



What'SUP Berks Newsletter

Summer 2025

Volume 1, No. 1

Collaboration with Alvernia University

This spring What'SUP Berks completed its collaboration with Alvernia University's O'Pake Institute for Economic Development and Entrepreneurship providing expertise and support for What'SUP Berks as a non-profit start-up. Out of that collaboration came a logo designed by one of our youth members, an informational pamphlet with QR code linking to newly developed web-site (whatsupberks.org). Guidance for development of a social media presence was also provided. Thanks to Marisol Martinez-Alvarez, Project Manager, and the Alvernia Students who participated for their invaluable expertise and support!

Mission Statement Finalized

Early this spring What'SUP Berks participants agreed on the need for a Mission Statement to help focus our efforts. Briefly, the agreed upon focus was "to reduce and eventually eliminate the use of single use plastic beginning with single use plastic bags in stores, restaurants, and businesses in Berks County through education, collaboration, and action." Please see web page for additional information about our mission and goals (www.whatsupberks.org).

Berks Nature Memorandum of Agreement Signed

On May 27th What'SUP Berks finalized a Memorandum of Agreement formalizing our partnership with Berks Nature, a leading agent for the past 50 years in environmental conservation in Berks County. Berks Nature has agreed



to provide ongoing consultation and administrative support for grant and donation funds. We are deeply grateful for the support being provided by Berks Nature as a leader in local conservation efforts.

Berks County Community Foundation Grant Award

This spring, What'SUP Berks was awarded a \$12,000 grant in support of its mission. This money will be an invaluable resource in development and maintenance of on-line resources including web-site and Zoom conferencing capability, social media promotion, community event fees, and promotional materials (re-usable bags, t-shirts, stickers) designed to spread the word about our cause.

Wernersville Borough Council Presentation

On Wednesday evening, February 5, 2025, Art and Louise Grim presented an overview of the mission and goals of the What'SUP Berks at the Wernersville Borough Council monthly meeting. They expressed our desire to have boroughs and municipalities enact ordinances to ban single use plastic bags within their area. Sample ordinances were given out to council members and the mayor along with other documents about the damage caused by SUP bags. The overall reaction was positive with the mayor and several council members supporting the idea. Some council members felt the county or commonwealth should be the leaders in this rather than the boroughs or municipalities. One council member was opposed to any bans on SUP. Further discussion was planned for later meetings. After multiple delays, the councilmember requested the SUP ban ordinance be put on the agenda for September's council meeting so that a discussion and action for or against will be decided. Additional Berks borough and township presentations are planned for the fall.



Meetings of Members and Development of an Executive Committee

What'SUP Berks participants have met in a General Meeting on a monthly basis since February 2025 providing opportunities for both in person and Zoom presence. Wyomissing Public Library is the current physical location, the 4th Wednesday of every month 6:45-8 pm. As participation in What'SUP Berks increased in numbers and activities and initiatives multiplied, the need for an executive committee consisting of a smaller team of committed members to provide support and maintain Mission focus was proposed and agreed upon. A president (Tom Crotty), vice-president (Nancy Sellers), secretary (Deanna Witzel), and treasurer (Linda Dapcic-Angst), two youth representatives (Lillyanne DeLoretto and Stella Belinski), and two at-large members (Louise and Art Grim) were chosen. An additional youth member transitioning to college in the fall (Garrett Hyneman) is participating as he is able. The plan is for the Executive Committee to meet at least monthly in addition to the monthly General Meeting

Youth Member State-Wide SUP Bag Ban Initiative

In early May, What'SUP Berks youth members, Garrett Hyneman, Lillyanne DeLoretta, Stella Belinski, and Jacob Labagh began drafting legislation for a state-wide single-use plastic bag prohibition. These students from Governor Mifflin High School proposed the bill to State Senator Judy Schwank, who graciously agreed to become the primary sponsor. Twelve other states, including New York, New Jersey, and Delaware, have statewide bans in place. In a statement of support from Senator Schwank, she noted, "Single-use plastic bags are one of the most common sources of litter within our Commonwealth. Plastic bags take hundreds of years to degrade and break down into harmful microplastics. These microplastics have been detected in



drinking water, wildlife, and even human blood and brain tissue, raising serious health concerns.” We are so proud of the What’SUP Berks youth members for their continued dedication to this issue. We wish them success with their bill! With much hard work left to do, all are encouraged to contact your State Senator or Representative to communicate your support for the proposed legislation.

Tabling Events and Spreading the Word

It has been a busy spring and summer for What’SUP Berks in spreading the word about our campaign. Tabling events at community gatherings have provided wonderful opportunities to distribute pamphlets, sign up individuals supporting a ban on single use plastic bags, and engage in 1:1 conversations about the issue with all those who stopped by the What’SUP Berks table. What’SUP Berks youth members Stella Belinski and Lillyanne Deloretta created a tri-fold poster display with information related to the SUP bag ban campaign. As a result of these sign-up opportunities, What’SUP currently has an emailing list of (Deanna-latest number). What’SUP Berks has tabled at the following community events thus far this summer

- March Governor Mifflin Student Expo
- April Earth Day Events at Penn State Berks, Alvernia University,
- Reading City Park
- June Good Medicine Indigenous Wellness Celebration
- July PRIDE Festival
- August Smokey’s Birthday Bash, Berks Parks and Recreation
- August District 2 Second Annual Party at the Park

Planned tabling events for the fall:

- October Hay Creek Apple Festival and Flea Market



- October Daniel Boone Homestead Heritage Fall Festival

In addition our Treasurer has been busy spreading the word by following through on using grant funds to purchase promotional materials including 1000 re-usable non-plastic grocery bags with What'SUP Berks Logo and Motto "Think Global, Act Local", t-shirts with logo, printed pamphlets with information about What'SUP Berks SUP bag ban campaign, etc.

Outreach to Grocery Stores and Businesses

As part of the campaign to eliminate single use plastic bags in shops and stores, and also to support those businesses that have already eliminated SUP bags, the Executive Committee encouraged outreach to local grocery stores and businesses, including stores in the county that have already stopped providing SUP bags at the register like Kimberton Whole Foods, Aldi, and Lidl. The hope is to learn more from them about the advantages and challenges of eliminating SUP bags from a business perspective.

Penn State Berks Environmental Awareness and Community Action Project

Every fall semester Dr. Mahsa Kazempour of Penn State Berks teaches a class in which she solicits teams of students to complete Environmental Awareness and Community Action Projects (EACAP). What'SUP Berks has submitted a proposal for 1-2 teams of students centering on the issue of single use plastic bag use in Berks county. These projects aim to provide students with the opportunity to research about an environmental issue, educate others about the issue, and participate in some form of sustainability-focused action or service in the community. The What'SUP Berks proposal asks for students to develop a 1-2 page statement proposing a single use plastic bag ban in Berks County municipalities, educating local businesses and community groups about the problem of SUP bags and also to solicit public endorsements of



support. The goal of the project is to raise students' awareness and understanding of various environmental issues and engage them in some form of service/action.

Thanks to Linda Dapcic-Angst, Lilly Deloreta, and Tom Crotty who contributed to this newsletter!

We need you! If you aren't already an active What'SUP Berks member, we enthusiastically invite you to participate either on-line or in person in our What'SUP Berks monthly General Meetings.

Our meetings are held on the fourth Wednesday of every month 6:45-8 pm at the Wyomissing Public Library in-person or via Zoom invitation (request invite at whatsupberks@gmail.com)