

12-11-06

Mountain Council of Governments reviews 2006 accomplishments

By **JIM DINO**

jimdino@standardspeaker.com

The Mountain Council of Governments (M-COG) purchased its first piece of jointly owned equipment in 2006.

There may be another in the future – and maybe a regional police force.

The organization reviewed its 2006 accomplishments, and its direction for 2007, this week at its regular monthly meeting.

Executive Director Dan Guydish said the joint purchase of a sewer camera by six member municipalities is the first such purchase in the history of the M-COG.

“The sewer camera was the first totally cooperative effort in which municipalities put up the money to buy it,” Guydish said.

Part of the money for the purchase came from a state grant Guydish was able to obtain.

But the camera was the first piece

of equipment purchased jointly by M-COG member municipalities.

Another big accomplishment in 2006 was the COG-sponsored Abandoned Vehicle Law, which was adopted by several municipalities.

The main purchase of the COG sponsoring the law was that a vehicle owner could circumvent the law by moving it from municipality to municipality, and avoid the 10-day time period to remove it.

Because the COG-sponsored law was adopted by several municipalities, the time period was made to be common among the municipalities. In other words, if the clock started in one municipality, it continued to tick in another – meaning the auto owner actually had to correct the situation, by getting the auto inspected and licensed, or properly junked.

Another successful 2006 project is the upkeep of the various gateway projects, in which signs and shrubbery welcome guests to Hazleton at several of its “gates.”

Yet another is the joint purchase of road salt and cinders, which the M-COG has been doing for years, saving its members thousands of dollars a year.

Two projects loom large on the horizon in 2007, but another equipment purchase may also be in the offing, Guydish said.

The two large projects are the formation of a regional police force, and an M-COG sponsored building code inspection program.

Guydish has made the M-COG a forum for discussion of forming a regional police department. Two municipalities have been talking about combining, which could be the first step toward the regional department.

The M-COG could also be the vehicle used to provide certified inspectors for the Uniform Construction Codes which have gone into effect in Pennsylvania, one of the last states in the United States to adopt the codes.

Under state law, municipalities have the option of allowing the state to do building inspections, but inspections take a long time done through the state.

A third-party inspection service is the most prudent way of handling the inspections, because the municipality – especially the small municipality that cannot afford it – does not have to pay to have certified inspectors on staff.

Guydish has offered the M-COG to be used to either provide the inspectors, or obtain the third-party service. The M-COG may be able to get the third-party service at a group rate, for all of its members.

The two pieces of equipment which Guydish is eyeing for joint purchase in 2007 are The Asphalt Zipper and a leaf vacuum.

The Asphalt Zipper mills the surface of an asphalt street and grinds up the asphalt, mixes it with dirt it also digs up, and creates an aggregate material that can be used as the base

when repaving the street.

M-COG members had demonstrations of the machine in 2006, and Guydish is attempting to set up a similar situation in which several municipalities would share in its purchase, along with some type of grant.

The same situation exists with the leaf vacuum, which is an idea Guydish has.

Another new idea is a joint program for the new GIS, or Geographical Information System for mapping.

Guydish said the M-COG's ranks grew by four in 2006, as White Haven Borough, MMI Preparatory School, Hazleton City Authority and Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership joined.

Their membership brings the total M-COG membership to 23, but with the potential closing of Bishop Hafey High School, Guydish is asking M-COG members to write a letter of support for the school to Diocese of Scranton Bishop Joseph Martino.