

Pennsylvania Rural Population Revitalization Commission Inaugural Press Conference



On January 9, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania Board of Directors, alongside the Pennsylvania Rural Population Revitalization Commission, held an inaugural press conference at the Erie Crossroads Conference Center at the Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex and Expo Center in Harrisburg. The event recognized and officially swore in the appointees to the Commission, highlighting its critical mission to address population decline and the challenges facing rural regions in Pennsylvania.

Established by Act 21 of 2024, legislation which received bicameral, bipartisan support, the Commis-

sion is tasked with creating reviews and recommendations to attract and retain residents in rural areas. Its work will focus on addressing the challenges posed by population shifts and changing demographics in rural communities across the Commonwealth. The Commission will also recommend necessary legislative and regulatory changes to support rural revitalization.



**REVITALIZATION
 COMMISSION**

This Commission will play a vital role in informing medium- and long-term planning at the local, regional, and state levels. Commission findings will guide efforts to address policy issues such as workforce availability, housing, healthcare, education, and transportation.

The Commission's collaborative approach, which includes input from state and local officials, nonprofit-

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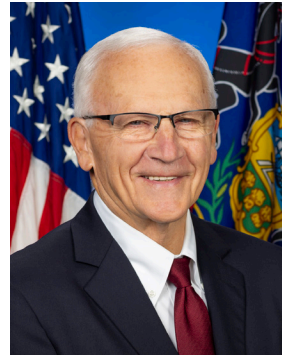
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Chairman's Message



As Chairman of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania Board of Directors, I am pleased to share the latest edition of our newsletter, which highlights important updates affecting rural communities in the Commonwealth.

The Center is thrilled to officially welcome all appointees of the Pennsylvania Rural Population Revitalization Commission, following its inaugural press conference and swearing-in on January 9. The

Commission is a first-of-its-kind initiative established to make Pennsylvania a national leader in retaining, attracting, and revitalizing the population of our rural communities. This collaborative effort is a critical step towards reversing population decline and pressures facing our rural communities and will provide the foundation for long-term success. The Commission's first public hearing, which will focus on local capacity, is scheduled for February 28 in Blair County. We look forward to the continued dialogue and progress that will emerge from these efforts.

In this edition of the newsletter, we also highlight the latest population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau. These updated figures for 2024 offer more accurate data on international migration trends, which have played a significant role in Pennsylvania's population growth. These revised estimates, which span the years 2020 to 2024, reflect an evolving demographic landscape. County and municipal population estimates will be released in the spring of 2025. To help further understand these shifts, the Center has published a detailed fact sheet analyzing how international migration is contributing to the state's population changes. This research provides valuable insights into the forces driving growth and offers critical information for shaping policy decisions.

Additionally, we are pleased to share a summary of the Center's latest research on the short-term rental (STR) market in Pennsylvania. This study provides a comprehensive inventory and analysis of the current landscape of STRs. The findings of this study will be essential as we explore new ways to support rural communities in adapting to evolving trends in tourism and housing markets. Lastly, the newsletter includes facts on local government officials and rural resources.

Thank you for your continued support as we work together to empower rural communities throughout the Commonwealth. Together, we can make a meaningful impact and improve the quality of life for all Pennsylvanians.

Senator Yaw

groups, business leaders, and industry experts, is essential for ensuring that rural Pennsylvania remains resilient in the years to come.

Commission appointees include:

- **Dr. Kyle C. Kopko, Chairman, Pennsylvania Rural Population Revitalization Commission; Executive Director, Center for Rural Pennsylvania**
- **Senator Judy Schwank**
- **Senator Judy Ward**
- **Representative Paul Takac**
- **Representative Michael Stender**
- **Albert Abramovic, Venango County Commissioner**
- **Betsy McClure, Greene County Commissioner**
- **Janet Pennington, School Board Member, Southeastern Greene School District**
- **Mark Critz, Western Regional Director, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture; Executive Director, Pennsylvania Rural Development Council**
- **Drew Popish, Northeast Regional Director, Office of Governor Shapiro**
- **Lisa Davis, Director, Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health**
- **Dr. Karen Riley, President, Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania**
- **Jordan Grady, President, Butler County Chamber of Commerce**
- **Gina Suydam, President, Wyoming County Chamber of Commerce**
- **Nathan Lesh, Vice President, Pennsylvania Future Farmers of America**

For more information, visit
www.rural.pa.gov/commission.



Center Releases New Study Analyzing Short-Term Rentals in Pennsylvania

The recently published study, *Inventory and Analysis of Short-Term Rentals in Pennsylvania*, by Dr. Alison E. Feeney of the Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania, provides a comprehensive inventory and analysis of the short-term rental (STR) market in Pennsylvania, offering valuable insights into its growth, distribution, and impact on both urban and rural areas.

The findings highlight the significant economic contributions of STRs to the state, as well as the disparities between urban and rural markets in terms of revenue, average daily rates (ADR), and occupancy rates. The research also underscores the importance of considering local regulations and policies to manage the growth of STRs effectively while balancing the needs of residents and tourists.

As the STR market continues to evolve, municipalities across Pennsylvania must consider how best to leverage this growing sector to enhance tourism, economic development, and community well-being. By implementing well-informed policies and emphasizing responsible tourism management, municipalities can ensure that STRs contribute positively to their local economies while preserving their unique character and resources. This study serves as a foundation for future discussions on STR regulations and their role in shaping the future of Pennsylvania's tourism and housing markets.

The STR market in Pennsylvania has experienced significant growth over the past decade, evolving from a niche offering into a widespread industry with substantial economic and social impacts. This project provides a statewide inventory of STRs using 2023 data from AirDNA and maps STR locations in a Geographic Information System (GIS). AirDNA is a proprietary web service that estimates a 95% accuracy rate for all aggregated short-term rentals listed on Airbnb, HomeAway, and Vrbo.

The statewide inventory includes thousands of STRs that vary greatly by price, number of rooms, types of accommodations, and seasonality. In addition, 20 municipalities in the state were selected to examine the inventory and the characteristics of STRs in various localities. The sampled municipalities vary in population, location throughout the state, location within urban and rural counties, and types of tourism amenities. The AirDNA data include information on types of occupancy units, housing characteristics, number of rooms rented, number of allowed guests, and occupancy rates. A detailed evaluation is provided for the 20 municipalities that includes 12 months of revenue, average daily rate, number of bookings, maximum number of guests, and cleaning fees.



Urban areas such as Harrisburg, Erie, and Allentown saw substantial growth in STR numbers, driven by their diverse economic bases, historical significance, and vibrant local economies. These cities capitalized on their assets to attract a considerable volume of STRs, with higher ADRs and occupancy rates than many rural areas.

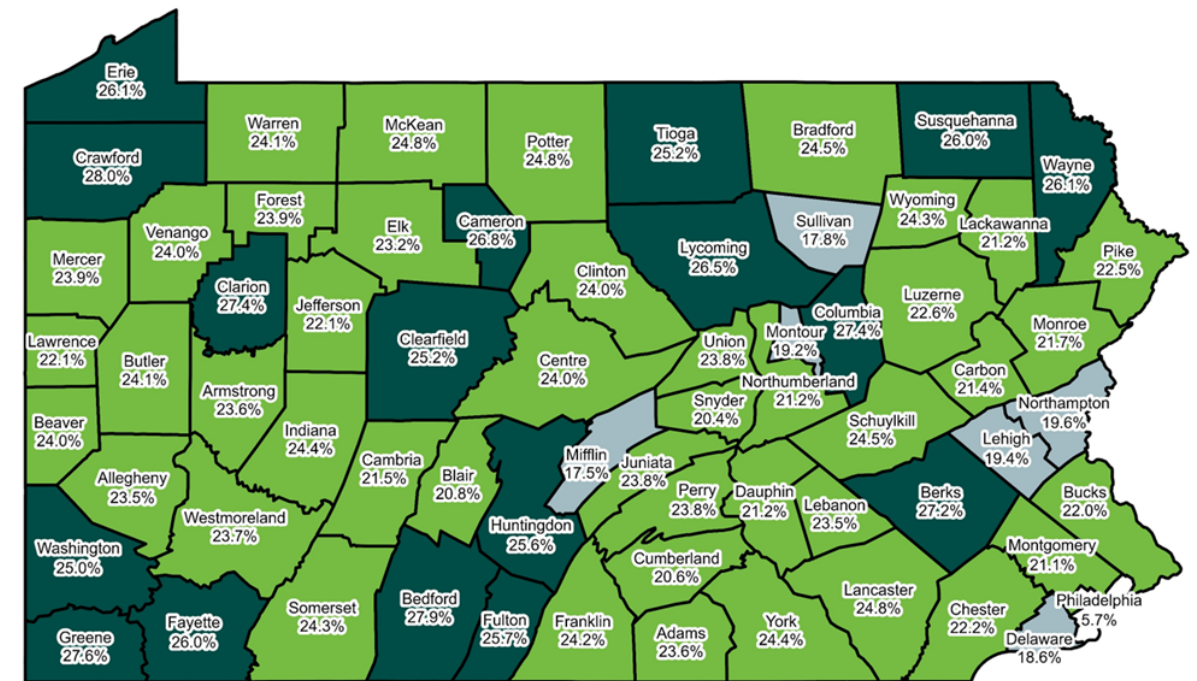
In contrast, municipalities in rural counties, like Gettysburg, Jim Thorpe, and State College, also experienced growth in STRs, largely due to tourism centered around historical sites, natural beauty, and local colleges. However, the economic impact of STRs in these areas varied, with municipalities in rural counties generating lower total aggregate revenue compared to urban counterparts. For instance, municipalities like Derry and New Hope, along with their surrounding areas, exhibited significantly higher ADRs than rural areas like Kane, Wellsboro, and Brookville, which had lower ADRs. Still, per unit, some rural STRs have as many bookings as units in urban counties and can bring in revenues just as high; the lowest mean/median revenues for 2023 in the 20 selected municipalities are observed in urban Allentown, Harrisburg, and Scranton.

Occupancy rates and the number of bookings also varied significantly between urban and rural STRs. Urban areas generally saw higher occupancy rates and more bookings, driven by constant demand from both business travelers and tourists. Rural STRs, while seeing growth, often experienced more seasonal fluctuations in occupancy, influenced by local events and tourist seasons. For example, Derry, New Hope, and Harrisburg showed higher average occupancy rates compared to rural areas like Huntingdon, Stroudsburg, and Hawley.

The full report is available at www.rural.pa.gov.

JUST THE FACTS: LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Percent of Individuals Holding Multiple Local Government Positions by County, 2024



Statewide = 27.1% of Positions May be Held by an Individual Serving in Multiple Roles

- <10.0% of Positions
- 10.0% to 19.9% of Positions
- 20.0% to 24.9% of Positions
- 25.0%+ of Positions

Data source: 2024 Municipal Statistics, Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development and 2022 Census of Governments, U.S. Census Bureau.

According to the 2022 Census of Governments, Pennsylvania ranks third in the total number of subcounty governments with 2,559 municipalities, following Illinois (2,720) and Minnesota (2,633). Across these Pennsylvania local governments, there are 54,992 different job positions, covering roles such as mayors, council members, public safety officials, public defenders, zoning officials, and public works officials.

Despite the large number of job positions, only 40,079 unique individuals fill these roles, meaning approximately 14,913 positions are occupied by individuals serving in multiple capacities within their local government. For example, it is common for a municipal secretary to also serve as the appointed treasurer or for an emergency management coordinator to work across multiple municipalities within a county.

Of these positions, around 80 percent are held by men, while 20 percent are held by women. The top three non-elected positions held in local government are solicitor (2,573), flood plain administrator (2,557), and secretary (2,417).



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Resources

Rural Residency Planning and Development (RRPD) Program

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) is offering up to 15 awards to support the creation and expansion of rural residency programs aimed at improving healthcare access in rural areas. Eligible applicants can propose new residency programs in specialties such as family medicine, internal medicine, psychiatry, and general surgery, among others. These programs must be accredited physician residency programs that train residents in clinical sites located in rural areas for more than 50% of their training time. The goal is to produce physicians who will practice in rural communities. Awardees will be expected to develop a new accredited rural residency program, finalize a sustainability plan, and track and publicly report resident career outcomes for at least five years after graduation. Learn more by emailing ruralresidency@hrsa.gov.

Pennsylvania House of Representatives Scholarship Program

Attention all graduating high school seniors in Pennsylvania! The Pennsylvania House of Representatives Scholarship Program, administered by The Foundation for Enhancing Communities, is now accepting applications. This program awards two four-year scholarships annually, covering the cost of one semester of tuition at the State System of Higher Education each year. To qualify, applicants must meet several criteria, including graduating from a Pennsylvania high school, maintaining a minimum 3.0 GPA, showing financial need, and demonstrating leadership and community involvement. Eligible students are encouraged to apply before the April 15, 2025, deadline. For more information and application details, visit www.tfec.org.