Happy Holidays! John Kramer and Andrea Weist of the Albright College Center for Excellence in Local Government wish all of our supporters and friends the happiest of holidays and a healthy and prosperous New Year.

Our Mission: to maintain and enhance the quality of life in Berks County by helping our municipal leaders meet the changing needs of their communities.

Upcoming Events:
- Jan. 10 Berks County Cooperative Purchasing Council
- Feb. 2 Berks Municipal Partnership
- Feb. 14 “Local Government in Berks” on BCTV
- Feb. 15, 22, 29 Municipal Leadership Institute
- Feb. 16 Berks Municipal Officials Dinner
- Feb. 21, 28, March 6 Community Planning Course
- Feb. 25 PA Land Use Institute
- March 15 Flexible Zoning Workshop
- April 11, 18, 25, May 2 Governor Mifflin
- May 3, 10, 17 Subdivision and Land Development Course

FALL 2011 PROGRAM SUMMARY

Developing Skills for Effective Leadership
Zoning Matters Workshop: Twenty-eight municipal officials were informed of the legal issues related to the PA Municipalities Planning Code and specific provisions of a local zoning ordinance that can create legal hazards for a municipality.

Budgeting Basics Workshop: Seven local officials were introduced to the different types of budgets, budgeting procedures and techniques, accounting and auditing issues to consider, factors affecting budget development and the estimation of revenues and expenditures, benchmarking and outyear budgeting.

Rental Inspection Programs Workshop: Thirty-one local officials learned ordinance drafting principles, the legal framework for property ordinances, the contents of an ordinance (including model ordinances), and potential pitfalls and errors.

Zoning Basics Course: Seventeen local officials became more familiar with the relationship of zoning to comprehensive plans and the need for consistency, the terms used in zoning, key issues in drafting the zoning ordinance and map, procedures for adopting and amending ordinances, zoning ordinance administration, and joint municipal zoning, planned residential development and traditional neighborhood development options in ordinances.

New Tools to Address Blight and Abandonment Workshop: Twenty-eight municipal officials were informed of new legislative tools, including two recently enacted laws (Act 90 of 2010 and Act 135 of 2008) available for each type of jurisdiction (townships, boroughs, cities). The key legal terms in the new laws, what the new tools in the laws allow municipal officials to do, and the legal citation in the laws so officials can obtain more details on each tool.

The Importance of Business Retention in Local Communities Workshop: The 11 participants learned how municipal officials have developed new communication strategies for better understanding the needs of their local business community, modified local land use regulations to become more business-friendly, provided financial incentives for business expansion, and supported the promotion of events to foster more business activity. The second part of the workshop provided officials with information on local economic development agencies who can provide assistance for fostering business retention and expansion in their communities.

Fostering Intergovernmental Cooperation
Berks County Cooperative Purchasing Council: Council members entered into new contracts to jointly purchase gasoline, heating oil, diesel fuel, rock salt, furniture, bond paper, and road signage, in addition to the other current contracts for line stripping, fire extinguishers, electricity and composting.

Berks Municipal Partnership: The partnership helped to facilitate a breakfast meeting for 44 local officials with the Berks County Commissioners to discuss issues of local and county concern. Officials met with the director of the County’s Department of Emergency Services to discuss the proposed new emergency radio system, learned about the successful joint trash collection service in Western Berks, and received an update on the new sludge drying facility in Exeter Township and the plans for upgrading the Reading Sewage Treatment Plant.

Berks County Sewer and Water Regionalization Study: The updating of the study was initially encouraged by the Berks Municipal Partnership and conducted under the direction of the Berks County Planning Commission. The study was accepted by the Commission and presented to municipal officials at five regional meetings.

Governor Mifflin Area Coordinating Council: The Council’s five municipalities jointly undertook a project to reconstruct one of the school district’s parking lots, continued planning for a Peer to Peer study to identify regional recreation opportunities, with guidance from the center, and continued planning a regional citizens academy.

Municipal Roundtable on Zoning Overlay Districts: Fifteen municipal officials attended the session to discuss the overlay district technique and how it is being used successfully in Berks County.

Municipal Roundtable on Zoning for Alternative Energy Sources: Fifteen officials participated in this session to discuss the growing interest in using alternative sources of energy (wind, solar, geothermal, bio-mass) and the regulatory implications for local communities.

Enhancing Citizen Involvement
“Local Government in Berks” Program on BCTV: Center Director John Kramer hosted and discussed progress in implementing the City’s Act 47 Plan with Mayor Tom McMahon, Council Vice President Jeff Waltman, and Act 47 Plan consultant Gordon Mann. Discussion centered on the importance of business retention and the formation of the Exeter Township Economic Development Committee with Donald Wilson, chair of the Exeter Township Supervisors; and discussed the updated Berks County Sewer and Water Regionalization Study with Shannon Rossman from the Berks County Planning Commission.

Leadership Berks Presentation on Changing Demographics: Center Director John Kramer discussed changing demographic and socioeconomic trends with the 30 members of the Leadership Berks Class of 2012.

Albright College Mayoral Debate: More than 100 Albright students participated in the City of Reading Mayoral Debate held at the College. The debate was planned and conducted by Assistant Professor Ian Wendt, Ph.D., and Director Kramer.

For more information, please contact Andrea Weist at 610-929-6503 or aweist@alb.edu.