

Your Tax Dollars at Work

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In March 1994, the state legislature permitted Allegheny County to add one percent onto the already existing six percent Pennsylvania sales tax. They called it the "Regional Assets District" or RAD tax. Where is this district and what exactly are we paying for?

The geographical boundaries of the Regional Assets District are the same as those of Allegheny County. The original six percent sales tax still goes to the PA Department of Revenue for the state general fund. The one percent RAD tax is divided into three parts. One quarter of it goes to the Allegheny County treasury and one quarter is divided among the county's 130 municipalities. The remaining half is distributed to the county's "regional assets" – libraries, museums, public theatres, historical societies, parks, sports facilities, civic and cultural groups, and other organizations.

From 1994 through 2007, county taxpayers paid nearly \$2 billion into the RAD tax fund. Twenty-five percent, or almost \$500 million, went to the county. Because of this revenue, Allegheny County eliminated the personal property tax and reduced the real estate tax by five mills, or \$300 on a house valued at \$60,000. The county also offered the homestead exclusion of \$15,000 for property owners who have lived in their homes for more than ten years.

The county's 130 municipalities shared another \$500 million. The nine municipalities in the 51 Corridor area received a total of \$24,776,882 in the past 14 years. Those towns may use the money for anything they choose. Every local government has decreased its property tax, and most have reduced or eliminated various other taxes because of the RAD fund.

The remaining half of the money, or nearly \$1 billion, was distributed to 142 local libraries, museums, parks, and civic, cultural, recreational, historical, sports, and other facilities. That's the Carnegie Library and Museums, the zoo, Phipps Conservatory, the aviary, symphony, and dozens of other great local places. Thanks to RAD, now every public library in Allegheny County has computers available for public use and offers basic classes in using computers and the Internet.

The RAD Board of Directors decides how to distribute the money, with input from its staff and from the Citizens Advisory Board. The Board meets monthly and its meetings are open to the public. The law permits the RAD to use up to one percent of its funds for administration – office space, salaries, supplies, equipment, etc. They actually only use slightly more than half of that. The 2008 RAD budget is \$83.4 million. If you work with a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation, your agency can apply for RAD funds. See the Web site for details.

Facilities that receive RAD money display the orange and blue sunburst logo with the statement "RAD Works Here". Wherever you see the sign, your tax dollars are supporting the agency. To thank the taxpayers, RAD holds "RADical Days" each year. During this time, usually about two weeks, admission to RAD sites is free and some offer special performances and family activities, funded by RAD. See the RAD Web site for more information.

For a complete list of how the money was distributed, or for more information, contact

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