

WPPA POTTSVILLE QUARTERLY ISSUES 1/2024-3/2024

Submitted: April 2024

The following is a listing of significant issues responded to by WPPA Pottsville, PA.
Significant programming issues for the period January to March 2024
and aired during Scheduled Newscasts 6am to 9am Weekdays and other program times.

<u>Issue:</u>	<u>Date:</u>	<u>Type and Description:</u>
Padora named chairman of Sch. Co. Commissioners	1/3/2024	<p>The newest member of the Schuylkill County board of commissioners was named chairman Tuesday at the reorganization meeting in the courthouse.</p> <p>Larry Padora, the top vote-getter in the November election, received the support of fellow commissioners Barron L. "Boots" Hetherington and Gary J. Hess. He abstained from voting on his appointment.</p> <p>Padora said "I'm stepping in at a difficult time. We need to put the past behind us and begin working for the county."</p> <p>Padora succeeds Hetherington as chairman and both Republicans were elected to four-year terms in November.</p> <p>The commissioners expect to meet with Vision Government Solutions Inc., the Massachusetts-based consultant that was hired to conduct the reassessment, in about a week. The RH says both commissioners stressed the importance of economic development to the county.</p>
Communities struggle to find police officers	1/4/2024	<p>Many communities are struggling to find police officers, and Ringtown is no exception. Mayor Phil Beaver told council at their meeting Tuesday night that "The search continues."</p> <p>Beaver added "I wish I had more to tell you, I really do." Council President Len Kamarousky chimed in by saying "It's all over the place."</p> <p>Beaver said many candidates are only seeking full-time positions and there's quite a few of those. Council Vice-President Tom Murray said "So it's not a money issue even. According to the Shen Sentinal Beaver added "No. They're not accepting part-time jobs, they just want straight full-time," Beaver said. "I will continue my search. Hopefully by next month, I'll have something."</p>

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Thea Sten signs
the National Anthem
at PA Farm Show

1/8/2024 Thirteen-year-old Thea Sten gave a rousing rendition of the “Star-Spangled Banner” on Saturday to kick off the 2024 Pennsylvania Farm Show. The Blue Mountain Middle School eighth grader won the “Oh, Say Can You Sing” contest to earn the prestigious billing. She was the third young woman in a row from Schuylkill County to perform the national anthem at the eight-day extravaganza, the largest indoor agricultural extravaganza in the country. According to the RH Mia Bixler, of Schuylkill Haven, performed it in 2023. Kalli J. Smith, of Gordon, sang the anthem in 2022. Thea was flanked by U.S. Sen. Bob Casey, U.S. Rep. Dan Meuser and Pennsylvania Lt. Gov. Austin Davis as she belted out the anthem. Thea’s mom Erin was on stage with her daughter and told the RH "She sounded wonderful."

Anthracite Mining
Heritage Month

1/9/2024 January is Anthracite Mining Heritage Month and there's a range of programs scheduled throughout northeastern Pennsylvania including Hazle Township and Pottsville. According to an event release the annual observance focuses on the history and culture of the anthracite region. The RH reports the public is welcome to attend the events, most of which are free. The itinerary includes programs in Schuylkill and nearby counties. • Jan. 25: Reading Anthracite Public Program, speaker Eric Bella, mining engineer, on “History of Philadelphia and Reading Coal & Iron Company and Reading Anthracite,” 6:30 to 7 p.m. at Reading Anthracite Building, 200 Mahantongo St., Pottsville, with refreshments. Parking is available at the Mahantongo Parking Garage across the street from the building.

American Red Cross
asking for blood donations

1/10/2024 The American Red Cross is calling on potential blood and platelet donors to step up and help rebuild its supply amid an emergency nationwide blood shortage. The organization’s supply has fallen to critically low levels, with the Red Cross experiencing a recent 7,000-unit shortfall between Christmas and New Year’s Day alone. The organization noted Monday in a press release the number of people donating blood to the Red Cross has fallen by about 40% over the past two decades. As demand outpaced incoming blood supply, the Red Cross has had to limit distributions of type O blood products — among the most transfused blood types — to hospitals in recent weeks. Those interested in giving blood to visit redcrossblood.org, where people can enter their ZIP codes and find nearby blood drives and donation opportunities. They can also download the Red Cross Blood Donor app or call 800-733-2767.

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Helping Harvest receives grant money

1/12/2024 Helping Harvest, the nonprofit food distribution program serving Berks and Schuylkill counties, has received a \$200,000 grant from the Jewish Healthcare Foundation grant to support pregnant and postpartum women. The foundation distributes federal Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Funds provided through the state Department of Human Services to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity and support Pennsylvania families. Jay W. Worrall, Helping Harvest president said "This grant substantially enhances our ability to pursue one of our most important goals — meeting the nutritional needs of children during their peak brain- and body-development years." The RH reports last year Helping Harvest provided over \$16 million in food to 110,000 residents. It is a member of Feeding America, the nation's largest hunger-relief organization.

Grant to buy police body cameras for Shenandoah borough

1/17/2024 Members of Shenandoah borough's police force will soon be equipped with body cameras. The borough received a grant through a foundation run by Mrs. T's Pierogies owner Tom Twardzik and his wife, Pam Twardzik. The grant will allow the borough to acquire four body cameras at a cost of just under 18K per a five-year contract. Shen Borough Manager Tony Sajone told the RH the decision to acquire body cameras became a big priority after the officer-involved shooting on Dec. 11 that led to the death of Bryon D. Scheuring, a 32-year-old borough resident. When interviewed shortly after the incident, Mayor Andrew Szczyglak noted that borough police did not wear body cameras. The mayor added the full-time officer involved in the shooting, whom he declined to name, is on paid leave until state police finish investigating the case.

Frackville "Grade" being prepped for project

1/19/2024 We are getting very close to some of the prep for the upcoming project to improve "The Grade" on Route 61 between St. Clair and Frackville starting. It's scueduled to begin in early February. Ronald J. Young, Jr. is the District 5 Press Officer for PennDOT and he said a \$115.5 mil contract has been awarded to J.D. Eckman, Inc. On Monday, February 5th work will begin on tree trimming and removal plus utility relocation. The work will concentrate on the area from Terry Rich Boulevard to just north of the Darkwater Road intersection and will last through mid-to-late spring. Skook News says that both northbound and southbound lanes will be affected by short term lane restrictions.

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Lawmakers have until the end of 2024 to reauthorize utility law protections

1/23/2024 Pennsylvania lawmakers have until the end of 2024 to reauthorize a key area of state law that protects low-income utility customers from sudden shut-offs when behind on their bills, and some are taking advantage of the deadline to push for new consumer protections. The law was enacted in 2004 and it was designed to both shield people from losing heat in winter and give utility companies more options to collect unpaid bills, with an eye on keeping rates down for all consumers.

With another reauthorization looming, consumer advocates are trying to make a case that the law favors utility companies over households, and they're pitching changes that include a moratorium on summer shut-offs.

As with every issue in a divided Legislature whether those those provisions happen or not is tied to backroom bargaining between the Democratic-controlled state House and the Republican-controlled state Senate.

Relay for Life to return

1/25/2024 After a two-year hiatus, Relay for Life will return to Schuylkill County on June 15.

While traditionally held in Pottsville, this year's rendition of the event will be held at a new location, Bubeck Park in Schuylkill Haven. The venue is being sponsored by the Schuylkill Haven Recreation Department.

Trysha Nettles who's the event lead said in a news release in part "Relay For Life is more than just a walk.

It is a volunteer-led movement that unites communities to celebrate cancer survivors, remember loved ones lost to cancer and raise funds to improve the lives of people with cancer and their families."

The RH says the society is looking for cancer survivors to honor at the event, as well as teams and volunteers.

For more information, visit relayforlife.org/schuylkillpa or the Relay for Life of Schuylkill County Facebook page.

Former Days Inn property to be developed

1/26/2024 The former Days Inn site along Route 61 in North Manheim Twp. is actively being marketed to attract development.

Cale Bruso is an associate with Bennett Williams Commercial, a retail brokerage firm and said they've talked to a bunch of sit-down restaurants and even a few national coffee guys.

However he would not identify the businesses. The former Days Inn property was demolished last summer.

The south building was the site of a March 15, 2019, fire that was ruled arson, and it was demolished in June.

The north building followed in July.

Bruso told the RH he anticipates this project is going to be 80 to 90 percent retail and as someone who grew up in Schuylkill County he knows it's been a struggle to get bigger groups to come to the area.

However he feels that people are finally seeing the light in Schuylkill County.

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Fountain Springs site could be turned

2/1/2024 The site of a former battery recycling plant in Fountain Springs could soon become a solar farm, if a New York firm has its way. It's U.S. Light Energy that's proposed a solar farm on the former site of Ashland Metals off Germanville Rd.

into a solar farm

The property is split across three parcels and is owned by Ed and April Wytovich, according to the Schuylkill Parcel Locator.

The Shen Sentinal reports a public zoning hearing is set for Feb. 7 at 7pm at the Butler Township Municipal Building in Fountain Springs on the matter.

The company has requested two variances, one to install the solar farm itself and one for setback requirements.

The property was a battery recycling plant decades ago and was a hazardous waste site and is still monitored by the Department of Environmental Protection. However no buildings are on the property and there aren't any above-ground remnants of hazardous materials.

Explore Schuylkill
mini grant program opened

2/2/2024 As a way to stimulate tourism and bolster economic growth, Explore Schuylkill has officially opened applications for its Tourism Marketing Mini Grant program.

The initiative aims to provide support to qualifying tourism businesses and organizations in Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, facilitating increased tourism and overnight stays within the region.

Grants awarded through this program can be utilized for a wide array of marketing initiatives, such as marketing campaigns, projects, and event marketing. Skook News reports organizations seeking to boost their tourism efforts and contribute to the economic prosperity of Schuylkill County are encouraged to apply promptly for this valuable financial support.

There's more info at schuylkill.org.

Property tax/rent rebate
program assistance

2/6/2024 If you're eligible for the state's property tax/rent rebate program and need help with your application, the Department of Revenue will be at two community centers nearby to help.

This additional in-person assistance is being offered in part to help Pennsylvanians who are newly eligible for the PTRR program following this year's expansion of the program.

DOR representatives stationed at these centers will also be able to help Pennsylvanians file their Pennsylvania personal income tax returns now that tax season is underway.

Revenue Secretary Pat Browne said "With the historic expansion of the PTRR program, there are nearly 175,000 people who are newly eligible for a rebate." In Mahanoy City, the staffers will be at the Mahanoy City Senior Community Center at 138 West Centre Street on Feb. 7, 15, and 21 from 9am to 1pm.

And the Shen Sentinal says in Shamokin, they will be at the Coal Region Adult Community Center on East Arch Street on Feb. 21 and 28 from 9am to 3pm. Keep in mind inclement weather could impact the schedule.

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Governor Shapiro budget proposal for 2024-2025

2/7/2024 Gov. Josh Shapiro's second budget proposes significant increases to education and economic development and would regulate adult use marijuana, while leaning heavily on Pennsylvania's flush reserves to underwrite his vision. The Democrat on Tuesday unveiled his budget for the 2024-25 fiscal year, which begins July 1, in front of a joint session of the House and Senate in the ornate Capitol Rotunda, watched over by a heavy police presence. The Gov said about his ambitious plan "I know that's a bold vision, and some will reflexively be opposed, saying, 'We can't afford that.' But I would argue we can't afford not to invest right now." Much of Shapiro's plan will face stiff resistance in the Republican-controlled Senate.

Schuylkill Co. History Fair will spotlight the Pottsville Maroons football team

2/9/2024 The Pottsville Maroons will be in the spotlight tomorrow at the 25th Schuylkill County History Fair in Fairlane Village mall. The Schuylkill County Historical Society's exhibit will have new Maroons' 100th anniversary sweatshirts and artifacts from the very early NFL team based in Pottsville. The exhibit is located in the former Kay Jewelers site. The bronzed football shoe with which Charlie Berry kicked the field goal that defeated Notre Dame's legendary Four Horsemen in an exhibition game in 1925 will be on display. It was that unauthorized postseason game, played in Philadelphia, that caused the NFL to revoke the Maroons' league championship. The RH reports the Maroons 100th Anniversary Celebration Committee will kick off the organizational effort with a mixer from 6 to 9 p.m. Feb. 17 in Arrow Studio & Events in Pottsville. The history fair event is free and open to the public.

Aqua Pennsylvania replaces 37 fire hydrants in Shenandoah

2/13/2024 Less than seven months since the acquisition of the Municipal Authority of the Borough of Shenandoah, Aqua Pennsylvania Inc. has replaced 37 inoperable fire hydrants in and around the borough, the company said in a news release. The company took over the water system in July and had identified 45 of 195 hydrants in the system, or 23%, as being out of service. Aqua President Marc Lucca described the replacement of the hydrants as an "immediate priority." The water system serves about 3,000 customers throughout Shenandoah and parts of West Mahanoy and Butler townships. Shortly after the acquisition, Aqua began replacing hydrants and installing new ones. According to the RH Aqua currently serves approximately 1.5 million customers in 32 counties throughout Pennsylvania. For more information, visit AquaWater.com.

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Schuylkill Technoloy Center
awarded grant money

2/14/2024 The SC technology center was awarded a grant from the state department of education in the amount of just under \$79,000. State rep. Tim Twardzick made the announcement.
The money will be used to buy new equipment to help train students in high demand jobs through career and tech education grants. Twardzick praised Assistant Executive director Shannon Brennan for the center's growing success. He said "The staff at STC are doing a fantic job for our students. Our local businesses are finding the graduates are job ready and enjoying career with bright futures."
The RH reports the release added that career and technical education offer students the chance to develop critical skills through a combination of classes and hands on learning experiences which allow them to apply academics to real world problems.

Schuylkill County
commissioner meetings
available online

2/15/2024 Schuylkill County residents can now watch county commissioner meetings live on the county website, or view them later.
Wednesday was the first time the county broadcast the meeting live online at schuylkillcountypa.gov through YouTube. Commissioners Chairman Larry Padora said that it was done in the interest of "more transparency," and called it a good change for county residents. The RH reports those interested are still able to listen to meetings via Zoom, as well, by dialing 301-715-8592 and following the prompts. Meetings via Zoom began amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Schuylkill Trust building
to begin renovation to
create 60 apartemnts

2/16/2024 Transformation of the Schuylkill Trust Co. building into 60 market-rate apartments could start soon.
City Administrator Thomas A. Palamar gave an update on the progress to turn the upper floors of the building into housing. At Monday's city council meeting he said "I believe we are going to see some (interior) demolition there within the next 60 days."
The eight-story building Located at Centre and Market streets in the heart of the downtown and is owned by Pottsville Centre LLC and currently houses Beyond Hello, a medical marijuana dispensary that opened in 2021 on the first floor.
The RH reports a \$3 million grant for the apartments was awarded through the state Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program and Palamar said it is likely that formal plans will be submitted within the next 90 days.

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Pottsville High School

2/20/2024 The Pottsville Area High School band, cheering section, flag bearers and majorettes are getting ready for an

band headed to Walt
Disney World

experience of a lifetime at Walt Disney World in Florida.

They left around 2:30 a.m. today for Philadelphia International Airport. The group of 95 students and a dozen or so chaperones will board a flight to Orlando.

On Thursday afternoon the Pottsville unit is scheduled to perform in the "Festival of Fantasy" parade in Disney's Magic Kingdom Park. District Superintendent Sarah E. Yoder expressed thanks to staff, band boosters and others who have made the trip possible. She told the RH "I am excited that our students are able to take advantage of this amazing opportunity."

According to Disney's website the parade is filled with unbridled enchantment and vivid pageantry, a dazzling mix of floats, motion and original music.

Pumpy recreational area
planned revitalization

2/21/2024 The revival of the former Pumping Station Dam recreational area, affectionately known as the Pumpy, took another step forward Monday night.

Councilman Joe Gawrylik, chair of the infrastructure committee, provided an update on the project.

He said a meeting was held with the members of the Pumpy Association and borough engineers from Alfred Benesch and Company.

Gawrylik said the meeting was positive and they received valuable guidance from the engineers. He added "We have support behind us and I think this thing can be a go, but I'm not going to say we can go fishing April 1st."

He said volunteers are working on the grounds regularly. Council approved a motion to allow Benesch to move forward in planning at a cost of \$10,000.

Mount Carbon bridge
moved to new location

2/23/2024 The historic Mount Carbon bridge moved into its new home yesterday at the Coal Creek Commerce Center in Saint Clair.

Shortly before 2 p.m., the rare bowstring iron truss structure was lowered onto abutments on either side of Mill Creek.

According to the RH a crew from Fabcor Inc., a heavy and utility construction company in Jessup, supervised the placing of the 130-year-old bridge.

The structure is eligible for placement on the National Register of Historic Places and it's part of the Schuylkill River Trail. It links Route 61 with the final section of the 120-mile trail, which will end in Frackville.

Hikers and bikers coming off the bridge will pass in front of the Dunkin restaurant. PennDOT funded the \$2.9 million renovation and restoration of the bridge, a project that began about five years ago.

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Foul Odor on west end
of county addressed

3/1/2024 Schuylkill County officials said that they had separate meetings last week with representatives of four firms accused of causing odors in the west end of the county, and the commissioners said they'll try to do more to address complaints. Residents say the odors from a biosolids facility and other operations are ruining their quality of life and they addressed the commissioners at their weekly meeting Wednesday. Commissioner Barron L. "Boots" Hetherington said their comments are not falling on deaf ears and added "This is not our jurisdiction, but we have to try to do something. We have to speak out." According to the RH a few of the commissioners met with representatives of those four firms and said they had interesting meeting. They discussed the processes they use and how they address complaints.

Blighted property has
trees cut

3/7/2024 Trees were recently cut down to rectify a hazardous situation on a blighted former garage property at the west end of Minersville. Borough manager Robert Mahalchick said that he was contacted about two weeks ago by Tim Hale, executive director of the Schuylkill County Housing Authority, over concerns about trees falling on a nearby authority maintenance garage. Street foreman Ed Houser told the RH that workers cut down trees Monday and moved debris so they could clear a path to the maintenance garage. There's still plenty of debris left over but pushing it into piles and cutting the trees made a noticeable difference. The borough is looking for someone to redevelop the property and put it back on the tax rolls

Reminder to check
smoke alarms and change
batteries

3/8/2024 As you change your clocks for daylight savings time this weekend, you should also check your smoke alarms and CO detectors, according to the American Red Cross, state fire commissioner, and local fire departments. State Fire Commissioner Thomas Cook said "Smoke alarms are your family's first line of defense against the dangers of fire." Cook says dead or missing batteries are the most common cause of a smoke or CO alarm malfunction. He also suggests residents make an escape plan for once your alarm sounds, saying that practicing that plan is critical to ensure a quick exit. Cook added no matter what type of alarms are used in a home, all should be tested monthly.

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PFAS found in Schuylkill
County water supplies

3/11/2024 PFAS, known as “forever chemicals,” have been detected in two Schuylkill County water systems and several sites throughout the region over the past several years.
The effect of exposure to these chemicals and their links to cancer is still being researched, but any exposure to PFAS — or per- and polyfluorinated substances — is a concern. That's according to David Andrews, senior scientist for the Washington, D.C., based Environmental Working Group.
He said “Ultimately, these are chemicals we don’t want to drink in water. Any detection is a concern. ... These are chemicals that end up in everyone’s blood.” EWG is a nonprofit and has managed an interactive online PFAS contamination map of the United States since 2017. Data is updated regularly, most recently on Feb. 5.
The RH reports the two Schuylkill County water systems with PFAS detected in them are the Municipal Authority of the Borough of Shenandoah, owned by Aqua Pennsylvania since last year, and Pennsylvania American Water Co. Frackville District. They serve a combined customer base of more than 15,000.

Person impersonating
deputy sheriff

3/12/2024 The Schuylkill County Sheriff’s Office is advising people of a scam involving someone impersonating a deputy sheriff. In a Facebook post Friday, the sheriff’s office says that if anyone receives a call from 610-600-5373 they are to hang up the phone.
Chief Deputy Sheriff Shawn Butler told the RH “We won’t just call someone on the phone.”
Deputies will typically knock on doors and leave business cards.
The office got a call Friday from former Chief Deputy Sheriff Brian Tobin, who said someone told him a woman got a call from a man pretending to be a specific deputy.
Tobin said “The person was upset because they didn’t know of anything they did wrong.”

St. Clair program
to assist low-income
senior citizens

3/15/2024 A program run by Saint Clair Borough to assist low-income senior citizens and other residents with making needed renovations to their homes and slow the spread of blight was awarded a highly competitive state grant for \$500,000. The award announcement was made by Sen. David G. Argall and Rep. Tim Twardzik. Argall said that Saint Clair’s program is one that other local governments should implement.
According to the RH it is similar to the statewide Whole-Home Repairs Program in that it provides funding to seniors and other low-income residents to make repairs to their homes.
Lawmakers say the Saint Clair program currently has a waitlist. The state funding was awarded through the HOME Investment Partnership Program, which provides municipalities with grant and loan assistance to expand and preserve the supply of decent and affordable housing for low-income Pennsylvanians.

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William Hung
performs for fundraiser
in Pottsville

3/25/2024 American Idol sensation William Hung came to Pottsville on Saturday as part of a fundraiser for ALS at The Crimson House restaurant. During an evening appearance, he was scheduled to perform "She Bangs," a Ricky Martin song. It's the the song that became a viral sensation when Hung appeared on the show 20 years ago. Hung was also escorted by Mayor Dave Clews and city councilman Mark Ackerman as he toured the Yuengling brewery and was guest of honor at a lunch in Roma Pizza in Pottsville. Hung didn't make it on "American Idol," but the video of his performance went viral and launched him on a career as a performer, motivational speaker and ambassador of goodwill. Hung is now 41 and holds an undergraduate degree in math and a masters in business, currently works as a criminal investigator in the Los Angeles Sheriff's Office. Hung told the RH "Over the years, I learned I just need to be my best. My mission is to bring more happiness to the world."

A number of projects win
state grants across
Schuylkill County

3/27/2024 A number of projects to improve roads, bridges and downtowns across Schuylkill County won state grants totaling almost \$2.5 million from the Multimodal Transportation Fund (MTF) yesterday. Rep. Jamie Barton was among those who made the announcement and he said in a news release "New sidewalks don't just improve the value of a property or community; they offer a safe pathway for walkers, joggers and strollers. They also invite people from out of town to visit and shop in our communities. And while culverts aren't a glamorous part of our infrastructure, their upkeep and maintenance are imperative for road safety." The RH reports projects that received grants include in Orwigsburg: \$500,000 to replace sidewalks throughout the borough. And Schuylkill Haven: \$300,000 to make streetscape improvements along the Parkway section of Route 443.

Project 113 train
excursions

3/29/2024 Project 113 which is Minersville's venture for restoration of steam locomotive C.N.J. No. 113, will host the first Minersville Community Day, scheduled from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. May 18, with train excursions highlighting the day's activities. It will include food, craft and other business vendors, plus nonprofits and history organizations; entertainment will also be in the mix. During the day, No. 113 will pull six rail treks from the Minersville station to the New Saint Nicholas Breaker and return. The RH says tickets can be bought online or through the mail. For online purchases, follow the links at RRProject113.org.

During the period. Non-profit groups are also encouraged to send in information for use of the air. Some non-profits also join us live in-studio to discuss their events and fundraisers. WPPA also airs CBS Top-of-the-Hour News Monday-Friday 6AM to 10AM.

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