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Protect PT

SPRING 2025 NEWSLETTER

10 YEARS!

SAVE THE DATE

Join us to celebrate our 10th anniversary!

Sat. April 26, 3 - 6:30 PM

785 Seventh Street, Trafford, PA 15085 Pavillion 2



Anniversary Celebration

Can you believe it's been 10 years already?!

After a whole decade of working to protect our right to clean air and water here in southwest PA, we have accomplished so much—and it was all made possible through the generous support of members like you!

Join us for a celebration of our journey to 10 years on **Saturday, April 26th, from 3:00 PM to 6:30 PM at B-Y Park (Pavilion 2).**

At the celebration, you can expect...

- Food
- Live Music
- Activities for all ages
- Raffles
- Screen Printing with an exclusive 10-year anniversary design (*be sure to bring an apparel item to print on!*)

As a member, you can attend this event **FOR FREE!** Whoop whoop! Non-members must pay a \$15.00 entry fee. We hope you can make it!

Native Plants Workshop

What better way is there to prepare for spring than learning about native plants? In collaboration with Stormy

Oaks Nature Conservancy, Protect PT hosted a Native Plants Educational Workshop this March. Alexis Fitzgerald, an expert nature educator, gave an in-depth presentation on the native plants we should be planting to benefit not only our gardens but all the critters coexisting with us, such as critical pollinators and endangered species. Following the presentation, guests were able to make a seed ball with native seeds donated by the Audubon Society. Interested in learning more about native plants? Contact natalie@protectpt.org for more information!



Pictured: Participants looking at PA's native cactus!

Artist Showcase

On March 22nd, we hosted an art exhibition featuring the work of Bel Haberberger. Each piece of art reflected an environmental disaster in our region, including the Blue Mountain Fire, the acid mine drainage effect on Millers Run, flooding in the Poconos, and Three Mile Island. We could not be more thankful for this

opportunity to present the work of another talented artist. Several of these pieces are still available, so stop by our office to check them out or email natalie@protectpt.org for more information!



Pictured: PPT Board Members Michele K. and Trish W. at March's art exhibition.

Donor Appreciation

In 2025, Protect PT has rolled out our Donor Appreciation Tree! Based on how long someone has been a member with us, donors will be added to our tree with a leaf once they renew their memberships in 2025. **So far, we have had over 70 unique donors make it on the tree, with over a third of those having been with us for 5+ years!** We are honored to have the support of so many residents in our community.

Come down to our office to find your leaf! To make sure your name makes it on the tree, donate today at www.protectpt.org/donate and reup your membership.



Scan to see all upcoming events!



Scan to renew your membership!



Pictured: Donor Appreciation Tree

Upcoming Events

- **Apr 12:** Nature Hike | 10 AM | Ann Rudd Saxman Nature Park
- **Apr 16:** Beaver Run Community Meeting | 7 PM | Allegheny Twp. Community Building
- **Apr 26:** PPT 10th Anniversary Celebration | 3 PM | BY Park, Trafford Pavillion #2

Federal Funding Update

Air Monitoring Project Funding at Risk

On January 27th, 2025, the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) announced cuts to all agency grants, loans, and other financial assistance programs. We want to share how these cuts are affecting us.

We have been receiving funds for our *Clean Air for All* (CAFA) Study to monitor air quality in three different communities that have struggled with air pollution here in southwest PA. These are local residents who have felt that their concerns were not being properly addressed by their local and state governments—so they turned to us, a non-profit organization advocating for clean air and water in southwest PA. After years of these residents seeking help, we were able to secure a federal grant through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and American Rescue Plan (ARP) to conduct air monitoring in these communities related to the Clean Air Act. This grant was awarded to us in order to learn more about what air pollution effects these residents are experiencing so that they can best protect their health and well-being.

This project, in collaboration with our partners at Carnegie Mellon University, CREATE Lab and the Environmental Health Project (EHP), is designed to last for the next 2+ years. This requires budgeting ahead. Now our ability to carry through on the commitments that we made to residents in these communities is threatened. The money we were counting on to fund our labor, technology, and supplies for this important project is in limbo, and we are not sure whether it will be restored.

As a bipartisan nonprofit organization, we rarely comment on the actions of changing federal administrations. However, we believe that it is important that our communities understand how we use federal funding to directly meet the needs of local residents. Federal funding can seem mysterious and opaque and is often the object of sweeping political claims. In

reality, it plays a large role in supporting valuable local work and services that communities count on.

Organizations across the country, just like ours, will not be able to do work for their communities because they may not have the funds to pay their employees, buy supplies, or pay bills. This cut in funding affects organizations in every state that are doing a variety of work, including providing basic necessities such as shelter, food, and critical care for our most vulnerable, including children, veterans, and the unhoused.

It is our sincere hope that funding is restored and that the federal government will adhere to its contractual obligations, not just for us but for all organizations working to serve communities across our country. In the meantime, we will continue to fulfill our commitment to the communities we serve to the best of our ability.

WSL Permit Local Landfill applies for NPDES Permit

In 2024, Westmoreland Sanitary Landfill (WSL) applied for a National Pollution Elimination Discharge System (NPDES) permit, which would allow the landfill to discharge their leachate into the Monongahela River, the source of drinking water for much of Westmoreland and Allegheny Counties.

Protect PT held a community meeting alongside our partner organizations, Three Rivers Water Keeper (3RWK) and Physicians for Social Responsibility of PA (PSR PA), on March 13th, 2025. Concerned community members came to learn more about the issue and to receive advice on giving public comments for the preceding public hearing taking place on March 20, 2025.

At the hearing, approximately 100 community members were in attendance, with 20 residents giving public comments. Many community members brought up concerns revolving around the permit’s potential for water contamination, which would contribute to detrimental public health, ecosystem, and quality of life

impacts. The youngest speaker, a Belle Vernon High School student, spoke about preserving our water quality for his generation and the next. Protect PT’s outside counsel, Lisa Johnson, spoke about how PA DEP doesn’t have the authority to issue this permit. Protect PT staff attorney Dylan Basescu also made a comment regarding the WSL’s lack of compliance with four previously issued consent orders, as well as numerous other instances of regulatory violations, as a basis for denying the requested NPDES permit.



Pictured: PPT’s Community Organizer, Sara Majorsky, presenting at the March WSL Community Meeting.

We will be following this and other permits at the landfill closely to ensure compliance with all local, state, and federal laws. We encourage community members to report any suspicious activity to PA DEP and by using Protect PT’s mobile reporting tool at report.protectpt.org.

PT Rezoning Penn Township pushes forward with Unpopular Rezoning Effort

Penn Township plans to move forward with rezoning the northeast corner of the township despite pushback from residents. In October 2024, Protect PT’s Community Advocate, Jim Cirilano, learned of plans the PT Commissioners had to rezone a portion of the township from Rural Resource to Industrial Commerce. Since then, residents have been pushing back to make their voices heard against the zoning change. Many residents have attended commissioner’s meetings, questioned the motives of the commission, and insisted that the commissioners should not make these changes, as it would impact property values and their ability to use their property as they wish. Despite this pushback, the

commissioners moved forward with a hearing.

Protect PT hosted a community meeting on March 18th from 7PM to 8PM to help prepare public comments for the impending public hearing on March 26th from 6PM to 8PM. At that meeting, property owners showed us their required “official notice,” which we noted was inadequate. The Municipal Planning Code (MPC) states that 30 days notice must be given to property owners who own property slated to be rezoned, yet Penn Township sent letters only weeks before the scheduled hearing, not giving proper notice.



Pictured: Penn Township residents speaking out against the PT rezoning at the public hearing in March.

Because the township had failed to give the residents proper notice of the hearing on the rezoning, Protect PT’s outside counsel for zoning matters, John Smith, Esq. of the firm Smith Butz contacted the township solicitor, Michael Korn, Esq., and informed the township of the deficiency. Rather than canceling the hearing scheduled for March 26, the township held the hearing, receiving testimony from Community Advocate Jim Cirilano regarding the failure of notice, along with approximately 30 other community members who spoke out against the rezoning. No resident appeared and spoke in favor of the planned rezoning. After the last resident spoke, solicitor Korn stated that the hearing would be held open until April 9, 2025, the Caucus Meeting of the Board of Commissioners. This means that the board will continue to receive written comments and will make them part of the record.

Protect PT will be organizing the community, encouraging them to attend the caucus meeting and speak out against the rezoning.

If you are a Penn Township resident, please plan on attending this hearing to speak out against the zoning change. More industrial activity in Penn Township will mean a greater pollution burden on our community.

Drakulic Well Pad Trial

Well Pad Trial in PT Area Awaiting Verdict

In January 2025, Protect PT went to the Environmental Hearing Board (EHB), the adjudicative body that hears appeals from permits granted by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP), for a trial about the permitting of the Drakulic Well Pad, first permitted in 2014.

Protect PT, through its outside counsel Lisa Johnson, Esq., filed its post-hearing brief on March 24th. Apex and the DEP are required to file their briefs by April 23rd, and Protect PT will file a reply brief by May 8th. A decision is expected in the matter sometime in the summer of 2025. In the meantime, Judge Mary Ann Wesdock, the hearing officer presiding over the Drakulic matter for the EHB, will be conducting a site visit of the Drakulic well pad and surrounding areas to better understand the proximity of the pad to schools, playgrounds, and residents. She intends to visit the Penn-Trafford area on April 16th.



Pictured: PPT Staff and Board showing support at the Drakulic Trial this January.

Protect PT and affected residents are hoping for a good result in the Drakulic matter. If industry can build an unconventional well pad in the middle of this densely populated community, then logically, there is no place that one cannot be built.

CAFA Reaches it’s Next Stage

PPT to Deploy Summa Canisters to Monitor Air Pollution

After years of hard work, our *Clean Air For All* (CAFA) air monitoring study has reached its next phase. This effort to better understand air quality near three industrial sites of concern for residents in Westmoreland and Allegheny counties was just a twinkle in our eye in 2021, when we began applying for the federal grant that would make this monitoring effort a reality. After going through the lengthy vetting, application, and quality assurance program development process, we finally put boots on the ground last fall, deploying monitors to detect two major types of air pollution, particulate matter (or PM) and volatile organic compounds (or VOCs).

Since then, those monitors have been collecting air data at multiple sites around each site of concern. This data has helped us understand what the general pollution level is and how it changes throughout each day and in different weather. Our environmental science team has been working hard to make sure that we meet the data quality and reporting requirements of this federal EPA grant.

Now that we have a better understanding of each location’s pollutant patterns, we will begin deploying a new piece of equipment called a “Summa canister” to select locations. Air monitors can only provide so much detail about what is in the air, so the deployment of the Summa canisters is very exciting!

With these sample canisters, we will be able to test for specific chemicals in the air. Our goal is to capture samples that can show residents what chemicals they may have been exposed to during pollution events. We’re eager to start this new stage of the CAFA project and are hopeful that we will finally be able to answer some of the questions that people living in those areas have been posing for years regarding air pollution and public health effects.