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Penn Hills' Chris Blackwell is 2025 Recipient of Joseph A. James Award
Retiring Planning Director honored after 30 years of service

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC) and the Local Government Academy (LGA) are proud to announce Chris Blackwell, Director of Planning at the Municipality of Penn Hills, as the recipient of the 2025 Joseph A. James Award. The Award is given annually to an elected or appointed official in Southwestern Pennsylvania in recognition of a lifetime of exemplary governance or management.

The award is named for the late Joseph A. James, Ph.D, who was a noted scholar at the University of Pittsburgh and a lifelong advocate of intergovernmental cooperation and professionalism in local government.

SPC Executive Director Rich Fitzgerald and LGA Executive Director Joy Ruff presented the award to Blackwell at Penn Hills' council meeting on February 17th – his final meeting after more than 30 years of service to the people of Penn Hills.

“Chris Blackwell has long been a regional example of how one dedicated public servant with a strong team can yield tangible results for residents in Southwestern Pennsylvania.” said Fitzgerald. “From skate parks to trails to thousands of permits for new construction, Chris has had a hand in every exciting development in Penn Hills for the last three decades”.

“Local Government Academy is proud to partner with the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission to recognize the service of Chris Blackwell, who we have worked with over the years through our Municipal Intern Program.” Said Ruff. “As a municipal planner, Chris exemplifies the spirit of a public servant and has been committed in his efforts to mentor young professionals. We thank Chris for his service to Penn Hills, his dedication to the planning profession, and his work promoting excellence in local government.”

“Penn Hills is extremely proud that this award was given to a Penn Hills resident and staff member,” Said Scott Andrejchak, Municipal Manager for Penn Hills. “The award reflects the work Mr. Blackwell accomplished in our community and how his colleagues view his professionalism and contributions to local government in western Pennsylvania.”

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The Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission, more commonly known as SPC, is the cooperative forum for regional collaboration, planning, and public decision-making for the ten counties of Southwestern Pennsylvania including the City of Pittsburgh. SPC develops plans and programs for public investment and fulfills federal and state requirements for transportation, economic development, and local government assistance programs.