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FEATURED

'What the public wants': West Hills residents weigh in on regional plan

By Dave Sutor
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Westmont resident Jeff Smith posts a message on a board during a public meeting regarding the West Hills Regional Comprehensive Plan at Westmont Hilltop Elementary School on Wednesday, Oct. 22, 2025.

By Dave Sutor
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JOHNSTOWN, Pa. – Residents of Lower Yoder Township, Upper Yoder Township, Brownstown, Southmont and Westmont got the opportunity to provide input regarding development of the West Hills Regional Comprehensive Plan for the first time Wednesday.



Before then, the beginning stages were handled by a steering committee, elected officials and members of the Cambria County Planning Commission.



Jeff Raykes, managing principal for the Stuart Group, and Cambria County Planning Commission Executive Director Mark Lazzari speak during a public meeting regarding the West Hills Regional Comprehensive Plan at Westmont Hilltop Elementary School on Wednesday, Oct. 22, 2025.

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Several dozen people attended the public meeting held at Westmont Hilltop Elementary School, providing conversational comments and written notes left behind on message boards.

“It’s amazing,” said Shanna Murphy Sosko, community development planner with the planning commission. “I wasn’t expecting this many people at all. We’ll be able to, later on, analyze all these Post-it notes. We’ll take some pictures of them, so we remember what they look like.





Shanna Murphy Sosko, a community development planner for the Cambria County Planning Commission, discusses a message board during a public meeting regarding the West Hills Regional Comprehensive Plan at Westmont Hilltop Elementary School on Wednesday, Oct. 22, 2025.

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"We'll take them back. And then we'll begin the analyze phase of the plan, which is when we'll really be able to look at all of this and find out what the public wants."

The goal is to develop an overall plan about how to improve the five municipalities, where 15,000 people live in a 30-square-mile region.

"This is an 18-month project, guys," said Jeff Raykes, managing principal of the Stuart Group, a consulting firm that is assisting with the process. "It's a long project. It will take us some time to get there. We're only about four months in, so we're way early."



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A broad range of subjects was discussed, including shared services, outdoor recreation, street and sidewalk maintenance, government ordinances, business development and activities for children.

"Things like shared services, I think, could be a huge help," said Jeff Smith, a Westmont resident. "Capitalizing on the wonderful outdoor communities that are around, that would all be wonderful stuff."

"Really, I'm just here to gather some information myself to see kind of what the whole comprehensive plan is."



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Molli Lazzari, a Southmont resident and 12th-grader at Westmont Hilltop High School, said she is "hoping to grow our community to not only have students like me stay in the area for years to come, but have people from outside areas want to come in and make Johnstown a better place."

Dave Sutor is a reporter for The Tribune-Democrat. He can be reached at (814) 532-5056. Follow him on Twitter @Dave_Sutor.

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Dave Sutor

Reporter

