

Palmer Township, Northampton County

Stormwater Authority Meeting Minutes

March 20, 2024, 5:00PM, 3 Weller Pl, Lower-Level Municipal Meeting Room

1. Pledge of Allegiance

2. Roll Call

- a. Present: Robert A. Lammi, Robert Blanchfield, Kendall M. Mitchell, George White, David Pyle, Paige Strasko, Scott Kistler, Jamie Paetzell.
- b. Absent: Ann Marie Panella, Craig Swinsburg, and James Farley.
- c. The meeting was called to order at 5:03PM.

3. Approval of Meeting Minutes from February 21, 2024, and March 12, 2024

- a. Lammi made a motion to approve the minutes from February 21, and Mitchell seconded. The motion was passed by unanimous voice vote.
- b. Mitchell made a motion to approve the minutes from March 12, and Lammi seconded. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

4. HRG Utility Presentation

- a. Blanchfield provided summary background information including information about the PTSA members, how the Authority was formed, and previous meetings and communications up to that point.
- b. Pyle, from HRG, gave a presentation on the stormwater utility fee, program needs, costs of maintenance and upcoming projects, as well as answering questions that were submitted by a resident prior to the meeting.

5. PRP Project Presentation

- a. White, from HRG, presented on the Pollutant Reduction Plan (PRP) requirements for Palmer Township, sediment reductions that must be met by 2028, gave a summary of proposed projects to meet requirements, and what funding will be needed to complete the mandated PRP projects.

6. Public Comment, Other communications

- a. Patricia McPherson- 214 Oxford Drive
 - i. McPhearson asked will this fee ever go down? The tiers should be changed so that homeowners cannot be categorized in tier 4.
 - 1. Pyle answered the first question stating that the fee is based on the budget needs of the program.
- b. Lisa Galloway- 2125 Stocker Mill Road
 - i. Galloway discussed how stormwater problems have been growing exponentially since 2004, and asked why engineers were not hired? Large increase, it should be more reasonable, and residents should not be paying for this now. Although the fee is said to be fair and equitable, the fees are excessive and should be more reasonable. Taxpayers shouldn't pay this.
- c. Linda Fischer- 2425 Oakdale Road

- i. Fischer has been a resident of Palmer for 70 years and is retired on a fixed income being charged tier 4 rates, the amount of money residents are contributing is more than we were led to believe. There should also be notifications to property owners when their property will be assessed, and the fee should be more resident friendly.
 - ii. Blanchfield addressed her questions and stated that the property owners are notified before any on-site meetings.
 - d. Mark Kittle- 2673 Northwood Avenue
 - i. Kittle discussed the budget, projected costs for the program and the projects and that the PTSA is over collecting fees for proposed work. Why was the storm system not maintained and problems ignored.
 - ii. White attempted to answer and explain that storm sewers being underground have not received the same attention as other services, and the lack of staff and funding to properly address maintenance in the past.
 - e. Kevin Dotts- 1164 Stones Crossing Road
 - i. Dotts explained that he is charged in tier 4, that the supervisors are responsible for overdevelopment and neglect of the stormwater system. Dotts also asked if there would be an offset to the stormwater fee for the water that runs from the road into residents' yards. Dotts ended by stating that only using impervious area as the metric is ludicrous and he is not going to pay his fee.
 - f. Sal Pugliese- 2225 Hackett Avenue
 - i. Pugliese stated the stormwater fee is a sham, the City of Easton only charges \$8 per property, this fee will never be taken away and it is only another tax that will continue to go up.
 - g. Neil Fehnel- 600 Haymont Drive
 - i. Fehnel discussed requirements for the Township through MS4, and what he has experienced with Bushkill Park building requirements from PA DEP, how DEP provides standards, and they ignore them, that DEP is useless, and someone should be questioning them and their methods.
 - h. Ken Thomas- 12 Kent Lane
 - i. Thomas discussed properties being billed accordingly, asked questions about warehouse fees and credits, and his thoughts on how BMPs for warehouses are going to give them too much credit on their stormwater fee. Thomas also discussed the state of drinking water, droughts in the area and how droughts should reduce the stormwater fee, water permeating the ground and why this is needed now and not 10 years ago.
 - i. John Griesser- 140 Jeremy Court
 - i. Griesser discussed and explained his view of the tier fees, how they were not equitable for the residents, explained that if a resident is on the low

end of a tier, they are paying more per square foot than a resident at the higher end of the tier. Griesser proposed that each property should pay the same and the stormwater fee should be a flat rate, like PA taxes.

- j.** Tina Walton- 209 Brentwood

 - i.** Walton discussed that she has been a resident of Palmer for 18 years, how her and neighbors discussed rates when they were first sent on utility bills, how her deck is pervious, that there are rain barrels on the property, and that the timeline for the bills to be sent was alarming since she thought it was less than 6 months. Walton also asked how much HRG is getting paid, that the total impervious area should be included on all utility bills, roof downspouts should receive a credit.
 - ii.** PTSA members and HRG staff explained that there are presentations available on the Township website and discussing points further with the Board of Supervisors.
- k.** David Smith- 2670 Northampton Street

 - i.** Smith clarified past issues with stormwater management in the Township, that numbers constantly change and stated that he does not believe impervious areas were defined correctly. Smith also stated that there was not enough precise detail for impervious area, tiers should be re-evaluated using calculations, and the fee should be looked at more closely.
- l.** Kevin Kuehner- 3730 Nicholas Street

 - i.** Kuehner discussed the new \$1,000 increase on his utility bill, discussed the retention and storm sewers, how water is collected and dispersed, and that the Township should do fundraisers to collect the money needed to complete projects. Kuehner ended by stating that there will be \$4,000 per year taken from him for the stormwater fee.
- m.** Brian Bird- 1239 Tatamy Road

 - i.** Bird stated that his sewer bill doubled with the stormwater fee, how there are no curbs in front of his house and stormwater flows towards his house, and that the rate is not appropriate for residents or businesses. Bird also discussed the West Chester Court Case that is being appealed currently and that he understands the purpose of the stormwater fee, but not the fee structure.
- n.** Bill Hartin- 1375 Van Buren Road

 - i.** Hartin discussed a scenario he calls the ham and egg breakfast, the confusion about the actual calculation for impervious area, and that the calculation and data need to be looked at. Hartin also discussed how his property receives runoff from the Schoeneck Creek, history of flooding in the area, the LCAP study that the ESC is working on in conjunction with a Penn State student, that residents should not expect flooding to reduce,

and despite the flooding issues and needing funds to address them, the calculations need to be looked at again.

- o.** Jane Walsh- 2141 Gruver Avenue

 - i.** Walsh discussed how she is surrounded by woods, she and her husband have two parcels, how all the stormwater flows to their land, and they take care of it, and the fee prices are too high to afford.
- p.** Matt Gunther- 716 Chestnut Lane

 - i.** Gunther explained that the issues are not unique to Palmer Township, that much of the infrastructure is reaching the end of its designed life, water quality requirements and that there needs to be a solution developed with the Community. Gunther also stated that the fees are too high, especially for first time homebuyers and senior citizens.
- q.** Tammy Liiro- 380 S. Greenwood Avenue

 - i.** Liiro discussed the huge water problem on her property, that her home was built in 1986 with water retention and that the retention creates a river running down Hartley Avenue when it rains, past damages that her property has sustained from flooding, and that she was charged in tier 4. Liiro also stated that she did not agree with decks being considered impervious, that she was charged a large fee for a small business, and her water issues have not been addressed.
- r.** Robert Fehnel- 2049 Stocker Mill Road

 - i.** Fehnel stated that the fees are discriminatory, and that businesses should be considered differently than residents, and sidewalk requirements for homeowners. Fehnel also asked if there will be money back for stormwater.
- s.** Anderson Raub- 1460, 1459, and 1415 Tatamy Road

 - i.** Raub discussed his and his wife's age being over 80 years old, asked how they are supposed to pay the stormwater fee. Raub also discussed that he has three properties in his name and family members' names that total over \$15,000 a year, reiterated how is he supposed to pay it, and finished by stating that something must be done.
- t.** Harry Graack- 1380 Van Buren Road

 - i.** Graack explained that his parcel of land has been in his family for 150 years, he grew up on a farm and that the fee is large for impervious area, and he doesn't believe the engineers know what impervious means. Graack also stated that he submitted an appeal based on incorrect ways to calculate the fee and measure his impervious area. Graack also discussed the cost of stormwater he put into his property before building there to avoid stormwater. Graack then complained that the billing process is dumb, the piss poor administration, still paying a stormwater fee, how

development has caused settlement and the cumulative effects of development and stormwater management. Graack also discussed pollutants from Lower Nazareth including the wastewater treatment plant and cement plant, and how he wants a presentation on what the Township is doing to handle the water that is coming to them from other places, that they should be solving problems not creating them.

ii. Blanchfield discussed and explained the Meadow Avenue projects.

u. Tom Dougherty- 2020 Maywood Street

i. Dougherty discussed his belief that the commercial and residential properties should be separated into different tiers.

v. Tony Rose- 102 Lois Lane

i. Rose explained that the tiers need to be looked at more and stated that he is part of the ESC for the Township and discussed the program for their Earth Day celebration. Rose stated that he would leave fliers at the front of the room for those interested in attending and that he would be doing a presentation on stormwater.

w. Pat McPhearson- 214 Oxford Drive

i. McPhearson had two suggestions for the room: don't pay the stormwater fee, and all properties in the Township should be measured by hand.

x. Noreen Davis- 2805 Eldridge Avenue

i. Davis discussed flooding on Seip Avenue and asked about placing sandbags at the end of their driveway to prevent stormwater running towards the house, and variances with the Zoning Hearing Board.

y. Francesco Curto- 2120 Hillcrest Drive

i. Curto discussed the Authority moving slowly on projects, taking years to complete what they wanted to accomplish, and that the Authority should file an appeal or amendment with the state and discussed residents on fixed incomes. Curto explained his belief that residents should be charged \$9, commercial properties should be in another tier, and farmers should pay nothing.

z. John Beena- 1209 Dunkle Street

i. Beena explained that tiers per 1,000 square feet of impervious area are not paying the same and that the fee could be by 1,000 square feet of impervious area rather than the tier system. Beena also discussed the Chrin Company when they constructed an oversized detention basin, and how nothing from that basin enters the river. Beena also discussed his concern of the warehouses getting the fees, no curbs or sidewalks on the street, the size of the overflow structure at the Chrin basin, rumors online about the fee, and that warehouses should not be given a credit.

7. Reports

a. Solicitor

- i. Stinnett stated that the EIN number was received from the IRS for the Authority to establish their bank account.

b. MS4

- i. Strasko had no MS4 report for this meeting.

8. Committee Reports

a. Engineering

i. Action Items

1. White stated and discussed the submission of the engineering report for the Authority and Township staff, the pending HOP for 25th Street, that Kingwood Street is out for bid, meetings for Bayard Street will begin in April, the survey was concluded on Old Nazareth Road and the swale for the Meadow Avenue project, and the Wedgewood survey was completed.

ii. Capital Improvement Plan

1. Pyle discussed that the capital improvement plan is in the early stages, the 81 problem areas that have already been identified, and that the Authority determined more detail is needed for the problem areas. Pyle and PTSA members also discussed the plan will be for 10 years including prioritization, implementation, scheduling, and funding sources, and that the cost of the project is \$126,900.
2. Lammi stated that it is critical that the Authority knows what they are working with, and Mitchell added that the financial outlook and long-range plan is much needed.
3. Mitchell made a motion to approve the Capital Improvement Plan project assignment and Lammi seconded. The motion and Capital Improvement Plan were passed by unanimous voice vote.
4. Galloway asked clarifying questions and Blanchfield and Pyle explained what the Capital Improvement Plan will be used for.

b. Finance

i. Action Items

1. Strasko stated that the only item Farley asked her to report on in his absence was that the EIN number was established for the Authority.

9. Township staff comments

- a. Blanchfield asked for staff comments, Kistler shared that his crew finished the inlet inspection for the Township and there are 287 inlets that need repairs. Kistler also explained the inspection process stating that the inspections consist of lifting the storm grate, determining how much sediment is in the inlet, as well as the

structural integrity of the inlet. Kistler also stated that from inlet cleaning there have been 80 tons of sediment and debris removed, cleaning was completed last week, and the Public Works Department will wait until the weather is favorable to begin inlet repairs.

- b.** Kistler reported on the street sweeping activities as well, stating that an additional 9 tons of sediment was removed, he hired 2 additional personnel for stormwater work. Blanchfield asked clarifying questions about paying for stormwater work through the Authority funds for Township staff time.
- c.** Godbout also reported that some impervious data through GIS have clear discrepancies that staff are working through, the appeals, minorities in the overall billing system, that most cases won't require a site visit, and that staff are not evaluating property lines or completing surveys for residents.
- d.** Linda Fischer asked how they can make the determination without visiting the property. Township staff explained the GIS data available that they are utilizing.
- e.** Zeke Bellis thanked everyone for their patience.
- f.** Stinnett commented that he has attended hundreds of meetings for stormwater utility fees and the Palmer residents were the best-behaved group that he has experienced yet.
- g.** Noreen Davis asked about the Public Works employees' hours and if they were included in the Township's budget or not. Kistler explained that the 2024 budget planned for reimbursement from the Stormwater Authority.

10. New Business

a. Geotech Services Proposal

- i.** Lammi made a motion to approve the Geotech Services Proposal and Mitchell seconded. The motion and the proposal were passed by unanimous voice vote.
- ii.** Lammi commented that the Geotech is a critical service and discussed the time and materials basis.
- iii.** Mitchell commented that Shawn Casey, the Geotech, has worked with the Township for a long time and has always had a quick response time.
- iv.** White commented that Casey is a Karst geology expert.

b. PTSA Bylaws Approval

- i.** Lammi made a motion to approve the Bylaws and Mitchell seconded the motion. The bylaws were passed unanimously by voice vote.

c. PRP Recommendations Approval

- i.** PTSA members and White discussed the PRP summary and projects that need to be completed to meet the MS4 requirements. PTSA members agreed and accepted the recommendations.

11. For the Good of the Order

- a. There was nothing additional for the good of the order.

12. Next meeting: April 17, 2024

13. Adjournment

- a. Mitchell made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Lammi seconded. The motion was passed unanimously by voice vote and the meeting adjourned at 8:04PM.