

Palmer Township, Northampton County

Environmental Steering Committee Meeting Minutes

January 25, 2023, 6:30PM, Municipal Building Lower Level

1. Roll Call

- a.** The meeting was called to order at 6:31PM.
- b.** Present: Bill Ruch, Karen Adams, Marc Singley, Tom Dittmar, Zane Rice, Bill Hartin came in after the meeting was called to order at 6:33PM. Member of the public and Earth Stewards of Palmer, John Marks, was present.
- c.** Absent: Tom Grube and Michael Brett.

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes from October 26, 2022

- a.** Ruch called for a motion to approve the minutes from October. Dittmar made a motion to pass the minutes, Rice seconded, and the minutes were approved by unanimous voice vote.

3. Reorganization- call for nominations

a. Chairman

- i.** Ruch introduced the new committee members to the goals that the committee set before the end of 2022 and brought everyone up to speed on what they wanted to accomplish for 2023. Ruch left nominations up to the committee and Dittmar made the motion to keep Ruch as Chairman. Rice seconded the motion, as Hartin joined the meeting. Ruch explained to Hartin why nominations were happening. He asked the committee to vote on himself as chairman and the motion passed unanimously.

b. Vice Chairman

- i.** Dittmar also made a motion to keep Tom Grube as Vice Chairman, which Rice seconded. The motion for Grube as Vice Chairman passed with a unanimous voice vote.

4. Updated Bylaws

- a.** Ruch started off by going back to the meeting minutes from October and reviewing how the lawnmower raffle at the tree lighting event went in December. Strasko reported on how the event went since most of the committee members were not in attendance. Strasko also updated the committee that the lawn mower was picked up at the municipal building prior to the start of 2023 and the couple that won were excited to use the electric lawnmower in the spring. Adams, Ruch and Strasko discussed specifics from the event. Adams also shared some ideas to improve future raffles and suggestions to engage the community. Dittmar and Ruch informed Adams of past events and methods of the committee, as well as the benefit of working with the new liaison, Michael Brett, moving forward.
- b.** Ruch steered back into discussing agenda items and allowed Strasko to inform the committee on updates with the bylaws. Strasko explained that she checked with Bob Williams to determine if there were any legalities of the bylaws that needed to be changed and to be safe they were under review by the Township solicitor.

Strasko explained some of the items in the bylaws were not correct, such as changing meeting dates and determining if the meetings would be held over Zoom. Hartin asked if there was a time frame that the bylaws would be reviewed by, and Strasko expects within a few weeks. Strasko explained all the changes that have been made in the Township, including the new solicitor which has a team of people, rather than one person reviewing all documents. Hartin asked some clarifying questions and discussed changes with Strasko. John Marks described the meeting between the Township staff and the Earth Stewards of Palmer and described the turn-around in the township compared to last year.

5. Earth Day Plans

- a. Ruch mentioned that Brett stated he would like the ESC to hold an impactful community event for Earth Day. The committee discussed what would constitute an “impactful” Earth Day event. Ruch asked the entire committee to brainstorm Earth Day event plans to have ready for February’s meeting. Ruch also brought up that ESC has a \$2,500 budget. Adams asked questions about what the turn out for past events has been like, and the committee discussed past events and the importance of advertising. Ruch finished the topic by asking committee members to send event ideas to him before the meeting in February.

6. Facebook/email

- a. Ruch explained to new members that a previous member had set up a Gmail account for the committee but has since deleted the account. Ruch stated if there was any correspondence that occurred between the committee members and the public that Strasko’s Township email would be used, or she should be copied on all communications.
- b. Ruch also informed new committee members about the Facebook page and Strasko updated everyone that she was now the administrator for the page. Strasko also updated members on a resident’s post to the page of a storm drain area that needed to be cleaned up. The committee members discussed the post at length and ultimately Hartin and Rice said they would meet the next day to see the site for themselves. Committee members discussed how litter is a widespread issue throughout the Township and what jurisdiction the area would be since the site from the resident’s post was along a state road. Members asked if there would be any repercussions if the ESC went and cleaned up the area themselves and discussed different ways to solve the litter problem. John Marks suggested that the committee contact PennDOT to pick up any trash that is collected. Adams asked if the committee wants to make litter one of the larger focuses on the committee, and she and Ruch discussed steps the committee could take for making clean ups a bigger part of the goals to accomplish this year. Ruch also discussed committee members sharing any informational articles that they come across to Strasko to have them posted on Facebook and try to start educating the residents that way.

7. EAC We Conserve PA Letter

- a. Ruch asked Strasko to discuss the information that was shared with the committee members via email. Strasko described that the committee received mail at the municipal building from an organization that is an EAC network, and the letter was asking them to pay a membership fee to join the network. Strasko also explained that through her research, much of the information that they would share was already free on their website and it seemed as though the membership fee was to put other committees in the same network. Strasko stated she was not sure what the money was used for.
- b. Adams asked if Strasko spoke to the people running the We Conserve PA organization, but she had not. Dittmar explained the difference between ESC and EAC and mentioned that the same information that they would probably share is already free through another organization called PROP (Pennsylvania Recycling Organization). Hartin suggested doing research on the organization first before spending any money on joining a network.
- c. Ruch asked Dittmar to send him the PROP email. Rice also suggested contacting other groups that are already a part of We Conserve PA to see what type of materials the group sends out to the EACs that are members. Hartin and Adams volunteered to look through the We Conserve PA website and see if it was a resource worth paying for. Ruch also mentioned the quarterly newsletter that can be utilized for sharing information with the residents.

8. Reports

a. Board of Supervisors

- i. Ruch shared that Brett described his vision for the ESC is holding an impactful Earth Day event for the community. Ruch also stated that Brett wants the committee to come up with a climate action plan and instructed the committee members to research some other climate action plans from surrounding cities and municipalities. John Marks suggested checking if Lower Saucon Township had a climate action plan. Adams wants to put a focus on engaging the community and developing programs or outreach that interacts with a large part of the community. Committee members discussed how to reduce the amount of waste that the Township contributes to the landfills. Ruch asked that members bring examples to the next meeting to discuss developing a climate action plan for Palmer Township.

b. MS4

i. Storm Drain Labeling Updates

- 1. Strasko told the committee that the decals the Township ordered last year have been delivered, and now the committee needs to work on getting maps ready and volunteers together to schedule a weekend when the weather is nicer. Ruch discussed how the children from his church organization have been asking for volunteer hour opportunities and that they should have enough help when the weather is nice to get the drain labeling done

quickly. John Marks suggested the committee should include the storm drain labeling project with volunteers' part of the Earth Day event, while also having information sessions at the municipal building or another centralized location, and telling the local news channel about the community's efforts.

2. Adams asked if there were any educational materials explaining why residents should care about stormwater and what goes down the storm drain. Strasko explained that she made a brochure for Palmer Days and writes articles for the Township newsletter every quarter for the MS4 program as well. Committee members discussed the problems with water quality and water pollution. Ruch stated it would probably be a good idea to include the drain labeling with Earth Day plans.

ii. Adopt a Storm Drain

1. Strasko updated the new members about the website she found called adopt a storm drain where cities or municipalities could join from an administrative level, residents could sign up for a personal account and keep track of how much debris is removed from their storm drain, or whichever storm drain they decide to adopt. Strasko also mentioned safety that is discussed on the website to keep residents safe, how it would be great for the MS4 program to keep track of how much is removed from the watershed and show the residents that we do care, and we want to keep track of the clean-up we do.
2. Adams discussed the logistics of residents cleaning out inside the storm drain with other committee members, and Strasko reiterated that residents would be cleaning only the surface. Ruch described that if a drain was full that the resident could contact Strasko to have the inside of the storm drain cleaned. Adams stated she would like to help Strasko with any storm drain work that needed to be done. Strasko stated she needed to work with Brett to determine if the Township would sign up for the program that she found or if they would make their own version of a similar program. Hartin asked Strasko to share the adopt a storm drain website with him. Adams and committee members discussed the logistics of the storm drain program and the tracking that would need to be implemented and advertisement for residents, etc.

c. Earth Day Subcommittee

- i. Ruch stated that Earth Day was already discussed and moved to the next line item.

9. For the Good of the Order

- a. Ruch explained what the good of the order is for new members and went down the line for members to share if they had anything. Hartin stated that along with

reviewing the bylaws, he would like to see the committee work on a long-range plan for overall goals that the committee wants to accomplish. He also discussed that many of the agenda items are reactive, where he would like to be more proactive and using the long-term plan as a sounding board for agenda items. Hartin also discussed the impact of development on the environment. Hartin asked Strasko and Ruch if Brett expanded on any of the points that he shared to give more direction in what he wanted to see from the committee. Ruch stated there was only an email response since Brett could not make it to the meeting tonight. Ruch agreed with Hartin on the long-term plan for the year and years in the future and the importance of having a long-term plan.

- b. Ruch also brought up again that the ESC needs to have more insight into new developments coming in front of the board and the committee needs to have more say over environmental issues in new developments throughout the Township. Ruch promised engagement for the committee on this front this year. Adams also mentioned the two different types of planning that are required of the committee and having a touchstone to go back to with a long-term plan. Ruch also mentioned that he is more of a checklist person where he wants to show the residents and the board that they are accomplishing tasks. Ruch stated that the committee should focus their energy on a great Earth Day event for the residents and get tasks finished for that event. Dittmar asked about updates on the new construction for the recycling center and Strasko stated she can ask coworkers to find out what the progress is on construction.
- c. Strasko informed the committee that herself and Kent Baird sent in an application to be considered for a Tree City designation through the Arbor Day Foundation. Strasko also stated that she has not heard back from the Arbor Day Foundation yet, but it would also be a good program to partner with the Shade Tree Commission and get the ESC name out there to remind residents about the environment overall. John Marks asked when Arbor Day is; April 28th, and Dittmar asked Strasko to find out how much funding is available through TreeVitalize for the Township since he worked with them in the past. Adams brought up how this goes into the greater environmental plan that the committee was discussing. Adams asked if the committee could think of Arbor Day with a mindset of an extended Earth Day.
- d. Hartin also brought up that now is the time for the committee to plan what they want to accomplish, figure out a strategy for the future and lay out their resources. Marks also suggested the committee should make a three (3) year plan together for what they want to accomplish. Ruch thanked everyone for their participation.

10. Next Meeting: February 22, 2023

11. Adjournment

- a. Bill Hartin made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Marc Singley seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous vote and the meeting was adjourned at 8:24PM.