

Palmer Township, Northampton County

Environmental Steering Committee Meeting Minutes

February 22, 2023, Municipal Building Lower-Level Meeting Room

1. Roll Call

- a. Present: Bill Ruch, Karen Adams, Tom Grube, Marc Singley, Zane Rice, Paige Strasko.
- b. Absent: Tom Dittmar, Bill Hartin, and Michael Brett.
- c. The meeting was called to order at 6:37PM.

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes from January 25, 2023

- a. Ruch asked to make an amendment to the October 26, 2022, meeting minutes to note that Diane Halasz gave her resignation prior to the October meeting and should not have been marked absent. Ruch also asked Strasko if Sciorra had sent a letter of resignation prior to October and Strasko clarified that Sciorra only stated that she would not be looking to renew her term at the end of 2022. Grube made a motion to make an addendum to the October 26, 2022, minutes. Adams seconded the motion, and the addendum was passed by unanimous voice vote. Adams then made a motion to approve the minutes from the January 25, 2023, meeting. Rice seconded the motion and the January minutes passed with unanimous voice vote.

3. Old Business

a. Earth Day Plans

i. Storm drain labeling HRG

- 1. Ruch explained that he sent an email to the committee following the January meeting with bullets of ideas for Earth Day events. Ruch then explained his ideas for the following agenda items. For storm drain labeling, Ruch explained to the committee that HRG was recently hired by the Township for stormwater. The ESC can help the Township with MS4 requirements by educating residents during Earth Day and relabeling storm drains with volunteers. Ruch also discussed the inventory of storm drains that Strasko completed in 2022 and that the decals needed were in hand, the committee can educate volunteers on the MS4 program. Ruch mentioned that decals need to be applied at a certain temperature for the glue to dry properly, and the committee can use Strasko's list as reference for which drains need to be labeled.

ii. Solar panels

- 1. Ruch then discussed how he spoke with solar panel solicitors from Tatamy borough, and his idea for the ESC to bring representatives or educational information for Palmer residents on solar panels, the current technology, and how they can benefit homeowners and the environment.

iii. Nature Trail

1. Ruch stated he was in contact with members from the Jacobsburg Environmental Education Center and that they would be willing to have a representative walk through our bike trails with residents to educate them about the environment, erosion, and various native plants in the area. Ruch stated the committee could get more information from them on what that educational program would look like. Strasko stated that Kathy Altman was present from the Bushkill Stream Conservancy (BSC), and that Altman had reached out over Facebook and offered support from the BSC for an Earth Day event. Strasko described that she and Altman had discussed BSC educating residents on the stream restoration project they completed on the Bushkill, as well as taking residents on a nature walk on the bike trail to educate on native plants and the surrounding environment. Ruch explained what their general plans for the day are to Altman including timed events so that residents and volunteers could attend events that they are interested in, in different locations. The committee discussed with Altman how the events of the day would progress.

iv. Composting/yard waste

1. Ruch mentioned he wanted to ask Dittmar if he would be interested in doing an educational presentation about composting and yard waste for Earth Day but Dittmar was not present to discuss.

v. Shade Tree Commission-planting trees?

1. Ruch described that he thought it would be a good opportunity for the ESC to work with the Shade Tree Commission (STC) to either plant a tree, learn more about what they are planning in the Township, or even just to give STC members a table to talk with residents about tree work happening in the Township. Ruch also described the tree work in his neighborhood of Mill Race, how the STC and Township came in and removed a large number of dead street trees and the discussion he hears from neighbors about replanting. Ruch pressed the committee that they needed to focus on plans for the event because it was quickly approaching and discussed the possibility of having tables at the Municipal Building for committees and programs and expanding around the Township.

vi. Native plantings-behind Municipal Building

1. Ruch explained that he and Strasko discussed the possibility of native plantings around the swale behind the municipal building to help reduce runoff that travels downhill towards the Palmer Mall.
2. Ruch then opened the discussion to other members and the public. Grube stated he liked the idea of plantings behind the Municipal

Building, and he brought up having a representative from Waste Management to present at the Community Center or the library on recycling practices and where recyclables go from the can. Ruch described his experience with the importance of educating residents on what is acceptable in curbside garbage and recycling pick-up. Adams asked how does the committee organize these events with different locations, if there were enough people to man stations at the various locations, and how do they publicize this information? Adams described the ESC Facebook page but was unsure of other advertisement methods for the Township for the event list, then also asked if the committee could have event sign ups. Strasko clarified what type of sign-up Adams was thinking of, and then described the other advertisement methods they could use. Strasko and committee members discussed how they missed the deadline for the newsletter already and how to schedule the various events discussed. Ruch discussed specifics for events with Altman, what the BSC could do at Mill Race Park, and how timing would work for different events. Altman described BSC projects in the area, models that the BSC has for education, demonstrations that could be done, and data from water quality monitoring the BSC performs.

3. Committee members discussed space, tables, and pavilions at Mill Race Park, John Marks made a comment about making sure bathrooms were open for the day of the event and Strasko stated she would also find out if they needed to reserve the pavilion. Ruch and Altman discussed manpower needed for BSC programs, and the timing needed for each. Ruch stated that it would make more sense to work around others coming to the event for their timing so the ESC can schedule event time slots where others are available.
4. Ruch was unsure if Dittmar would be able to present on composting and asked if there were others that could do an educational presentation for Earth Day. Strasko suggested perhaps someone from Jacobsburg Environmental Center could, or if someone from Waste Management would be able to and stated she would discuss with her coworker Zach Trexler who was the new Waste Management contact with the Township. Grube stated he would volunteer to reach out to Waste Management but was unsure of who to contact. Grube, Ruch and Adams discussed the benefits of different presentation forms and thought it would be better to do a visual presentation of what goes in the garbage and what can be recycled, education of food waste, and a possible tour of the recycling facility. Grube suggested both types of presentations, and

Singley described having informational material at tables as well to educate on what can be recycled.

5. Ruch stated the committee needed to contact the organizations mentioned to see who would be available to present. Ruch then asked Altman to reach out after their Monday night meeting to confirm the BSC's participation in Earth Day and the ESC will make them a priority. Ruch then went through the events on the agenda to make sure everyone would be contacted. Adams asked if there was an alternative to having solar panel businesses at the event and Marks made a suggestion of contacting Lisa Boscola's office for a state or EPA representative for solar panel information because her office has various grants involving solar panels.
6. Adams asked about native plantings at the Municipal Building, she and Strasko discussed possibilities of planting a few plants near the swale area to retain stormwater, what that might entail and if volunteers would be able to do a planting. Committee members and Altman discussed flooding problems in Palmer and surrounding areas and solutions other groups have taken. Adams discussed with Altman how different topics involving native plant education can be tied into the programs BSC is doing and who could discuss native plants. Altman suggested Penn State Extension for a master gardener and as a source of information. Committee members discussed expanding the native plant program to include general gardening education and yard care. Halasz brought up that the previous ESC board had discussed projects in the Weller Tract, the land behind the Municipal Building, but that they did not do anything there because the land was donated under certain conditions. Halasz, Altman, Marks, and committee members discussed plantings and invasive plant removal at Mill Race, other planting sites, obtaining plants, making programs impactful for residents to use at home, and keeping programs simple. Ruch highlighted what are important points for the ESC to focus on and using time wisely to keep the Earth Day event on track. Strasko stated she would reach out to Penn State Extension to find out if an educator or master gardener was available. Ruch also mentioned that he was in contact with a woman from WMFZ, the news channel to also advertise for the event and stressed again events should be kept simple this year. Strasko and committee members discussed storm drain labeling logistics, timing for events, handouts for residents such as LED lightbulbs, and overall events or representatives that will be available to attend the Earth Day event. Committee members assigned tasks of who to contact about attending Earth Day, and making sure that they ask about

educational materials that the committee can have at information tables.

b. We Conserve PA letter

- i. Ruch asked that this item be tabled until the next meeting to focus on Earth Day event discussion.

c. Standard Operating Procedure

- i. Ruch described contact with the Township Solicitor and the need to switch from Bylaws to a standard operating procedure since the ESC is not an advisory committee and authority lies with the Board of Supervisors. Ruch also explained that a set of operating procedures would give the ESC the structure they need that was discussed previously. Adams stated her item for an operating procedure that should be added is the importance of educating and engaging residents through committee actions. Ruch stated once Earth Day is over, the committee can switch focus back to the standard operating procedure.

4. New Business

- a. Adams brought up the need for a climate action plan from the January meeting and shared her research of the city's climate action plans in the area and the fact that they were all developed with the Nurture Nature Center and a consultant. Adams asked if the Township would follow the same process to be in line with the other climate action plans in the area. Ruch asked about the county climate action plan, and Adams stated none of the counties she searched had a plan in place, only local cities. Strasko stated she found a few different plans from DCNR and PennDOT, and committee members discussed various climate action plans, keeping plans consistent, funding to start a plan, templates to use, organizations to work with, and requirements for cities and townships in a climate action plan.
- b. ESC decided to keep climate action plan on the agenda for future meetings and stated they will need to work with Brett and other organizations to complete a plan.
- c. There were no other new business items.

5. Reports

a. Board of Supervisors

- i. No news other than Earth Day event and climate action plan.

b. MS4

i. Storm drain labeling

- 1. Storm drain labeling was already discussed with Earth Day events.

ii. Adopt a Storm Drain

- 1. Strasko discussed her conversation with a representative from the adopt a drain program she found in her search previously and explained the organization provides a service that is an annual fee. Strasko also explained some of the initial costs related to mapping set up, and the services they provide through the program. Strasko also stated that the program was designed to be MS4 compliant

and that the program creates and sends an end of year report to include in the Township's annual MS4 report. Committee members asked questions about costs, how materials are distributed, reporting practices, and Strasko explained that their program is a turn-key operation and that everything material wise is ready to go. Ruch asked what the benefit to the MS4 program is and Strasko explained that keeping track of how much waste and debris is removed from drains can show PA DEP that the Township is working to monitor water quality, and educating residents about the importance of keeping storm drains clean. Ruch suggested taking this idea to the Stormwater Advisory Committee for consideration.

2. Halasz suggested bringing the adopt a drain program to residents on Earth Day during drain relabeling and Strasko discussed that the committee had mentioned the same idea at the previous meeting. Ruch stated Strasko will most likely need an informational table at the Earth Day event for MS4 education.

- c. Earth Day Subcommittee

- i. Ruch stated since everyone is already focused on Earth Day, there was no need for the subcommittee to report.

6. Public Comment

- a. Ruch opened the floor for public comment. Halasz made the comment that the ESC already has bylaws in place that were approved by the previous Township Manager and written by the previous committee members and unless the current committee changes them in some way, they remain in place. Halasz also discussed that the previous committee had discussed becoming an EAC in the future and that if they did, the bylaws would already be in place.
- b. Halasz also brought up the fact that there has not been a Household Hazardous Waste event in a few years and that may be an item that the ESC should put on the agenda. Strasko stated that she has been looking for a hazardous waste event from the county and that they had an event but there was a sign up and registration required so only a certain number of people could attend. Marks suggested for Strasko contact the county to open the event to more people due to the amount of money the county collects as a tipping fee. Committee members discussed the need for a hazardous waste event, how events have been run since COVID, and steps that would need to be taken for a public event to be held again. Ruch stated the ESC can look at household hazardous waste events for future meetings. Marks suggested working with surrounding Townships to make it an urgent matter for the county.

7. For the Good of the Order

- a. Strasko informed the committee that the code officers sent a violation to the land owners from the Facebook video she shared at the January meeting.

- b.** Strasko also invited the ESC members to the Arbor Day event at the Community Center and explained that they would be planting trees at the Community Center.
 - c.** Lastly, Strasko told the committee she was given direction to obtain a grant for the Township to switch their fleet vehicles to electric and has future plans to install charging stations for the public at the Municipal Building. Adams, Ruch and Strasko discussed some of the grant restrictions, amounts, and regulations for grants and rebate programs.
- 8.** Next meeting: March 22, 2023
- 9.** Adjournment
 - a.** Ruch expressed his thanks to the committee members. Rice made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Grube seconded the motion, and it was approved by unanimous voice vote. The meeting was adjourned at 8:22PM.