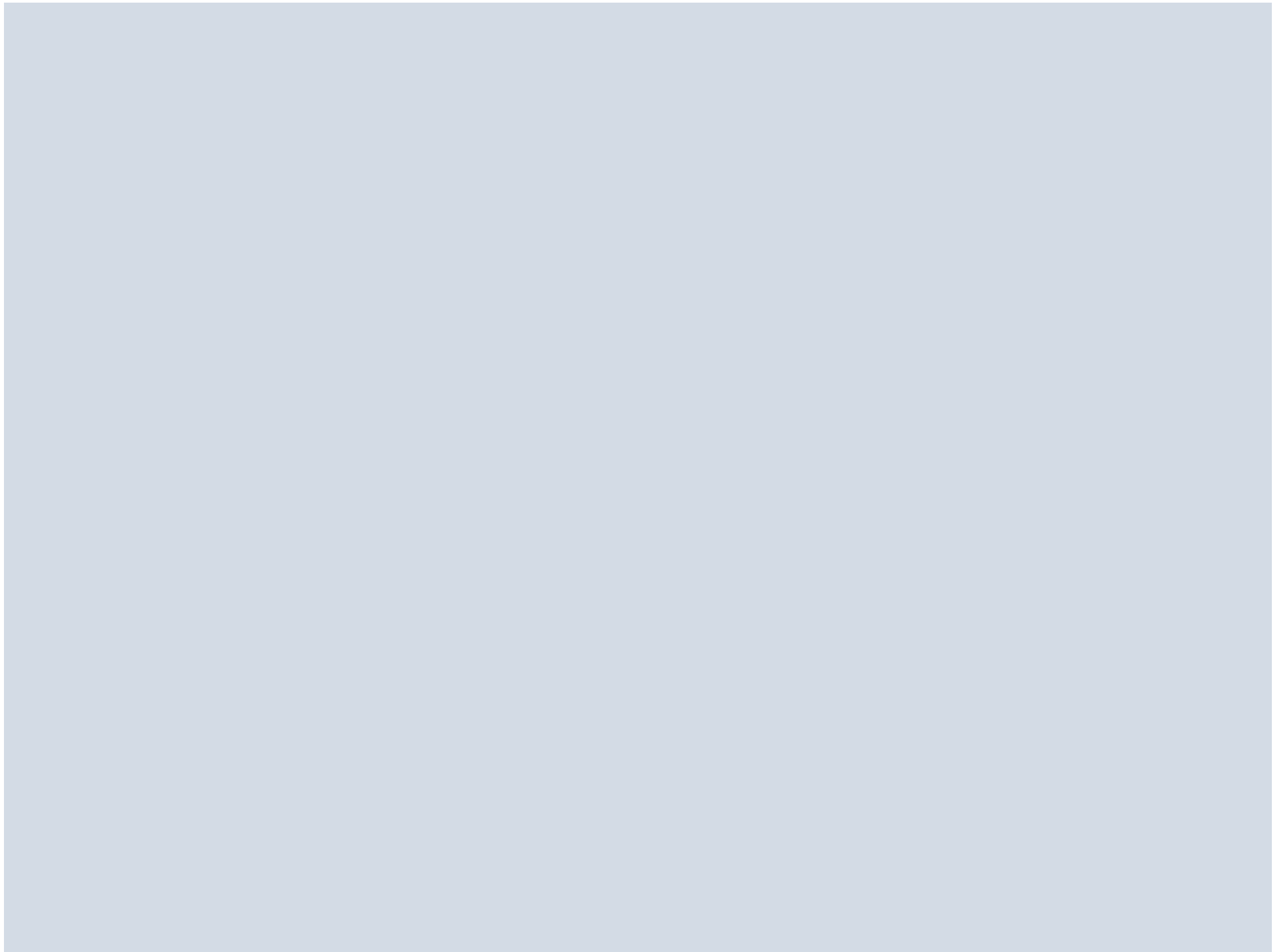




Clarion  
Crawford  
Erie  
Forest  
Lawrence  
Mercer  
Venango  
Warren

# Annual Report



## Mission

To provide leadership and assistance as well as collaborate and cooperate with our partners in strengthening business and job growth and improving the environment for economic and community development across the Northwest Pennsylvania Region.

## Vision

Northwest Pennsylvania will grow in its business and economic vitality, its residents will become more prosperous and the quality of life will be enhanced in the region's counties and communities.

# About Us

## Our Organization

Established in 1967, the Northwest Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission (Northwest Commission) is an Oil City based, public, non-profit regional resource for economic and business development as well as community development and planning. Funding for the Northwest Commission comes from local, state, and federal levels of government. We are pleased to provide quality services at little or no cost to our clients.

## The Team

The Northwest Commission is comprised of skilled professionals dedicated to sustaining economic vitality and growth in the Northwest Pennsylvania region by fostering local, state and federal partnerships across public and private sector lines. The Board of Directors represents county governments, private businesses, county planners, tourism, and economic development corporations throughout the region.

## Our Services

The Northwest Commission strives to produce private sector job creation and retention through its business and economic development programs such as government contracting, business finance and international marketing assistance. The Northwest Commission also provides community development and planning services such as grants, transportation planning, community revitalization, and technical assistance to municipal governments to help communities stay progressive.

## Our Region

The Northwest Commission is proud to serve eight counties in Northwest Pennsylvania: Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango and Warren.

# Executive Message

*Nothing could have prepared us for the events of 2020. An understatement if there ever was one. However, the foundation of knowledge and the network of partners within the Northwest Commission has prepared us to adapt to changes and circumstances that cannot be anticipated. Our goal was and continues to be to meet the needs of businesses and communities in the eight counties of the Northwest region of Pennsylvania. Even when our traditional programs were not exactly what our clients needed, we were the place they called. We are a trusted partner to those we serve. We engaged with the network that has been built over our 53 years to bring our businesses and communities as much information and assistance as we could in an uncertain and unsettling time.*

*The Commission has worked closely with our Counties' leadership to help navigate the programs and resources available to them to aid their economies, communities, and citizens. We have adapted our operations to keep our staff and families safe while never diminishing capacity or the services we provide to the region.*

*It's hard to articulate the pride I have for our Commission Team. Their commitment to the work, the region, and especially to each other genuinely inspires me. I very much look forward to the day we are all together again.*

*Now more than ever, take care of one another,*

*Jill Foy*



**Jill Foy**  
Executive Director

The infographic consists of three blue downward-pointing arrow shapes stacked vertically. The top arrow contains the text '\$78.5 Million'. The middle arrow contains the text '140'. The bottom arrow contains the text '219'. Below each arrow is a text label: 'In Government Contracting Sales' under the first, 'Jobs Created' under the second, and 'Jobs Retained' under the third.

**\$78.5 Million**

**In Government Contracting Sales**

**140**

**Jobs Created**

**219**

**Jobs Retained**

## **Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC)**

The Northwest Commission offers a free government contracting program known as the Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC). The Northwest Commission's PTAC office is part of a larger network of nearly 100 PTACs located across the United States.

The PTAC assists businesses large and small in understanding and navigating the government contracting market by providing counseling, instruction and bid opportunities. Through these activities, the PTAC increases qualified sources and competition and creates better value for government agencies and American taxpayers, while stimulating the local economy activity as local businesses learn how to successfully navigate federal, state, and local government contracting processes.

PTAC counseling is confidential and because the Northwest Commission's program is funded through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) and a match from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), services are offered at no cost.

### **Program in Action:**

One of the special duties PTAC counselors are very proud of is to assist our Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (VOSB) and Service Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSB) with applying for VA Verification, a program that gives Veteran Owners the advantage over the competition or makes a business eligible to compete for the program's set-aside contracts, as well as partake in the role as a sub-contractor to help primes meet their subcontracting goals.

The Commission's PTAC counselors are certified through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Verification Assistance program to help Veteran clients. **In the past year, the NWC PTAC has assisted over 25 Veteran-Owned Small Businesses** with the SD/VOSB verification process. One SDVOSB PTAC client had this to say after receiving assistance from a Northwest Commission PTAC Counselor:

*"She was a wealth of fresh information and very knowledgeable of the actual official process to get verified. She gave us countless hours and visits to walk us through the path that then led to our submitting a package to the Center for Verification and Evaluation. Without her assistance there would have been no way we would have made it that far. Also, she made it a point to continue to follow our progress. She was as determined as we were to get everything completed correctly this time. We owe her our utmost thanks."*



## Business Financing

The Business Financing Program stimulates the creation and expansion of small business through the use of fixed low-interest loans, structured to allow companies the ability to borrow based on the number of jobs created and/or retained. The Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) is comprised of funds from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), Economic Development Administration (EDA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). RLF loans can be used for land and building, machinery & equipment and working capital needs. In addition, as a certified Economic Development Organization (CEDO), the Northwest Commission works with the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) to market and administer the loan financing programs available through the Commonwealth.

# \$6.2 Million

In Private Funds Leveraged

# \$2.8 Million

In Loans Closed in FY 19-20

# 66

Jobs Created

# 104

Jobs Retained

## Program in Action:



Berman Bedding, Inc. of Erie County was founded in 1912 as a manufacturer of retail bedding (mattresses and box springs). One of the current owners has been running the company since the mid-1980s.

They began producing medical pads along with the retail bedding. Most recently in 2005, the company placed its sole focus on producing medical and surgical pads. The company sells their finished product to original equipment manufacturers. Due to increased production, the company had outgrown their 30,000



square foot space and located a new property with over 23,000 more square foot space.



The business received a \$400,000 loan in August 2019 from the Northwest Commission as part of a \$3,200,000 project to purchase the real estate and make renovations.

The company had 47 full-time employees at the time of purchase and will be creating 9 more jobs as a result of this project.

## COVID-19 Working Capital Access Program

The Business Financing Department assisted in the administration of the Department of Community & Economic Development's COVID-19 Working Capital Access Program in March. The program provided up to \$100,000 in working capital loans to small businesses across Pennsylvania. The Commission received over 200 inquiries about the program in the six days the program was open. 10 complete applications were submitted, approved and closed—3 in Clarion, 5 in Erie, 1 in Venango, and 1 in Warren County. These loans provided \$697,900 to companies in our region negatively impacted by COVID-19 to assist with operating expenses.

## International Marketing

The Northwest Commission serves as the Regional Export Network (REN) Coordinator for the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development's (DCED) Office of International Business Development (OIBD). The REN partner acts as the gateway to Pennsylvania's Authorized Trade Representatives (ATRs) of 15 overseas trade consultants covering 51 countries.

The program offers a wide range of export assistance committed to preparing clients to enter and compete in the global marketplace by providing international opportunities that lead to increased sales. Services include export readiness assessment, target market research and identification, market entry strategy development, foreign agent/distributor search, and trade event/mission assistance.

170

Jobs Created

578

Jobs Retained

\$244M

In Total Export Sales

### Program in Action:



Based in Erie, PA, Whitethorn Digital is a low-stress indie game publisher focusing on approachable, digestible, wholesome games. They concentrate on games that can be played in pieces, that require no special skills or knowledge, and that anyone can pick up and play.

Whitethorn distributes video games on client platforms such as Xbox, PlayStation, and Nintendo Switch.

Whitethorn Digital participated in their first Bringing the World to PA event last September, meeting with several of the trade offices and as a result received completed projects relating to market overviews and regulations/standards for the video game industry relevant to the specific markets they wanted to explore.

Katie White shared her perspective after attending their first BTW2PA, *"We had a lot of great and productive conversations with the representatives with whom we met. It gave us a lot of different ideas to consider as we are rapidly growing and expanding our market to a more global audience. Our conversations also generated some very detailed and informational reports. We definitely hope to be able to attend future events!"*

In November of 2019, Whitethorn Digital participated in the G-Cores G-Fusion event in Guangzhou, China. They applied for and were granted Global Access Program (GAP) funding to help offset expenses for the show.

The G-Cores G-Fusion event is the largest game magazine and media organization in China approved by the Chinese government. Whitethorn's goal is to expand their global footprint and this show was a great opportunity for them to explore the market in China.





The Northwest Pennsylvania Partnerships for Regional Economic Performance (NW PREP) is one of ten economic development regions designated by the Commonwealth. As the regional coordinator, the Northwest Commission brings together local, county and regional economic and workforce developers, government offices and statewide organizations to work together on specific projects and proactively seek out new resources and opportunities to build a stronger and more prosperous Northwest region.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought on major disruption to the economy as continual waves of unpredictable pivots are experienced and shifts are implemented within the Northwest PREP partnership to stay relevant and beneficial to the businesses and communities served. The need to secure capital to sustain small businesses was substantial this year along with the challenges presented in seeking the 'new normal.'

Fortunately, this network of resource providers was well-established to assist with navigating various programs as they were rolled out, such as, the Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL), COVID-19 Working Capital Access Program (CWCA), Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), and many others.

Partners quickly moved in-person meetings and events to virtual platforms, as well as providing webinars early on to address a variety of hot topics. The NW PREP partnership is comprised of diverse sets of knowledge, allowing the ability to collaborate as a team and provide targeted assistance, efficiently delivering help to requests received.

**1,154 New Clients**  
**91 Business Start-Ups**  
**152 Training Workshops**  
**3,734 Workshop Attendees**



Engage! is a statewide program initiated by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) to support regular and proactive interactions with targeted companies to identify their needs and strategically connect them with viable resources, ensuring their challenges are minimized and their opportunities are capitalized.

Now in its second year, the Engage! program was timely in its positioning to help the Northwest region in weathering the storm ushered in by COVID-19. By providing one-on-one technical assistance to businesses through proactive engagement, companies identified issues experienced and developed plans of action with specialists to work towards resolution.

Focus groups coordinated through Engage! efforts proved to be very beneficial, encouraging the dialogue and collaboration among industry peers and resource providers.

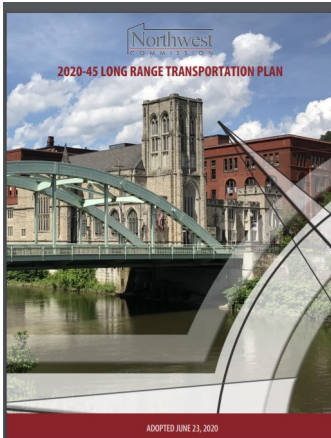
Most recently, Gannon University Small Business Development Center (SBDC) held two focus groups that were comprised of businesses located in Warren, Erie, Mercer, and Crawford counties—one targeted all industries and maturity levels to create a mix of data and the second targeted full-service restaurants to garner their responses to ordered closures.

In addition to facilitating peer support, understanding what areas created the most discord and what success stories have occurred will enable resources and assistance to be better deployed to meet the needs of recovering small businesses.

**626 Surveys Completed**  
**485 Action Plans Developed**  
**480 Referrals to Partners**

## Transportation Planning

The Northwest Commission serves as the Northwest Rural Planning Organization (RPO) planning partner for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT). In partnership with the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) comprised of local leaders from the five-county region of Clarion, Crawford, Forest, Venango, and Warren, projects are prioritized to meet current and future needs of the region. The RPO works collaboratively with PennDOT, member municipalities, and modal operators in reaching consensus on the best way forward for implementing regional transportation priorities.



### 2020-2045 Long Range Transportation Plan

The Northwest RPO adopted the 2020-2045 Northwest Pennsylvania Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) in June of 2020. The Northwest RPO LRTP is the fourth such plan that the Northwest RPO has developed. The LRTP serves as the guidebook to the region's transportation policy and candidate project identification. As such, it serves as a primary "gatekeeper" for future Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) and Twelve-Year Programs (TYPs). The development of the most recent LRTP broke with the approaches used in developing previous plans in that it placed a stronger emphasis on project identification. The plan is also the RPO's first to be developed during the FAST Act era – the planning region made the Transportation Performance Measures advanced by the Act an integral part in evaluating candidate projects for future programming. The result is a plan that clearly delineates what the region's project priorities are, by county, by project type.

### Venango Regional Airport Air Cargo Feasibility Study

To maximize existing assets, diversify the Venango Regional Airport's revenue base, and improve the regional economy, Venango County initiated this study with the assistance of the Northwest Commission, to explore the feasibility of shipping and receiving air cargo at Venango Regional Airport. Accordingly, the County determined the study was prudent to understand air cargo as an opportunity to inform strategic decision-making and capital investments for the facility. The study evaluated the local and regional demand and determined the current demand for air cargo services. The study also looked at the potential for air cargo at the airport to see if a regional air cargo hub or feeder is feasible, and lastly it identified the required airport improvements that could take place. The study was completed in March of 2020.

### Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP)

The Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) provides local municipalities with technical trainings, technical assistance and other services. LTAP classes address topics such as roadway maintenance, safety, drainage, and signage. Classes are offered in the counties of Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Mercer, Venango, and Warren. Classes are scheduled throughout the counties during the course of the year. Technical Assists are available upon request of the municipality. These can be done via telephone or an LTAP professional can offer on-site assistance. All LTAP services are provided free of charge.

# \$58.5 Million

Invested in NWPA Roads  
and Bridges in FY 19-20

# 15

LTAP Trainings Held

# 395

Staff Trained



## Greenways Block Grants

The Northwest Commission's Greenways Block Grant (GBG) Program serves to implement the Northwest Pennsylvania Greenways Plan, utilizing local capacity to advance the regional and statewide priorities of the program partners, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR).

This mini-grant program provides a funding opportunity at the local level for implementing smaller scoped projects with agility and purpose that may not be competitive for other funding opportunities when presented individually.

The GBG Program is a great opportunity to continue established partnerships and create new ones between local, regional, and state entities, cooperatively working together to put mutual greenways plans into action.



### Program in Action:

Crawford County Conservation District in partnership with DCNR Bureau of Forestry successfully completed the Crawford County Streambank Reforestation Project this past fall, reporting 370 students from 7 different schools planted 1,705 native trees and 1,850 native shrubs along 10 acres of Crawford County streams.

Riparian sites were in need of restoration and students were willing to do the work, but funding was not in place to put the two together until a round of the Northwest GBG program had become available.

By receiving an award from DEP through the GBG program, the identified sites were stabilized and numerous students received hands-on experience learning the importance of riparian buffers.

Projects that preserve natural resources while encouraging stewardship and recreational engagement have a long-lasting, meaningful impact that improves quality of life for communities and contributes to positive momentum for attracting visitors and new businesses.

**16 Applications Received | 10 Projects Funded  
73 Participants Since Inception**

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# 2019-20 Board of Directors

**Commissioner Chip Abramovic**, Venango County

**Carl Anderson III**, Erie County Council

**Commissioner Scott Boyd**, Mercer County

**Cindy Crytzer**, Forest County

**County Executive Kathy Dahlkemper**, Erie County Executive's Office

**Jim Decker**, Warren County Chamber of Business and Industry

**Peter Frisina**, Erie County

**Dan Gracenin**, Mercer County Regional Planning Commission

**Commissioner Basil Huffman**, Forest County

**Commissioner Ben Kafferlin**, Warren County

**Debbra Kapp**, Action Auto Service, Inc., Venango County

**Tom McKinley**, Sentinel Onsite Support, Lawrence County

**Lizette Olsen**, Aware, Inc., Mercer County

**John Stroup**, Clarion Hospital Foundation, Clarion County

**Commissioner Ted Tharan**, Clarion County

**Commissioner Dan Vogler**, Lawrence County

**Commissioner Francis Weiderspahn, Jr.**, Crawford County

**Kimberly Zippie**, Commodore Perry High School, Mercer County

The Northwest Commission's Board of Directors is comprised of public and private citizens representing the 8 counties in Northwest Pennsylvania.

The board contains an Executive Committee that oversees administrative duties, responsibilities and goals of the entire board.

## Board Officers

### Chair:

Commissioner Basil Huffman

### Vice Chair:

Commissioner Chip Abramovic

### Secretary:

Lizette Olsen

### Treasurer:

John Stroup



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