

Meeting of the 2025 Allegheny County Government Review Commission

Date: Tuesday, March 10, 2026

Time: 11:30 AM

Location: Gold Room (4th Floor) – County Courthouse
436 Grant St, Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Present: Rohit Acharya, Member; Matthew Barron, Member; William McKain, Member; Evan Frazier, Member; Gretchen Moore, Member; Mark Foerster, Member; Robert Vescio, Member; Michael Witherel, Member; Ernest Rajakone, Allegheny County; Alexander Inman, Allegheny County; Wayne Fontana, Pennsylvania General Assembly; Ira Goldstein, Reinvestment Fund; Nate Edenfield, Carnegie Mellon University; Ben Murphy, Carnegie Mellon University

Welcome, Pledge of Allegiance, and Roll Call

Rohit Acharya, chairman of the commission, called the meeting to order at 11:34 AM.

The members stood and recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Acharya conducted a roll call, with members Matt Barron, Michael Witherel, Gretchen Moore, William McKain, and Robert Vescio indicating their presence. Members Tracey McCants Lewis, Evan Frazier, and Mark Foerster were not present at this time.

Acharya restated the purpose of the commission: to study and evaluate the charter and county government in the service of providing advisory recommendations through its final report submitted to the people of the county.

Public Comment on Agenda Items

Acharya asked if there were any members of the public who would like to comment on agenda items. Ernest Rajakone responded that no members of the public wished to speak.

Approval of Minutes

Acharya asked the commission for any comments on an approval of minutes from the previous meeting. No member wished to comment.

Vescio motioned to approve the minutes. McKain seconded the motion. Acharya put the motion to a vote. All members voted aye and the motion was passed.

Discussion – Pennsylvania’s Reassessment System

Acharya turned it over to State Senator Wayne Fontana for a discussion of Pennsylvania’s reassessment system.

Senator Fontana introduced himself and referenced his familiarity with the setting due to sitting on the first Allegheny County Council. Fontana noted that his experience as a realtor during the 2000 reassessment involving Sabre Systems made it clear that relying on court-ordered reassessments was a problem. Fontana stated that as Chair of the Council’s assessment committee, he drafted a bill for scheduled reassessments. Fontana noted that that bill was vetoed in 2003.

Fontana stated that 20 years later, the county and state is facing the same issue, with 64 of 67 counties having not reassessed in 15 years or more. Fontana added that 10 counties have not reassessed in 48 years or more. Fontana stated that Pennsylvania is the only state that does not reassess on a standard schedule. Fontana explained that these issues inspired Senate Bill 567, introduced to the Pennsylvania General Assembly, to require reassessment every five years.

Fontana referenced a July 2024 hosting of two Senate policy committee hearings on reassessment, one in Pittsburgh and one in Harrisburg. Fontana stated that testimony was provided by the Board of Property Assessment Appeals and Review (BPAAR), a school superintendent, a realtor, and national commercial real estate expert. Fontana stated that the hearings were focused on the impact that a lack of reassessment has on ability to budget.

Fontana stated that a lack of political will was a main driver of the not implementing regular reassessments. Fontana added the money is another issue, as reassessment becomes more expensive the longer it is put off, with delayed reassessments resulting in a cost of about \$60 per parcel.

For the record, vice chairman Mark Foerster arrived and took his seat.

Fontana explained that SB 567 requires that all counties other than Philadelphia County reassess at least once every five years with biannual market-value adjustments; moves the State Tax Equalization Board to the State Department of Revenue, expanding its authority; protects counties from lawsuits involving uniformity; and allows counties to collect a \$20 per parcel fee for costs. Fontana noted that the bill is currently in the State Senate Government Committee awaiting

consideration. Fontana added the bill does have the potential to be amended and that it will expire at the end of the year. Fontana concluded his opening remarks and opened the discussion for questions.

Robert Vescio thanked Fontana for his leadership and asked how Fontana settled on five years for the bill. Fontana replied that the consensus from his July 2024 meetings fell on five years. Fontana added that in between reassessments, there can still be updates. Vescio asked Fontana if he had insight into how the commission might provide realistic recommendations. Fontana replied that the advocacy of the commission on this matter would be valuable.

William McKain thanked Fontana for his leadership and asked if there have been lessons learned from other states on reassessment from a cost perspective. Fontana replied that many states have implemented schedules where values are updated in between in assessments using technology.

Gretchen Moore asked about the timeline of Fontana's legislation and how it compares with the timeline the commission is working on. Fontana responded that he was unsure given hesitation for other members of the assembly to sign on as cosponsors. Moore asked where Fontana could find the advocacy he needs. Fontana replied that school districts and municipalities would be strong advocates and that they have complications with the common level ratio.

For the record, member Evan Frazier arrived and took his seat.

Michael Witherel asked if any other bills of this nature had made it out of committee. Fontana replied that this was not the case but that after the July 2024 meeting in Pittsburgh, 95% of the emails he received for his stance were positive. Fontana noted that exemptions can give people breaks if they are concerned about higher tax bills.

Mark Foerster thanked Fontana for his courage in bringing the bill to the assembly and noted that the commission may emphasize courage as a theme in its recommendations regarding this topic. Fontana replied that the Governor's office needs to hear political will from all corners of the state.

Acharya commented that being part of the commission has helped him recognize the distinction between assessment and taxing bodies that levy taxes on the assessed value as well as the importance of helping people to avoid conflating the two. Fontana agreed and noted that people need to understand assessment is not millage. Acharya asked if Fontana had any recommendations for how to handle commercial assessment compared to residential assessment. Fontana replied that

when he served on county council, there was a different millage on land compared to building. Fontana added that they ended up combining them for simplification but that there is an argument to separate them again. Fontana stated that a similar distinction could be made for commercial and residential.

Evan Frazier asked if there are ways to get other counties in the state on board with Fontana's legislation. Fontana replied that the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) could be an organization that could help. Fontana referenced an organization called the Community Project that had been involved in lawsuits against the state regarding reassessment.

Matt Barron thanked Fontana for his leadership and stated that he wants fairness for all Pennsylvania homeowners. Barron asked if Fontana could speak more to the costs of not doing reassessment in terms of a newcomers' tax and other issues holding the county back. Fontana stated that there is no question that it is costing Allegheny County to not do it. Fontana added that costs of reassessments will be recouped from its benefits.

Acharya thanked Fontana for his time and concluded the discussion.

Preparing for a Change: How Allegheny County's Property Reassessment Will Affect Homeowners and Communities

Acharya turned it over to Dr. Ira Goldstein, PhD, Senior Advisor for Reinvestment Fund for a presentation on the impact of a reassessment on the county. Goldstein stated that he would be going over a presentation on some work done ending about a year ago regarding the impact of reassessment would have for different parts of the county. Goldstein noted that this work was funded by the Heinz Endowment.

Goldstein introduced himself and described Reinvestment Fund as a not-for-profit community development financial institution based in Philadelphia. Goldstein stated he had worked on some tax studies regarding assessment for Philadelphia regarding accuracy, uniformity, and equity. Goldstein added that he had been asked to co-chair a task force organized by Philadelphia Mayor Parker to ensure fair assessments for the city.

Goldstein introduced three main topics for the presentation: how mass assessments are created; how to define and evaluate assessment quality; and what happens during a reassessment. Goldstein noted that assessments are an empirical process that should not be concerned with a tax yield. Goldstein added that assessments are about calibrating what taxes will yield across the county.

Goldstein stated that assessors create assessments through gathering data all year round rather than just leading up to an assessment. Goldstein noted that this could be size, number of bedrooms, and other characteristics of homes. Goldstein explained that data typically comes from some type of municipal agency. Goldstein stated that data can also come from a multiple listing service or aerial imagery. Goldstein stated that it is important for assessors to verify that sales were valid, arms-length transactions.

Goldstein stated that assessors statistically estimate the price of homes that sell and then apply that model to all homes. Goldstein stated that the models are multiple regression models that use characteristics of homes such as size, condition, style of home, and geographical location. Goldstein added that finding a good model is an iterative process that reduces statistical bias. Goldstein stated that the big question in this process is whether homes that sell are like all other homes.

Goldstein stated that Philadelphia has a 6-part process: pre-work and preliminary ratio studies; sales validation; model development; assessment review and preliminary ratio study results; final quality control review; and certification of values. Goldstein noted that this process is done in accordance with standards from the International Association of Assessing Officers.

Goldstein stated that assessment quality is usually evaluated according to three ratios: median assessment ratio, coefficient of dispersion (COD), and price-related differential (PRD). Goldstein stated that the median assessment ratio measures how close the predicted value of the property is to its real value. Goldstein stated that the coefficient of dispersion is a measure of uniformity, where similarly assessed properties have similar actual values. Goldstein stated that the price related differential is a measure of vertical equity, where low-value properties and high-value properties should have assessments that are a similar percentage of the value. Goldstein stated that for Allegheny County, the PRD was slightly worse than industry standard while median assessment ratio was not ideal and COD did not meet industry standard.

Goldstein stated that uniformity was important due to its place in law and that vertical equity was important due to fundamental issues of fairness. Goldstein added that for assessment, mistakes will happen but errors should be small and random. Goldstein noted that errors can be corrected through the appeals process.

Goldstein stated that reassessment does not mean higher taxes. Goldstein added that it can be called a rebalancing or a truing up of values. Goldstein described the

Pennsylvania law delineating an anti-windfall revision where a county can't reassess and pull in more taxes as a result.

Goldstein stated that there can be complications such as Allegheny County having a lot of commercial property that has seen large reductions in value, which may require a higher millage for the commercial portion.

Goldstein stated that for a reassessment, some assessments will go up, some will go down, and some will stay the same. Goldstein added that some will feel some pain and that represents opportunities for municipalities to use exemptions to ease hardship. Goldstein noted that lower to modest income deciles are more likely to see increases in assessed value.

Goldstein stated that to protect homeowners from rising taxes, governments can roll out reassessment public education campaigns and affirmatively market exemptions and other tools for absorbing economic shocks of reassessment. Goldstein added that selecting a vendor that does a high-quality, transparent, and verifiably accurate job is important, as is providing ample time for appeals before certification. Goldstein stated that evaluating the results of a reassessment against any racial or ethnic patterns is important as well.

Goldstein stated that the homestead exemption is a strong tool for homeowners due to its transparency and ease of understanding. Goldstein added that the Longtime Owner Occupant Program (LOOP) is another good tool. Goldstein stated that freezes are not as strong of a tool, due to its unpredictability. Goldstein concluded his presentation.

Acharya thanked Goldstein for his presentation and opened up a question and answer session.

McKain thanked Goldstein and stated that the presentation was very helpful.

Moore thanked Goldstein and asked why there is a disparity in the median assessment ratio by geography in the county. Goldstein responded that the distance of time from the last assessment is a factor. Goldstein stated that real estate markets don't appreciate uniformly across space, which could be another factor.

Moore asked if Goldstein had thoughts about an outside vendor for reassessment compared to having in-house assessors. Goldstein expressed his personal opinion that a combination of the two is best. Goldstein stated that the government is a custodian of important data regarding assessment. Goldstein stated that Philadelphia has teams of people that are geographical experts based on

generalized market areas (GMAs) where they learn an area at a deep level. Goldstein stated that vendors can be particularly useful for the statistical modeling component of assessment.

Witherel thanked Goldstein for his presentation.

Foerster commented that advertising the various exemptions in the county could be a part of commission's recommendations. Foerster asked for clarification on vertical equity. Goldstein explained that vertical equity would be a \$100,000 home being assessed at \$80,000 and a \$1,000,000 home being valued at \$800,000, as the percentage for each home is 80%. Goldstein noted that for the many exemptions in the county, it may be difficult for a homeowner to understand which direction might be best for them.

Acharya asked who is valuing the properties with respect to vertical equity. Goldstein responded that the arms-length sales are the determining factor. Goldstein added those prices are the prices the models should be based on.

Acharya asked if there were any lessons from Philadelphia's shift to recurring reassessments. Goldstein responded that the first time is difficult. Goldstein stated that Philadelphia went to an actual value initiative, which produced a number of variables. Goldstein stated that public education is particularly important for the first time. Goldstein referenced the timeline discussion the commission had with Senator Fontana and stated that a three-year timeline is ideal, as it allows appeals to efficiently make their way through the system. Goldstein added that the informal review process had proven important, where homeowners can meet with the Office of Property Assessment on factual matters.

Acharya asked how Philadelphia had accounted for the cost aspect of reassessment. Goldstein responded that he could not speak to that but that he would happy to connect Acharya with someone who knew more, potentially an Office of Property Assessments leader. Goldstein added that a fee per parcel could go a long way to funding reassessment.

Acharya asked if Goldstein could speak to Philadelphia's experience with a land value tax. Goldstein responded that most interest in that topic was related to a new construction abatement that attaches to the improvement rather than the land. Goldstein added that the Office of Property Assessment had undertaken efforts to value the land properly for that purpose, but found it very difficult and applied a ratio to the whole property instead. Goldstein stated that an added difficulty is that bare parcels are rarely transacted.

Frazier asked how reassessment can impact gentrification and how promotion of tools like exemptions can be most effective. Goldstein responded that neighborhood assistance groups (NAGs) had been effective. Goldstein stated that tax policies that allowed values to go up slowly in rapidly appreciating areas could be more effective than freezing values. Goldstein noted the importance of predictability, though this can be difficult under state uniformity laws. Frazier asked if this risk of unpredictability was worse in counties that don't do regular assessments. Goldstein stated that he does think that is the case.

Barron stated for public that he works for the Heinz Endowments and that he worked on the grant in 2023 and 2024 for the Reinvestment Fund to support the report. Barron asked if there was a best-in-class county or state that is doing reassessment very well. Goldstein replied that Maryland has strong approaches. Goldstein noted that Chicago provides strong public education on the topic. Goldstein stated that legal limits are a factor for each place.

Acharya thanked Goldstein for his time.

Updates on Workstreams and Resource Updates

Acharya initiated a discussion workstream updates.

Moore stated that the law students supporting the commission had mostly completed an analysis of prior commission recommendations and whether action had been taken on them. Moore added that the research into the reason for action or inaction was ongoing and was being conducted via interviews. Acharya added that the commission would be putting together a list of interviewees.

Acharya stated that the Heinz students supporting the commission were putting together literature reviews for each of the modules in the commission's workplan.

Committee Updates

Acharya explained for the public that commission has subcommittees for three topics: property assessment, structure of government, and role of government. Acharya stated that the structure of government subcommittee had a meeting recently to discuss voluntary disincorporation. Acharya stated the campaign finance and redistricting have been discussed as topics for future meetings. Acharya stated that the role of government subcommittee meeting is being scheduled.

Next Steps and Future Meetings

Acharya stated that members can expect a poll via email soon to schedule out the next few meetings.

Public Comment on General Items

Acharya asked if there were any public comments. Rajakone responded in the negative.

Moore motioned to adjourn the meeting. Frazier seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 1:10 PM.