

## It takes five: County and municipal partners to sign Mount Penn Preserve pact

*For immediate release* – The evening of Wednesday, July 25, 2018, promises to be an historic one as representatives of the County of Berks, the City of Reading, the Borough of Mount Penn, and the townships of Alsace and Lower Alsace formally sign the document officially creating the Mount Penn Preserve Council of Governments agreement at *the Lower Alsace Township Building, 1200 Carsonia Avenue, Reading, PA 19606*.

The initiative has been under way since the spring of 2016 to create this municipal partnership designed to coordinate plans to make Mount Penn a recreational and entertainment destination. The preserve will be governed by a council of governments – or a COG – comprised of representatives from the four municipalities and the county.

The municipal legislative bodies or boards, as well as the county commissioners, all approved the ordinance creating the COG over the spring and summer.

Berks County Commissioner Kevin Barnhardt and Lee C. Olsen, AIA, a member of the Berks County Planning Commission and immediate past chair of the Pagoda Foundation, are the two principles behind the Mount Penn Preserve (or MP3) initiative.

“The MP3 COG is a testament to the cooperative spirit that’s alive and well in Berks County,” said Barnhardt. “Bringing five government entities and the greater community together to preserve and enhance the Mount Penn Preserve is remarkable.”

Olsen recalled how the first stirrings of the initiative came about.

“Just two-plus years ago Commissioner Barnhardt and I were sitting at breakfast and I turned over my placemats and drew the mountain and started to locate the assets that exist,” said Olsen. “These were not just the public icons like the Pagoda and the Firetower, but existing places of business and recreational venues and destination.”

Interest was strong from the start, he said. The duo invited input from the community at large regarding establishing an entity to work collectively on Mount Penn issues. Close to 60 supportive individuals attended a first exploratory meeting. The duo then visited with officials of the four municipalities and the county, with each agreeing to invest \$1,000 in the initiative.

Following that, the Reading Berks Association of Realtors, through its national foundation, sponsored a grant for \$15,000 to create a master plan. From that plan, an executive committee was formed to consider aspects of the plan. The committee structure formulated a marketing plan, a governance structure, an environmental assessment, and a public safety procedure to successfully monitor the health and vitality of the mountain. Representatives from the five government entities have been involved throughout the process.

The COG ordinance is the cumulative, official outcome of this collaboration.

“I am so proud to be a part of a viable and dedicated movement created out of identifying a need and capitalizing on our natural resource and treasure to enhance the quality of life in our community,” said Olsen.

“Our responsibility is to leave a legacy for future generations so they can continue to enjoy the beauty and history of this gem,” Barnhardt added.