

**Times News**

[Blue Ridge offers 1  
Gig internet service](#)

A strategic plan created for six regional counties – the first of its kind in the state – is one its contributors hope begin the process to address issues affecting residents in those areas.

**USA TODAY**

[A Fox-Comcast deal  
faces 'higher  
regulatory risk' than  
one with Disney, Fox  
says](#)

Work to create the 138-page Alleghenies Ahead plan for Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Fulton, Huntingdon and Somerset counties began at the end of 2016, taking input from elected officials, community leaders and residents from each county.

**Star-Telegram  
(Fort Worth, TX)**

[Need Internet  
access? Soon you'll  
be able to borrow it  
from the Fort Worth  
library](#)

The final draft, which is expected to be approved for implementation by each of the county's commissioners by the end of July, identified eight issues to address across the region: broadband and cellular service; collaboration and coordination; business and workforce development; housing and blight; recreational amenities and natural assets; agriculture; public health and safety; and transportation.

**Bloomberg**

[Twitter Ramps Up  
Fight Against Abuse  
and Malicious Bots](#)

On Monday, Cambria County's commissioners held a public hearing welcoming comments on the plan, which identifies several specific action plans to begin resolving ongoing issues through steering committees, grant funding and other efforts.

**USA TODAY**

[Facebook grounds  
Aquila, its solar-  
powered internet  
drone project](#)

The commissioners will vote on the plan's adoption at its regular meeting scheduled for Wednesday night at the Highland Public Library in Richland Township.

**Cox Media Group**

[AT&T warns  
customers of Social  
Security scam](#)

Johnstown resident John DeBartola attended the meeting, asking the commissioners to vote against the plan, which he said is not aggressive enough in tackling the county's issues.

**Cleveland.com**

[Ex-Trump press  
secretary Sean  
Spicer shopping talk  
show](#)

He also questioned the timing of the plan's presentation in proximity to the 2019 election.

**The Bradford Era**

[A 28-year-old  
Progressive just  
ousted a 10-term  
Democratic  
congressman in  
New York](#)

Katie Kinka, senior planner for Cambria County and project manager for Alleghenies Ahead, said planning is often seen as a requirement by government officials instead of an exercise that can produce an impact.

The efforts that produced Alleghenies Ahead won't go unnoticed by state or federal officials if the counties pursue and compete for grants that will assist in solving some of the issues outlined in the plan.

Cambria County Planning Commissioner Director Ethan Imhoff said the state's Department of Community and Economic Development provided a grant that paid for half of the \$364,000 it took to create the plan. Officials with DCED have also reached out to discuss how the department can further invest in priorities within Alleghenies Ahead.

"There's a lot of power in working together and speaking with one voice from a six-county region," Imhoff said. "This is an implementable plan."

Work has already begun to create solutions for some of the issues in each of the counties, Imhoff said.

For example, a broadband task force has been formed with representatives from each county. That group plans to meet in August and look at what it would take to conduct a study of the region and create a map that shows gaps in broadband and cellular service – something many are surprised doesn't already exist.

Housing and blight are issues local elected officials, community leaders and local organizations have been trying to tackle in recent years.

Both Cambria and Somerset counties opted into Gov. Tom Wolf's Act 152 to place a fee on deeds and use those funds for demolition of blighted structures.

"But we're not going to demolish our way out of the blight issue," Imhoff said.

Alleghenies Ahead suggests ways for counties – Cambria County especially – to look at opportunities to add more market-rate housing to attract a variety of families and suggests a future study to determine locations, cost and potential developers.

The region's declining population "is something that kind of looms over the whole plan," Imhoff said, with 34 percent of Cambria County homeowners who are 65 and older.

"It's no secret that Cambria County is getting older."

Kinka said different and affordable housing options could attract and retain younger people.

"The housing choice really isn't there," she said.

One of the biggest obstacles to taking on some of the region's issues is the attitude about those problems and about taking risks to solve them, she added.

"If we don't take any risks, we'll continue to be where we're at," Kinka said.

When it comes to collaboration and coordination, the idea that Cambria County has too many municipalities and authorities comes to mind, Imhoff said.

The proposed action plan for Cambria County suggests seeking legal and financial guidance on exploring collaboration options and establishing a matching grant program to incentivize inter-municipality agreements and service sharing.

Service improvements and savings realized by collaboration between municipalities, reducing low-capacity and low-functional units of government could enhance the marketability and competitiveness of the county, the report adds.

"Retirements, looming labor force shortages and stagnant tax bases make partnerships and structural change not only desirable but necessary," the plan states.

Of the county's 63 municipalities, 24 have less than 1,000 people, he said. The framework of those municipalities was established when the region was more populated.

"We're hesitant to take that jump into the unknown," Imhoff said, with Spangler and Barnesboro being the last two municipalities to merge into Northern Cambria in the early 2000s and a failed attempt in 2013 to combine Franklin, Daisytown Borough, Conemaugh Township, East Taylor Township and East Conemaugh Borough.

Many talk about what it would take to collaborate and consolidate to resolve problems such as unfilled elected positions or decreases in budgetary resources for smaller municipalities, but it will ultimately take "a long-term solution to a long-term problem," Kinka said.

To read the full Alleghenies Ahead document, visit [www.allegheniesahead.com/related-reports-plans/](http://www.allegheniesahead.com/related-reports-plans/) . – *Tribune Democrat*

