

THE TOWNSHIP Planner

PUBLISHED BY THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE ASSOCIATION OF TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS

SECOND QUARTER 2019

Understanding Sharing Experts Offer Advice to Help Local Leaders Navigate the On-Demand Economy

BY JILL ERCOLINO / MANAGING EDITOR, PA. TOWNSHIP NEWS

Technology has thrown the world's virtual doors open and made it easier for people to connect. And sharing — that thing that's been ingrained in us since we were kids — will never be the same again.

Toys were the commodity of choice then. Now, thanks to smartphones, tablets, and peer-to-peer apps, society has grown up and grown into borrowing everything from bikes and parking spaces to rides to restaurants and rooms for the night.

Some call it collaborative consumption. Others refer to it as the sharing, or on-demand, economy. Whatever term you choose, this free-wheeling business model is expected to be worth \$335 billion by 2025 as startups like Uber, Lyft, Airbnb,

TaskRabbit, DogVacay, and Car2Go carve out their spot in a marketplace that's only limited by the imagination.

"You don't need an economics degree to understand what [the sharing economy] is about," software developer Matthew Hughes writes. "When distilled to its essence, all it really means is ordinary people meeting a demand with resources they own to make a profit.

"This could manifest itself as an Uber driver ferrying passengers with the aid of his Toyota Prius and iPhone or as a 'TaskRabbit' performing housework and odd jobs, but most important, it's characterized by a permeating lack of formality."

And chances are, this new-fangled form of sharing, fueled by convenience, affordability, and entrepreneurial spirit, is happening in your very own township as technology erases distance and borders and brings the world to your doorstep.

'Don't be afraid'

So what, as a local leader, should you do? With all of this so-called sharing going on in your community, shouldn't you be concerned? Somebody has to protect the public, right?



The on-demand economy is expected to be worth \$335 billion by 2025 as startups like Uber, Lyft, Airbnb, TaskRabbit, DogVacay, and Car2Go carve out their spot in a marketplace that's only limited by the imagination. Chances are, this new-fangled form of sharing is happening in your very own township as technology erases distance and borders and brings the world to your doorstep.

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HAVE A QUESTION?

Want to know more about developing a comprehensive plan? Need some guidance on drafting a subdivision ordinance? Need to know the advertising requirements for a zoning hearing board meeting?



Scan with your tablet or smartphone to visit the PSATS website.

Help is available from PSATS, which sponsors the Township Planning Association for local planning commissions and zoning hearing boards (see *contact information above*), and from the Governor's Center for Local Government Services, which coordinates the state's land use efforts. To contact the center, call toll-free, (888) 2CENTER (223-6837).

Understanding Sharing (Continued from front page)

Not so fast, says Dan Mallinson, assistant professor of public policy and administration at Penn State Harrisburg.

"The natural instinct for some communities may be to resist or over-regulate [the sharing economy] because it's new and different," he says, "but my advice is don't be afraid. Open your eyes and your mind to these services."

Mallinson says that despite some negative press, the sharing economy offers a number of potential benefits for rural, urban, and suburban communities. These include reliable, affordable transportation for the homebound, extra income for residents, flexible jobs for those who don't want to be part of the traditional workforce, and money-saving options for travelers, to name a few.

"A lot of these sharing apps are associated with younger people," he says, "but they certainly have the potential to help older, rural populations, too."

And it looks like the sharing economy is here to stay.

"Consumers are attracted to the lower prices offered by these sharing-economy apps, as they pass on cost savings from not owning hard assets such as stores, cars, or hotels," according to an article published by The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. "People also like the efficiency and better customer experience of these services, which usually offer cashless transactions, emailed receipts, and online reviews."

"At Uber," the article notes, "rider demand for its car-hailing service has grown

so rapidly in five years that it now operates in 45 countries despite battles with regulators in many cities."

Therefore, Mallinson recommends that township supervisors do the following before considering any regulations:

- Get educated about sharing platforms, including their pros and cons (*Ride-sharing services, such as Uber and Lyft, and home-sharing sites, such as Airbnb and VRBO, are among the most popular and are a good place to start.*)

- Learn from other municipal leaders who have experience with these services.

- Talk to residents who use these services as operators and consumers.

- Come up with strategies that work best for your township. That could mean updating existing ordinances, enacting new ones, or doing nothing at all.

"There is no one-size-fits-all solution," according to *Navigating the Sharing Economy: A Six-Decision Guide for Municipalities*, a resource developed by a caucus of mayors in Ontario for North American municipalities. "Different models of sharing necessitate different responses, and local governments can opt to play a number of different roles depending on their policy objectives."

The National League of Cities reached a similar conclusion in its 2014 report: "The consensus is that there is no consensus. There is no one-size-fits-all regulatory framework that can be implemented to accommodate these new business models. Only a

Continued on Page 4



Out of fairness to those listing short-term rentals and to protect renters, neighboring homeowners, and existing businesses, some townships are passing ordinances that require these property owners to have licenses, permits, and inspections.



LEGISLATIVE Update

The following is a summary of township-related legislation under consideration by the General Assembly. Please check the latest edition of the "Week in Review" for status updates. To receive the "Week in Review," email grassroots@psats.org.

Agricultural conservation easements

SB 145/PN 119

HB 370/PN 360

Major provisions:

- Would amend the Agricultural Area Security Law to allow the construction of an additional residence on preserved farmland.
- Would allow the residence to only be used by the principal landowner, an immediate family member, or an employee.
- Would allow the landowner to voluntarily extinguish the current right to construct an additional residence on a preserved farm.

Status: SB 145 is before the Senate Appropriations Committee, and HB 370 is before the House.

Microenterprise development

HB 324/PN 302

Major provisions:

- Would amend Title 72 (*Taxation and Finance*) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated

Statutes to give municipal authorities and certain other authorities the ability to develop blighted properties.

- Would allow community development municipal authorities to provide micro-enterprise loans for small business owners.

Status: Before the House.

Definition of blight

HB 407/PN 541

Major provision:

- Would amend Title 1 (*General Provisions*) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes to provide a legal definition of "blight."

Status: Before the House.

Wind energy on preserved farmland

HB 441/PN 427

Major provisions:

- Would amend the Agricultural Area Security Law to provide the owner of an agricultural conservation easement who has 50 or more acres the authority to grant a right of way to install a wind power generation system.
- Would limit the wind power generation system to no more than two acres of a property of less than 100 acres.
- Would limit the wind power generation system to no more than two acres plus two additional acres for every additional 50 acres in excess of 100 acres for properties with 100 acres or more.
- Would require that if the land on which the wind power generation system is constructed is later subdivided, conveyed, or transferred, the section housing the system must consist of 50 or more acres.

Status: Before the House. ♦

Lawmakers are considering House Bill 441, which would allow wind-powered generation systems to be installed on preserved farmland.



A Message from the Executive Director

Webinar Wednesdays: Learn Without Traveling

Do you want to squeeze some extra learning in this year but can't always find time away from home or work to travel?

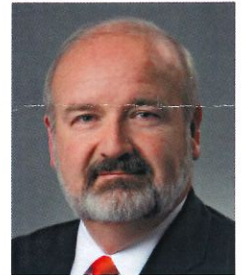
It's a common problem for busy people, but PSATS has a simple solution: Webinar Wednesdays.

Every Wednesday of every month, we host an hour-long, online learning session covering a range of local government issues. To make it easier for you to plan ahead, each week's session will focus on a particular topic. For instance, the second Wednesday of every month will be devoted to planning issues.

From noon to 1 p.m. on April 10, we'll be presenting "Considering Riparian Forest Buffers for Your Community." And the best part is, you can learn from our experts and keep up with the latest issues and information without traveling or taking time away from the office.

For more information and to register for these convenient workshops, go to connect.psats.org, click on the "Education" tab, and select "Education Catalog (Webinars)."

And don't forget, PSATS now offers a Webinar PowerPass, which gives you unlimited access to all of our 2019 webinars for one low price of \$79. Learn more about this great deal by going to connect.psats.org and clicking on the "Online Store" tab.



DAVID M. SANKO

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community can determine the best solution.”

In Pennsylvania, municipalities are taking a mix of approaches.

When townships respond...

In places like Middle Smithfield Township in Monroe County, which is tucked away in Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains, and College Township in Centre County, which is on the fringes of Penn State University, home-sharing services, such as Airbnb, have become popular with vacationers and football fans alike.

The same, however, can't be said for nearby property owners and resorts.

“Around 2014, we started getting complaints from a local homeowners association about the music, the parties, and the cars,” says Judy Acosta, Middle Smithfield's zoning administrator. “We were getting push-back, too, from the owners of local hotels and resorts, who said it was unfair. They were paying taxes and getting regulated, and the Airbnbs weren't.”

In College Township, safety was another concern as alumni and others reunited on the weekends to cheer on the Nittany Lions.

“Because of the landscape around here, we have a lot of elevated decks,” manager Adam Brumbaugh says, “and the last thing we wanted to see was one of those decks collapse.”

After studying their respective situations, officials in both townships decided they

wanted to be fair to those listing lodgings while protecting renters, neighboring property owners, and existing businesses. As a result, they chose to regulate, not prohibit, short-term rentals, which are now required to have licenses, permits, and inspections.

“We did this out of an abundance of caution for the health, safety, and welfare of the public,” Brumbaugh says.

While these municipalities and others have chosen to manage the sharing economy, at least one township is actively participating in it.

In 2017, Warwick Township in Lancaster County developed a public bike-sharing program in partnership with Lititz Bike Works. The community's fleet of 10 donated bikes, available nine months out of the year, is stationed near the municipal office and the entrance of the Warwick-to-Ephrata Rail Trail. Recently, two kids' bikes were added to the collection, manager Dan Zimmerman says.

The program, he says, was introduced as a convenience and is similar to the one operated by the City of Lancaster.

“We have a lot of people, including seniors, who like to bike but don't have one or don't have a rack to transport it,” Zimmerman says. He hopes that as the region's rail-trail system grows and connects more destinations, more people will use the bikes for transportation, as well as recreation.

The bikes, rented through an app, are available seven days a week from dawn to dusk at \$9.99 for two hours and \$14.99 for up to four hours. Residents age 60 and over are eligible for a \$5 discount.

“For the longest time now,” Zimmerman says, “we've been sharing equipment with other municipalities — why buy a brand-new oil sealer when you can share the cost and the use with someone else? This bike-sharing program is just a natural extension of that. It's practical and just another convenience for our residents.”

Understanding sharing

No doubt about it: Technology is putting a 21st-century spin on sharing.

And the way College Township's Adam Brumbaugh sees it, if things like Airbnb, Uber, Lyft, and Uber Eats can pop up in State College and surrounding municipalities, a relatively sequestered region in the Appalachian Mountains, they can emerge almost anywhere.

His advice: Don't wait to learn about what technology could bring — or has already brought — to your township's doorstep.

“If anything, just become informed,” Brumbaugh says, “because before you know it, you could have a roomful of people at a supervisors meeting asking very pointed questions about something you're not even aware of.” ♦

Can you afford not to be there?

Plan to attend PSATS' Annual Conference in April

Entire workshop track devoted to local planning

Ask township officials and employees why they attend the PSATS Annual Educational Conference and Exhibit Show, and two of the most frequent answers will be “training” and “networking.”

That should be no surprise. The four-day event, to be held **April 14-17** in Hershey, offers more than 80 workshops on the topics that are most important to townships.

In addition to a workshop track devoted solely to local planning and zoning issues, which includes sessions on short-term rentals, conducting land use hearings, and more, the conference features the Pa. Association of Zoning Officials (PAAZO) Spring Educational Forum on Sunday, April 14.

Registration for the conference and lodging opened in January. The cost for those who register online, by mail, or fax is \$210. (**Note:** All township supervisors and township-affiliated personnel, including planners and

ZHB members, must register as delegates.)

The registration fee for the PAAZO Forum is \$125 for members of PSATS affiliate organizations, which includes the Township Planners Association, and \$175 for all others. Lunch is provided. To attend the forum, go to **paazo.org** and click on the “2019 PAAZO Spring Educational Forum Registration” button. (**Note:** You do **not** need to be registered for the PSATS Conference to attend the PAAZO Forum.)

For more information about the PSATS Conference, go to **conference.psats.org**, check out the January 2019 issue of the *Pennsylvania Township News*, or call PSATS at (717) 763-0930.

