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## Westmont Borough mulls sharing services with neighboring municipalities, takes step toward joint comprehensive plan

By Russ O'Reilly  
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John Hahn, Westmont Borough Public Works laborer, uses a lawn tractor to blow leaves to the curb along Luzerne Street in Westmont Borough on Thursday, Oct. 15, 2020. The borough will be vacuuming up the leaves and taking them away on Friday.

By Todd Berkey  
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JOHNSTOWN, Pa. – Westmont Borough Council is moving forward with following the process for a comprehensive plan to share services with neighboring municipalities.

“This is wh  
plan,” Coun

**gusto**

Gusto builds in payroll, HR, and  
peace of mind, block by block.

Lea

comprehensive



Municipalities in the West Hills area already share some services, including police and fire protection, but other opportunities for collaboration may exist in areas including recreation, zoning and stormwater management.

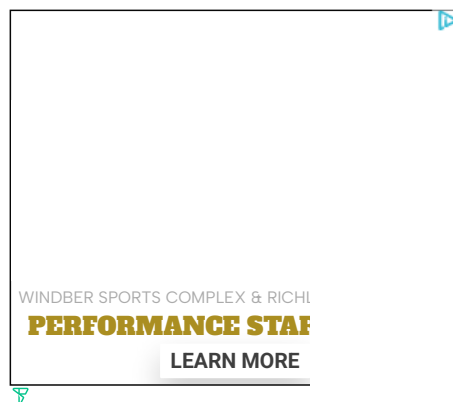
The first step for leaders of Westmont Borough and other participating municipalities toward a joint comprehensive plan is to perform an individual “strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats,” or SWOT, analysis of their municipality to submit to the Cambria County Planning Commission.

The Westmont council unanimously decided Tuesday to provide that information to the Cambria County Planning Commission’s community planner, Shanna Murphy Sosko.

“Once we know what they are prioritizing as far as their goals and objectives, we can determine where it can go as far as a shared plan to achieve those goals,” Murphy Sosko said.

The commission would use the analyses supplied by the participating municipalities to define a project scope and submit a request for proposal to consultants to author a comprehensive plan and to determine a project budget.

The commission would also apply for a Municipal Assistance Program grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development and oversee the comprehensive plan for the municipalities.



Murphy Sosko provided boroughs and townships in the West Hills with preliminary information on the process in February.

More recently, in May, representatives from Westmont, Southmont and Brownstown boroughs, Upper Yoder and Lower Yoder Townships, and Westmont Hilltop School District met with Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development officials, who talked about the benefits of joint municipal planning and the process for applying for municipal assistance program funding, Murphy Sosko said.

Southmont Borough initiated the effort by contacting the planning commission, she said. The inclusion of other municipalities would make a stronger application for state grant money to afford the comprehensive plan.



The municipalities are seeking a grant of \$70,000 to \$100,000 from the DCED, which would require a local match, McCall said.

The funding would include the cost of managing the comprehensive planning process for the participating municipalities.

Southmont and Westmont are serious about it, Murphy Sosko said. The other municipalities are interested, but not committed; they still have further questions, she said.

Once a plan for cooperation is in place, each municipality would sign a cooperation agreement. The process was attempted in the past, but fell through when the request for proposals from consultants who would author the plan were returned, McCall said.

“This is where we had a sticking point the last time, when the cost came back,” McCall said. “But if we get to the point of having a cooperation agreement, then we would pass a resolution and apply for the grant.”



The municipalities have the opportunity to apply for the DCED grant in September or in the spring, he said.

The cooperation among municipalities in the West Hills may someday lead to the formation of one West Hills municipality, council members of Westmont Borough said.

“Maybe that’s where it will take us,” McCall said, seeing costs of operating individual municipal functions rising.

Sharing services and collaboration is a start that could perhaps lead to the eventual formation of one West Hills municipality, but it doesn’t have to evolve to that point, Murphy Sosko said.

Municipal collaboration and coordination is a core goal of the countywide comprehensive plan, she said.

Russ O'Reilly is a reporter for The Tribune-Democrat. Follow him on Twitter [@RussellOReilly](#).  
MORE INFORMATION





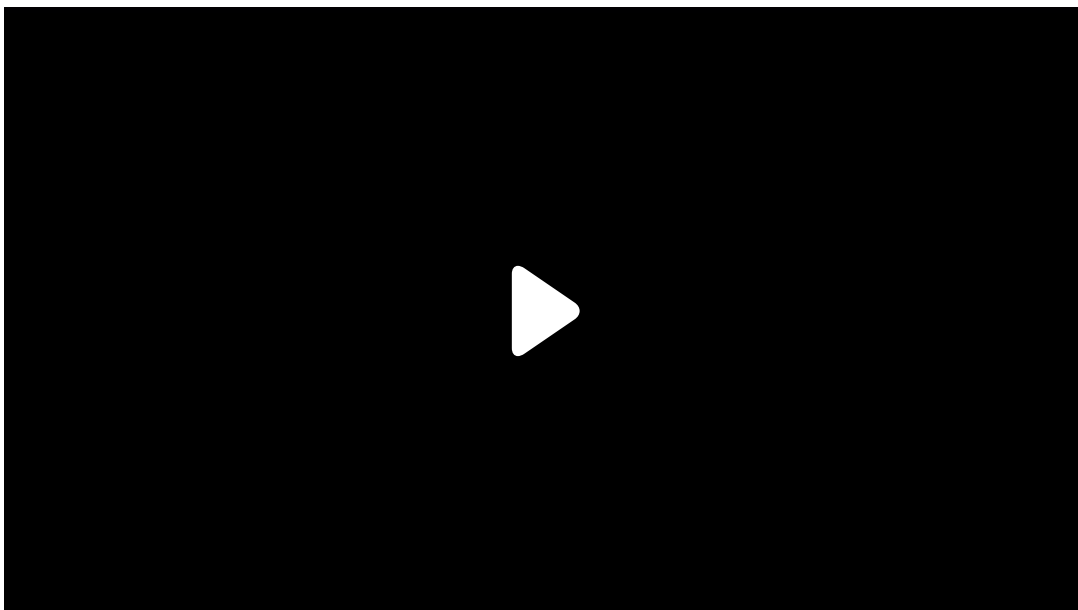
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