

Allegheny County Controller Chelsa Wagner's

TAXPAYER ALERT

Clean Air Fund

July 2018



Once known worldwide as the “smoky city,” perceptions of Pittsburgh have changed markedly. But while business people no longer are forced to change their soot-soiled shirts at lunch and the streetlights don’t come on in the daytime, serious air pollution issues remain with us that are impacting the health of our residents.

Allegheny County was one of just 10 counties in the nation and the only county outside California to receive all ‘F’ grades on the American Lung Association’s State of the Air report for 2018. The Pittsburgh metro region now rates 10th worst out of more than 200 metro areas for daily levels of fine particulate pollution, which is invisible and small enough to be breathed deeply into the lungs.



View the American Lung Association’s 2018 State of the Air Report at Lung.org

The ALA reports that ozone and particle pollution at levels such as those in Allegheny County can result in breathing problems such as shortness of breath, asthma attacks, and respiratory infections; cardiovascular effects leading to increased risk of heart attack and stroke; and lower birthweight and decreased lung function in newborns.

[Environmental Health News](#) reported that a recent study of 1,200 elementary school students in Allegheny County by the Pediatric Alliance showed that greater than 22 percent have asthma. This compares with 10 percent across Pennsylvania and 8 percent nationally.

The Allegheny County Health Department cites 27 facilities around the County as “major sources” of air pollution.

A Clean Air Fund administered by the Allegheny County Health Department and funded through fines from facilities that exceed pollution limits brings in more than \$1 million each year, and currently contains about \$12 million.

By County ordinance, the Health Department’s Air Quality Program may spend up to 5 percent of the Fund balance annually on operations, about \$600,000 per year currently. Bizarrely, this provision incentivizes the Department to spend less on programs to address air quality in order to be able to spend more on operations. This provision should be amended so that only 5 percent of annual receipts of the Fund, or about \$50,000 annually, could be reserved for operations. This would remove the incentive for the County to stash funds in the bank that should be expended on projects to improve public health.

Last year, \$500,000 was allocated from the Fund for renovations to a Health Department building in the Lawrenceville neighborhood of Pittsburgh. It is expected that approximately \$5 million could eventually be spent from the Fund for building renovations. Previously, \$450,000 was spent on studies and design related to the renovation, and in 2015, \$200,000 was spent from the Fund to pay for half of the cost of repairing its roof.

Read more on page 2.

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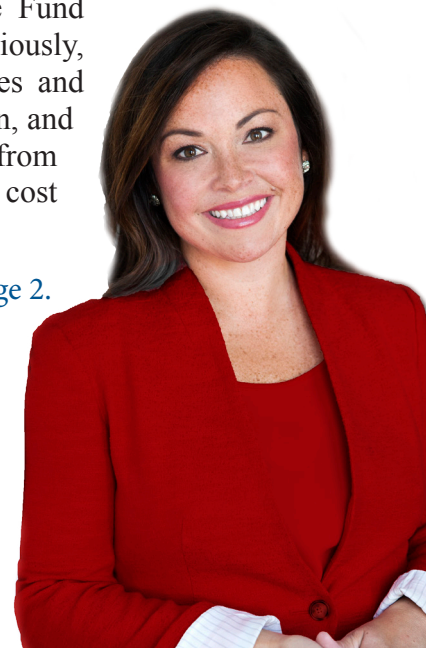
@AlleghenyController



@AC_Controller

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chelsa Wagner".

Chelsa Wagner
Allegheny County Controller



Environmental advocates have argued that building renovations are an inappropriate use of the Clean Air Fund in that they do not result in reduced pollution, and that these payments were not properly disclosed to an advisory committee which is to make recommendations on appropriations from the Clean Air Fund.

Building projects are common expenses for County government, with most major projects being funded through borrowing. In fact, \$90 million in new borrowing for capital projects is proposed for this year. Rather than drawing down resources intended to address the urgent problem of our air quality, renovations to the Health Department facility should be prioritized among other major capital needs, such as the City-County Building and County Courthouse roofs.

The Clean Air Fund has been utilized to fund pollution monitoring, solar energy installations, retrofits of gas-burning engines, and other initiatives. But the data show that much more must be done. These funds can also have the greatest impact in high-poverty communities which have lacked significant investment for decades, and where air pollution is often most severe due to their proximity to major industrial facilities.

The Clean Air Fund should be dedicated to projects that can meaningfully improve public health, and the Health Department must improve outreach to identify organizations that can benefit from these dollars.

Non-profit organizations, schools and local governments may request funds for air quality initiatives or public education by contacting:

Allegheny County Health Department
Air Quality Program
301 39th Street, Building 7
Pittsburgh, PA 15201
412-578-8103

The Frank B. Clack Health Complex Building #7 houses the Health Department's Air Quality Division.

