some parking, particularly the approach to intersections," said John Grado, city engineer and director of city community and economic development.

William Rischar, a member of the city planning commission, asked what the purpose was of making Pine Street two-way between West Third and West Fourth streets, suggesting it appeared to be a move to accommodate River Valley Transit bus access.

Mayor Gabriel J. Campana said opening up the street would enhance economic opportunity for existing businesses, perhaps open up potential for more and add on-street parking.

“There appears to be no good access into downtown by using Court Street, which is too narrow,” Councilwoman Liz Miele, of the committee, said.

Opening up Pine Street to two-way traffic would assist more businesses, she said.

Dr. John F. Piper Jr., a city historian and retired dean of Lycoming College, provided a historical perspective, some of it focused on the proposed redevelopment sites.

The first building, the Russell Inn, a tavern that also served as the courthouse for a time, was built at East Third and Mulberry streets, Piper said.

In a tribute, the city may have a small park and a replica skeletal structure of the tavern built.

The area also was where Michael Ross first farmed on 111-acres he called *“Virginia,”* Piper said. Ross was the individual who named Williamsport, after his son, William, and for the value of its river as a port.

The access to the Susquehanna River Walk also is part of the redevelopment strategy. Jerry Walls, of the SEDA-Council of Governments Joint Rail Authority, said the authority engineer has done an analysis and believes that an *“at-grade-level crossing of the tracks”* with safety improvements is doable near Basin Street.

Such a close connection might fit with Lycoming College, which is raising funds to build a *“Gateway Building”* facing south, and adding recreational curriculum.

The funding streams of late appear to be a boost for the officials.

The city has been notified it was awarded a \$777,395 grant from state Department of Community and Economic Development to make Basin Street two-way, add traffic signals at Third and Basin streets and to realign Basin, Franklin, East Fourth streets as part of Lycoming College’s new gateway entrance.

Additionally, Lycoming College and River Valley Transit also will share in a \$1 million grant for revitalization the area east end of the city’s downtown. The grant was awarded by the First Community Foundation Partnership of Pennsylvania last week.

On council's agenda this Thursday is the application for a \$750,000 grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission to pay for reconstruction of Pine Street, making two-way traffic between West Third and West

GRANT PURSUIT RECOMMENDED FOR 'CONNECT'

City Council's finance committee Tuesday gave a positive recommendation for the city administration to pursue a \$729,000 grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission to reconstruct Pine Street and to make the street two-ways between West Third and West Fourth streets.

The grant application for the project, which is part of a strategy called "*Connect Williamsport*," to make it easier for motorists and pedestrians to get across the Central Business District and encourage more commerce into the downtown via Interstate 180, is expected to go before City Council Thursday night.

The project has an estimated cost of \$1.2 million, according to John Grado, city engineer and director of community and economic development. The cost includes engineering and is estimated more precisely at \$1,261,408, he said.

It would widen the street, by removing a curb "*bump out*" outside of Executive Plaza and would make two-way traffic possible, continuing the two-way traffic pattern that exists on the street, between Church Street and West Third Street and from West Fourth to Little League Boulevard.

Partnering with the city on the project would be the Williamsport Municipal Water and Sanitary Authority.

Authority Executive Director Douglas Keith told the committee that the authority plans to improve stormwater drainage on Pine Street near Church Street.

He said that improvement would help existing businesses and promote better drainage for the projects that are underway on the east end of Market Street as part of the redevelopment of the East Third Street Gateway.

Additionally, the committee, consisting of Councilwomen Liz Miele and Bonnie Katz and Councilman Randall J. Allison, further recommended the city administration be able to pursue a \$378,422 grant from the state Department of Community and Economic Development, through its Keystone Community Fund.

That would require a city match of \$92,392 and an authority match of \$61,594.

Miele asked Grado should the situation arise where the city is awarded the Appalachian Regional Commission grant and not the state grant, could that put the city in a financial bind. He said the recent grant of \$500,000 provided by the First Community Foundation Partnership of Pennsylvania would be enough backup for the city project to be done.

In another matter, the committee gave no recommendation to the administration's proposal to amend the ordinance requiring residency requirements for city employees. The proposal that listed the director of the Department of Public Safety, fire chief and director of codes administration as the positions having to live in the city was thought to be too narrow. The city continues to explore how to get the most qualified applicants to fill open positions, including a human resources department director and soon-to-be city engineer with the expected summer retirement of Grado.

BUSINESS DISTRICT ON COUNCIL'S AGENDA TONIGHT

City Council is expected tonight to review the city administration's application of a \$729,000 grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission to reconstruct part of Pine Street and open it to two-way traffic between West Third and West Fourth streets.

As the city, the Lycoming County Planning Department and Lycoming College continue a transportation strategy known as Connect Williamsport, meant to ease congestion through the business district and get more vehicles into downtown from Interstate 180, it is looking at the Pine Street project, estimated at \$1.2 million.

One aspect of the project is to widen Pine Street where a curb bumps out into the lane closest to the Executive Plaza. The two-way traffic would better accommodate River Valley Transit buses entering Transit Drive and stopping at Trade and Transit I and II, said William E. Nichols Jr., city finance director and general manager of River Valley Transit.

The project includes stormwater drainage improvements on Pine Street at Church Street, done in partnership with Williamsport Municipal Water and Sanitary Authority.

Another possible grant application before council is \$378,422 from the state Department of Community and Economic Development toward the project. The city would need a match of \$92,000-plus and an authority match of \$61,000-plus.

In other possible action, city Police Chief David J. Young is expected to introduce a former city patrolman who left for a while and is asking to be rehired.

Officer Joshua Bell has the requisite police training and can be back on the department rolls within a week, Young said at a previous city public safety committee meeting.

Two officers have retired — former Deputy Chief Gregory A. Foresman and Agent Raymond O. Kontz III. Another patrolman has resigned this month, Young said. That brings the department complement this week to 47, with a budget for 51 officers.

Also, Jessie Novinger, director of the city recreation department, is planning to introduce a proposal to hire an AmeriCorps member to assist at the City Hall offices and the department for a year at an estimated cost of \$4,600.

TEMPORARY WALLIS RUN ROAD BRIDGE UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Work on a temporary bridge spanning Wallis Run on Wallis Run Road at Butternut Grove in Gamble Township has begun.

A contractor is building the foundations for a temporary structure that is expected to be in place and open to traffic by mid-February.

The original bridge was destroyed during the October flood event. A series of pipes and fill were installed since then to provide a temporary crossing.

Once the temporary bridge is in place, the pipe crossing will be removed. A permanent bridge is expected to be constructed this year.

Wolyniec Construction is the prime contractor on the \$490,000 project.

PINE STREET TWO-WAY PLAN REACHES GRANT SEEKING PHASE

The vision of two-way traffic on Pine Street in downtown Williamsport became very real last week when City Council's finance committee backed the administration's recommendation to pursue a \$729,000 grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission to reconstruct Pine Street.

The reconstruction would include making the street two-way between West Third and West Fourth streets as part of the "*Connect Williamsport*" strategy to prompt more commerce in downtown in conjunction with Interstate 180.

Grant applications require plans. In this case, those plans call for a curb "*bump out*" outside of the Executive Plaza and other details allowing the same two-way traffic pattern that exists north and south of West Third Street and West Fourth Street.

The total cost, including engineering, is \$1,261,408. The payoff is a more modern, commerce- and motorist-friendly downtown.

OPEN HOUSES SET FOR BRIDGE AREA REPLACEMENT PROJECTS

WATERVILLE — A representative of Plenary Walsh Keystone Partners will host an open house at 7 p.m. Feb. 7 at the Waterville Volunteer Fire Department, 11009 N. Route 44, to share information about two bridge replacement projects on Route 414.

Information such as a tentative timeline, construction schedule and traffic changes will be available.

Those who attend also will have the opportunity to sign up as stake holders, allowing them to receive construction information in the mail two weeks in advance.

The bridges, which span Upper Pine Bottom Run in Cummings Township and Callahan Run in Jersey Mills, are among 558 bridges being replaced across Pennsylvania under the state Department of Transportation's Rapid Bridge Replacement Project.

The project is a public-private partnership between PennDOT and Plenary Walsh. Plenary Walsh will finance, design, replace and maintain the bridges for 25 years.

A list of bridges to be replaced statewide and other information can be found at www.parapidbridges.com

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Route 414 bridge replacement projects open house

WHEN: 7 p.m. Feb. 7

WHERE: Waterville Volunteer Fire Department, 11009 N. Route 44

GREATER FREE PARKING PRESENCE WOULD HELP DOWNTOWN PERCEPTION

The cost and availability of parking have a lot to do with how a downtown is perceived.

In the case of Williamsport's downtown, the parking impression is a negative one, despite sincere efforts by public officials to change it over the years.

Last week parking officials met with the Liberty Group, developer of the indoor arena on Elmira Street, after parking tickets were issued to multiple drivers parked outside the arena.

The Williamsport Parking Authority and city administration have a tricky balancing act to perform. There is a need for long-term parking throughout downtown for people who live and work in center city every day. There is a need for high-volume, short-term parking for scheduled events at the Community Arts Center, Liberty Arena and other venues.

And there is a need for parking for people who are downtown briefly to eat, shop, run errands or attend a brief event or appointment.

To serve all those masters, the city needs to offer a combination of metered, monthly and other parking situations, including free.

The city is blessed to have a relatively thriving downtown, but the perception is mixed in large part because of parking policies that can appear punitive, even when that is not the intent.

Such is the case with the Parking Authority's decision last year to ticket vehicles after hours and on Saturdays at the municipal lot in the same block as Liberty Arena, and to ticket vehicles that do not leave a metered spot on the street after two hours, even if the owner returns to feed the meter and pay for additional time.

The parking authority chairman Anthony Cipolla says they stopped ticketing on Saturdays.

Still, Councilman Randall J. Allison correctly points out of the lot by Liberty Arena: *"There were no discussions about that becoming a paid lot all of the time ... I think it took everyone by surprise."*

It is not possible to have free parking across-the-board downtown. That would create uncertain situations for people who live and work downtown and are expecting – and have the right to expect – to park in the same place every day.

But city officials need to consider whether the limited parking revenues are worth the long-term reputation damage that comes with parking fines for people heading downtown after hours and on weekends.

City officials said the arena owners did not ask for free parking.

IMPLEMENTATION KEY TO EXPANDING ARTS

Katelyn Hibbard

As Lycoming County continues to draft its comprehensive plan and prepare it for public review, at least one key aspect of the overall goal still being addressed is the arts.

Megan Lehman and Kim Wheeler, lead planner for the county and deputy director of the county Department of Planning and Community Development, respectively, met with members of the Lycoming Arts and other prominent members of the arts and Williamsport communities to brainstorm what needs to be addressed and how to address it at the City Alliance Church Wednesday.

Wheeler pointed out the Greater Williamsport Alliance, one of the six planning teams tasked with identifying issues within their municipalities alongside the county planners, placed great importance on maintaining and building up the arts.

"We're prioritizing what is important to the people and the municipal officials," Wheeler said. "We all can agree that (the arts) add to our social capital. We'd like to see arts recognized as an essential infrastructure in our community."

Wheeler added that, based on prior discussions with the alliance and Lycoming Arts, as well as other feedback, it seems Lycoming Arts' greatest need is that of staff capacity.

Joy Walls, a member of Lycoming Arts, said more outreach is needed, which would require more funding. Someone also is needed who could be hired full-time to work in an executive director-type position.

But the conversation wasn't limited to one task - several people offered ideas, questions and advice to help expand the art culture that has developed in Williamsport.

"The arts don't live in a vacuum, they live in a larger world," Mark Winkelman, owner of the Pajama Factory, said. "I think that's where Williamsport is failing a bit."

Winkelman explained that the

arts are thriving in this area, but artists struggle to go much further.

"Artists can't get to museums in New York City," he said.

Ideas for future funding also were discussed. For example, in Lackawanna County, "one penny per dollar goes to the arts," Lycoming Arts President Judy Olinsky said.

Other ideas included advertising First Fridays regionally and hiring buses to bring people in from around the state for an entire weekend, as well as using artist-in-residence programs to the fullest by having the visiting artists speak to classes or otherwise connect with the community.

This would have a "cross-pollination" effect, gaining community interest in the arts while also giving the artists positive things to say about Williamsport when they go home.

The group also noted that youth should be more exposed to the arts, and the Heart of Williamsport found that lower-income community members don't think the arts are accessible and can't participate.

Further, it's difficult to get word out about upcoming events, fundraisers and other arts news, some said.

In the end, Mark Murawski, transportation planner for the county and a team leader on the comprehensive plan, had some of the final words, stating that some suggestions may "be wildly successful" while others "will just disappear."

He stressed the importance of putting someone in a leadership role to keep forward momentum on the set goals.

"It's not about just writing a plan, it's about implementing a plan," he said.

STATE AID BRINGS PLANT'S EXPANSION A STEP CLOSER

28 Jan 2017 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

A Williamsport company will add nearly 40 positions as part of an expansion process at its piston aircraft engine manufacturing facility.

Gov. Tom Wolf announced that Lycoming Engines will invest \$11.34 million to make significant renovations at its plant at 652 Oliver St.

"It is an honor to announce that the only U.S. owned and operated aviation piston engine manufacturer plans to continue its legacy in Pennsylvania and grow its employee base here," said Wolf. "As the manufacturing industry becomes more and more technologically advanced, the Keystone State's highly skilled and dedicated workforce and world-class colleges and universities provide the resources that companies need to keep pace and succeed."

The news of the company adding up to 38 jobs is good for the local area, noted Williamsport/Lycoming Chamber President Vincent J. Matteo.

"It's an excellent development for family-sustaining jobs at a facility that that has been the center of our economy for some time," he said.

In addition to new jobs, the project will mean the retention of more than 400 positions.

The company reportedly received a funding proposal from the state Department of Community and Economic Development that includes a \$75,000 Pennsylvania First Program grant and \$17,100 in WEDnetPA funding for employee training.

The project was coordinated by the Governor's Action Team, a group of economic development specialists that works with businesses considering locating or expanding in the state. Matteo noted the company is seeking additional funding through the Lycoming County Industrial Development Authority.

"Lycoming continues to enhance its competitiveness through investments in our facilities and people," said Michael Kraft, senior vice president and general manager of Lycoming Engines. "We are thankful for the governor's support of our initiatives."

The company's piston engines reportedly power more than half of the world's general-aviation fleet - both rotary-wing and fixed-wing. As a division of Avco Corp., the company also provides engines for military training schools and other specialized applications.

Company officials could not be reached for further comment.

CITY ON THE VERGE OF SOME DRAMATIC, OVERDUE CHANGES

29 Jan 2017 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

Some dramatic changes are due for Williamsport between Basin and Elmira streets, changes geared to creating a commercial corridor in the eastern end of the city, connecting Lycoming College to the downtown area and unclogging traffic patterns.

All these things have been talked about for years. But now there is a group dedicated to the execution. And there is a defined plan, known as the Gateway Revitalization Project.

And there is money.

The First Community Foundation last week announced a \$1 million grant for revitalization of the east end of Williamsport's downtown.

How dramatic are the physical changes? Well, imagine two-way traffic on Pine Street between West Third and West Fourth streets.

Imagine two-way traffic on East Third Street between Market and Mulberry streets. Imagine a walking/biking path on Willow Street and an infrastructure pathway connecting Lycoming College with downtown. These changes would ease congestion downtown, improve commerce and save River Valley Transit operational money. They would provide easier linkage between downtown and Interstate 180.

These changes are overdue. Williamsport is blessed with a clean central business district that is more active than most cities its size.

The payoff from that is muted by a crazy quilt of traffic patterns and a lack of natural flow for pedestrians and motorists between the eastern end of that business district and the rest of the city. We are particularly excited by Lycoming College's aggressive involvement in this long-overdue modernization.

The hard truth is that changes cost money. To that end, the foundation grant will hopefully be money well spent. The hard part - converting ideas into a practical plan of execution - remains ahead. But there is momentum. There are unified minds. And there are experienced people making the important decisions.

This can happen.

CHANGING DIRECTION

29 Jan 2017 — Williamsport Sun-Gazette

Looking at the Sunday edition of the Sun-Gazette, it spoke of the changing directions of city streets. The city cited the traffic congestion, delivery trucks causing problems, and the buses having problems driving. I have been living in Williamsport for 64 years and have not seen this.

Lycoming College must want more taxable property to become theirs. The city will lose more money! Between the hospital and Lycoming College, the city has lost a great deal of taxable

property. At least Pennsylvania College of Technology helped the city with police and other ways.

I am wondering how and who brought this matter up? It was not brought up by the general public, because the administration feels they are better than us. City Council does not care about the general public. I have personally had delivered information to all of them, and they never even said thank you, nor answer my questions. I guess the hospital and Lycoming College do not have a problem speaking with them.

The bus company in Williamsport wants this change to increase their profits. They cause the driving problems in Williamsport. They block the smooth flow of traffic in Williamsport. The city now puts buses above the people.

Why not fix the streets, or goat paths, we call streets. They always have a reason. I spent over \$1,000 in front end repairs, due to the goat paths. I know I am not alone, because I see and talk with them at the repair shops.

If you are sick of how this city is operating, write a letter, make a phone call, and vote them out!

Stephen Hertel

Williamsport

PART OF HIGHWAY DEDICATED TO LONGTIME EDUCATOR

PICTURE ROCKS — A memorial highway dedication in honor of the late Thomas A. Paternostro was held at George A. Ferrell Elementary on Sunday afternoon, drawing in dozens of people who turned out to celebrate the lifelong educator and former East Lycoming School District superintendent.

Approved by the state General Assembly as a part of Act 159 last November, with the support of Sen. Gene Yaw, R-Loyalsock Township, and Rep. Garth Everett, R-Muncy, the portion of U.S. Route 220 stretching from the Picture Rocks Borough line to the Hughesville Borough line now will be known as Thomas A. Paternostro Memorial Highway.

“I was thinking about Tom today, and this guy was a fixture ever since I have been around this area,” Yaw said. *“Maybe it is appropriate to name part of the highway after him, so he continues to be a fixture.”*

“I knew Tom since his days at the East Lycoming School District,” Yaw added. *“Two of the things that I most remember about him were that he always had a smile and he was always willing to do anything for kids. Kids were the No. 1 issue for him.”*

Everett, who defeated Paternostro in the 2006 race for the 84th Legislative District, also looked back fondly on his former political adversary, who he said remained a friend after their campaigns drew to a close.

“This is one of the good parts of the job, to be able to come out and honor folks who have done great things in the community. Tom was certainly one of those,” Everett said.

“I got to know Tom well during that 2006 campaign,” Everett said. *“We made a pledge to each other that we were going to focus on the issues in a civil manor, and not get into negative ads. For anyone who knew Tom, he loved to talk about the issues. He had a unique view on things and I always could profit from it.”*

Born in Williamsport in 1939, Paternostro was a 1957 graduate of the city’s former St. Mary’s High School before joining the Navy. After his military service concluded, he earned a bachelor’s degree in political science at Lycoming College in 1964. From there, he acquired a master’s degree in public administration from St. Lawrence University in 1975, setting the stage for a career in education that spanned more than four decades.

Beginning his career as an elementary school and secondary school teacher for several years, Paternostro first made the transition into school administration when he took on the role of principal at an elementary school in Prattsburgh, New York. He later held the title of superintendent for schools in the Oneonta City School District and Clifton-Fine School District, both in New York.

In 1981, Paternostro took his experience as superintendent to the East Lycoming School District, where he held the same designation for 11 years before retiring from public schools in 1992.

“At every turn, at every chance he had, he reminded everyone to never forget about the children,” said Tom’s daughter Krista Paternostro Bower, who was a driving force in having the highway named for her late father. *“He believed in the potential of all children and had compassion for all children. This was our dad’s most enduring legacy.”*

In telling of the many transformations Paternostro helped pioneer at East Lycoming, Bower emphasized that the biggest thing her father took to the district was a fresh attitude, which brought out the best in those around him.

“Through our dad’s leadership, East Lycoming School District started to believe in itself again. The teachers were reinvigorated about the important role they played in their students’ lives. The students were inspired to do their best and be their best,” she said. *“There was a newfound sense of pride for everyone. We went from being a small farming town in the sticks, to a top-notch district that was competitive in academics, arts, sports and community service.”*

“(Ferrell Elementary) is a perfect example of that,” Bower added. “Deciding to renovate and fundamentally save this elementary school back in the mid-1980s helped to lay the foundations that propelled it to become the Blue Ribbon School it is today. You cannot have the present without an acknowledgment of the past.”

Bower went on to say how her father became an inspiration for those within the community to expect better things from their schools, as he always had the district’s future in mind.

“People started to demand more of their district, more from their teachers, and more from their children,” she said. “Together, the district transformed.”

After retiring from public education, Paternostro took a position with the Industrial Modernization Center in Montoursville, where he played a huge role in the Pennsylvania School-To-Work Initiative. The great success of that initiative that would become a model for youth apprenticeship across the country, led Paternostro to testify on its behalf in front of a U.S. Senate committee — a testimony which would later be featured in Smithsonian Magazine and replayed on ABC News.

In the early 2000s, Paternostro stayed involved with youth education by serving as director of the Children’s Advocacy Initiative for Lycoming County, earning him the Child Advocate Award in 2004.

Following his involvement in that initiative, he took up a position supervising student teachers at Bloomsburg University, and spent three years as a consultant for the American Board for the Certification of Teacher Excellence, in Washington, D.C.

Paternostro spent six years, from 2005 to 2011, serving as one of Pennsylvania’s first Distinguished Educators, where he helped struggling school districts improve student achievement.

Along with his many years in education, Paternostro also served on the Lycoming County Heroin Drug Task Force, Lycoming County’s School Safety Committee on Homeland Security, the state Legislative Joint Commission Task Force on Children and was a former member of the Picture Rocks Volunteer Fire Department Fire Police.

According to Yaw, who has focused a lot of his own energy on the ever-growing drug problem in Pennsylvania, Paternostro was one of the first people in the area who noticed how big of an epidemic heroin was becoming.

“I remember that Tom was very instrumental in the Heroin Task Force in Lycoming County,” said Yaw. “He was a little clairvoyant to recognize that, unfortunately, we had a serious drug problem in Pennsylvania. That was just the kind of person he was.”

Fittingly, the stretch of highway now named in his honor was a piece of road that Paternostro, who died Sept. 8, 2014, played a big role in having upgraded for safety

reasons, as he was a spokesman for a communitywide coalition seeking to get the road straightened out.

“It is unique that Tom was actually involved with this piece of highway, and getting it upgraded from what it used to be,” Everett said. “It is very fitting that his name be on it and that he be remembered for that, and all of the other great things he did in the community over the years.”

THRUWAY PROJECT HITS FIRST HURDLE; IT MUST BE SCALED

The Central Susquehanna Valley Thruway Project has – pardon the pun – hit a roadblock.

Actually, the roadblock is more like a milkshake-textured ooze from two coal by-products that are in the path of the southern portion of the project, which is designed to bypass the perpetually congested Shamokin Dam strip of Route 15.

When completed in 2024, the thruway is designed to connect Route 147 south of Montandon to Route 15 south of Winfield with a 13-mile, four-lane, limited access highway.

The coal byproducts pose significant environmental and engineering risks that will necessitate shifting the ultimate path of the thruway. Doing so requires public interviews and input and a host of new approvals.

This is hardly the first hurdle to the thruway project and, we are certain, far from the last one.

But the big picture must be kept in view. This thruway needs to be completed for three reasons. It will improve highway safety, bring travel for thousands of motorists going to and from Harrisburg and points into the modern age, and improve the region’s commerce profile for the future. We have faith that engineers and environmental personnel with PennDOT will work with the public and find an altered pathway for the thruway that will still meet this goals.

The thruway is about 20 years late, but the funding – the most difficult hurdle – is in place. At this point, we would hope everyone involved in its construction is more in the mood to solve problems than turn back at the first sign of complication. That is certainly our hope and expectation and we are guessing it is shared by thousands of motorists and countless business leaders who are depending on a Susquehanna Thruway seven years from now.

AIRPORT AUTHORITY SETS SPECIAL MEETING FOR TERMINAL BIDS

The Williamsport Regional Airport’s new terminal project is moving forward with a special meeting scheduled for March 14 to open bids for construction.

The meeting will be at 12:30 p.m. at the Hampton Inn on Via Bella, Thomas Hart, executive director of the airport, said.

The Lycoming County Municipal Airport Authority issued the call for bids at the end of January.

Hart said plans for the new terminal are advancing as expected.

Despite the prospect of building an entirely new terminal in the next year, the authority approved construction to increase the size of the current terminal's security area during its meeting Thursday evening.

The current security area holds about 30 people, making it impossible for large aircraft to come to the airport.

The renovated section will add 20 more seats and will cost roughly \$3,500, Hart said.

Hart said it is a relatively small price to pay to bring in larger aircraft during the next 12 months.

In other business, the authority approved a long-range strategic plan and a long-range marketing plan.

The strategic plan includes construction of the terminal and renovation to the runways to increase the line of sight for pilots and allow planes to approach at a lower altitude.

The marketing plan will include aggressively pursuing additional airline services for the airport. Currently American Airlines is the only carrier.

In the past, Hart and the authority have said that without the construction of a new terminal additional airline service will be impossible, but with a new building, including a larger security area, getting a new airline is more likely.

Authority members present were Christopher Logue, Atwood Welker, William Martin, Frank Pellegrino, Rebecca Burke, state Rep. Garth Everett, R-Muncy, and Ryan M.Tira.

The next authority meeting will be at 5:30 p.m. March 9.

WOLF'S PROPOSED COP TAX FOR THOSE WITHOUT DEBATED

A \$25 per person tax on municipalities without a police force to raise about \$63 million in funds for the state police is included in Gov. Tom Wolf's proposed budget, a cause for debate among local municipal officials.

The proposal would only affect municipalities that do not directly fund a police force. Municipalities with a part-time force or that contract police from other communities would not be affected, Wolf's press secretary J.J. Abbott explained.

"We feel it's important to start a conversation about this because more and more municipalities are opting not to provide their own police," Abbott said. *"The cost of having a local police department is much more significant than \$25 per person."*

About half of the municipalities in Pennsylvania, and about 20 percent of the state's population, rely solely on state police, Abbott added.

Bill Burdett, township manager for Loyalsock Township, which does not have a police force, said a similar proposal was made in the past, but was turned down because it was considered double taxation — Pennsylvanians already fund the state police through state and other taxes.

However Abbott said this proposal won't be considered double taxation because the fine would fall on municipalities as a whole, not on individuals or households.

"That's just a way to not call it a tax," Burdett said, saying the fine eventually would fall onto individuals' shoulders. *"I think every municipality would have to raise taxes (to pay the fine). Maybe not in year one, but eventually. It would certainly have an impact on our budget."*

Burdett said it's unfair for the governor to task municipalities without local police to fund state police on their own. Everyone pays for the state police; no one gets their services for free, he said, and the state police serve the entire state, not just communities without local forces.

"They go where the crime is," he said. *"I don't want to say everybody shouldn't help, because it's an important service. But (the state government) needs to identify the problem and figure out a solution that works for everyone."*

Larry Stout, a Clinton Township supervisor, said it's too early to discuss in detail, but that he's not at all surprised by the proposal.

"I've believed the present structure was not sustainable," he said.

He said he doubts the proposal will pass as is. It'll get hashed around and there will be changes, he said, but *"we can't kick the can down the road forever."*

Stout said he and the other supervisors will discuss the proposal at their meeting Monday.

The county hasn't taken a stance for or against the proposal, but is examining it to determine its fairness, said county transportation planner Mark Murawski.

“What the right mix is to solve this problem is a great debate,” he said. “The governor is putting something out there for people to react to.”

Murawski is a longtime supporter of finding additional funding for state police in order to lower the amount state police can take from the Motor License Fund, so more of that money can go toward repairing highways and bridges as was intended, he said. State police have withdrawn more and more from the fund over time and are taking about \$800 million this year.

The state started working last year to drop that amount to \$500 million over a 10-year span, but did not identify alternative means of supplying state police with that missing \$300 million. If the proposal to fine municipalities without police does pass, Murawski doesn't think it will generate enough funding on its own.

“I support the state police, but the need is there,” Murawski said, referring to the growing list of highway and bridge repairs needed statewide. “The status quo is unacceptable.”

MEETING SET THIS WEEK ON PROPOSED HIGHWAY PLAN

SELINGROVE - The state Department of Transportation's Engineering District 3 will hold a public meeting to provide updates and seek input on the Central Susquehanna Valley Transportation project's (CSVT) Southern Section from 6:30 to 9 p.m. Wednesday at the Selingsrove Middle School, 401 18th St.

The CSVT Southern Section is a proposed, four-lane, limited-access highway in Monroe Township and Shamokin Dam Borough in Snyder County. It will connect U.S. Routes 11/15 north of Selingsrove to Route 15 south of Winfield, and the project will include a connector from the new highway to Route 61 at the Veterans Memorial Bridge.

PennDOT's project design team will make a presentation at 6:30 p.m., then an open house will follow at 7:30 to display refinements made to the project design over the past year, information on the current engineering and environmental challenges, and other aspects of the design process.

Project design team members will be available to address questions and receive feedback about the information presented during the meeting.

Engineering and environmental challenges have arisen during final design of the CSVT Southern Section, which was initiated in 2015. In particular, PennDOT recently has determined that the project alignment must be modified between Fisher Road and Sunbury Road to avoid constructing the new highway on the nearby existing fly ash waste basins, as previously planned.

A fact sheet with additional information related to the fly ash waste basins is available at www.csvt.com. Those challenges must be addressed to continue advancing design, right-of-way acquisition and, ultimately construction of the CSVT Southern Section.

Public involvement is a key component of the design process, and input from community members who live, work or regularly travel in the area will be considered as alternate routes avoiding the ash basins are developed. All residents, business owners, and other interested parties are strongly encouraged to participate in the public meeting and offer their opinions and suggestions.

Should inclement weather cause the cancellation of this meeting, it will be held at the same time and location on Feb. 22.

COMMISSIONERS DISCUSS GAS TAX IN LIGHT OF \$5 REGISTRATION FEE

As the Lycoming County commissioners consider imposing a \$5 vehicle registration fee on county residents, one commissioner took issue with the Pennsylvania State Police's increasing allotment from the statewide gas tax.

Commissioner Tony Mussare said while he supports the state police, he takes issue with them extracting \$800 million from the gas tax fund, that would otherwise be used to fix county roads and bridges.

"This was for roads and bridges," Mussare said, adding that the state wanting counties to impose a fee is counterproductive if such a large sum is taken out of the gas tax.

He and the other commissioners encouraged local residents to contact their office and voice their opinion on the matter.

The registration fee would be collected by the state Department of Transportation, however the entire amount would be returned to the county, according to the commissioners.

Commissioner Rick Mirabito said the money from the fee could be used to pay for a bridge bundling program in the county, so a number of bridge repairs could be funded at the same time, thus making it cheaper.

Commissioner Jack McKernan also added that the money could be used for a number of different transportation issues in the county.

Mussare voiced his frustration with the cost of bridge repair and the extremely long permitting process each bridge must go through. He used the Wallis Run Road bridge, which was swept away in the Oct. 21 flash flood, as an example.

That bridge saw a speedy replacement because the permitting was expedited, according to John Yingling, director of the Department of Public Safety.

“Why do we need a catastrophe to move the process so quickly,” Mussare said.

The commissioners are unsure when or if they will vote on the registration fee.

WOLF’S STATE POLICE FEE PLAN FRACTION OF LOCAL POLICE COST

HARRISBURG (AP) — The fee that Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf wants municipalities to start paying for full-time state police coverage is a fraction of what other cities and towns pay for their local police departments, according to an Associated Press analysis of state data.

The analysis found that residents in municipalities that have their own police force pay perhaps 10 times the \$25-per-resident fee the Wolf administration wants the Republican-controlled Legislature to approve.

The proposed fee would raise \$63 million for a state police budget that is projected to approach \$1.3 billion in the fiscal year starting July 1.

The state has no eligibility rules or poverty test for municipalities that get state police coverage, and free state police coverage has been a sore spot for at least two decades, since Gov. Tom Ridge, a Republican, sought to extract reimbursements from the largest municipalities benefiting from the service. Lawmakers repeatedly rebuffed him.

Budgetmakers now are under pressure to reverse the increasing flow of highway construction funds into the state police budget, especially since lawmakers approved a \$2 billion-a-year increase in motorist fees and taxes to improve Pennsylvania’s transportation system.

The data show that about 950 municipalities reported spending more than \$2 billion on their local police departments in 2014, or an average of about \$230 per person. That per-person cost two years ago was almost 10 times the fee Wolf is proposing for 2.5 million Pennsylvanians who live in municipalities that currently receive free full-time state police coverage.

The governor’s office frames the proposal as one of fairness to municipalities that pay for their own police forces and as a way to improve public safety.

“This is something of an equity issue, but there is a lot of value in local police,” said Wolf’s press secretary, J.J. Abbott. *“The governor is a big supporter of law enforcement and he thinks we should have a system that incentivizes the maximum level of police coverage for public safety.”*

The AP analysis found that municipalities with full- or part-time state police protection are less populated and bigger geographically than the average city or town.

Of 2,560 municipalities in Pennsylvania, half — 1,287 — rely solely on the Pennsylvania State Police for police coverage, according to state data. Another 410 get part-time state police service to cover when their local police force is off-duty. Those would not be assessed a fee under Wolf's proposal.

Troopers are required to provide local police service to any municipality that requests it.

The state police have not divulged a cost figure for the police service in response to repeated requests from The Associated Press. However, legislative researchers reported in 2014 that the state police said it had cost \$540 million in 2012 — more than half the agency's budget that year — to provide full- and part-time police service.

Under the state constitution, motorist fees and fuel taxes are strictly for highway construction, repair and safety. Those dollars now underwrite two-thirds of the state police budget, or \$800 million out of \$1.2 billion.

The state's largest legislative district, in northern Pennsylvania, where dozens of municipalities are served by the state police, belongs to Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati, R-Brockway.

Scarnati warned that many rural municipalities cannot afford the fee and that perhaps the state should have a poverty test to determine which cities and towns can afford it. But he also warned that, once imposed, the fee will surely rise.

"It may be \$25 today, but it's going up every year," Scarnati said. "It's only the beginning."

BUDGET REALITIES MAKE WOLF'S COP TAX DEBATE-WORTHY

Gov. Tom Wolf is proposing a \$25 per person tax on municipalities without a police force to raise \$63 million in funds for the state police, a plan bound to have its share of critics.

It's entirely understandable that those who lead municipalities that get their police protection for free from state police would resist any move to change that.

Loyalsock Township, Lycoming County's second most populous municipality, does not have a police force and has been happy with state police protection for decades.

Bill Burdett, the township's manager, says Wolf's proposed fee amounts to double taxation since the township's residents already pay state taxes to support state police.

That's true. But so do Williamsport residents, who also pay hefty city taxes in large part for local police protection. So do residents of many of the county's municipalities with lesser populations.

There also is the practical matter of the state's revenues, where they go, and where they are intended to go.

State police are taking \$800 million out of the state's Motor License Fund for operations costs. That money is supposed to be going toward funding of bridge and highway repairs and improvements. Those are costs that never recede.

Both Larry Stout, a Clinton Township supervisor, and Mark Murawski, Lycoming County transportation planner, agree on one point - the current arrangement is unsustainable.

The \$25 per person fee for police protection in municipalities served solely by state police is at least worth talking about. Leaders in municipalities working under the existing setup should at least suggest alternative funding if they don't like the proposal.

But claims of double taxation probably ring hollow for the 80 percent of Pennsylvania's population that pays for local police out of one pocket and state police protection out of