

Palmer Township, Northampton County

Stormwater Authority Workshop Meeting Minutes

November 12, 2024, 2PM, Upper-Level Conference Room, 3 Weller Place

1. Roll Call

- a.** Present: Robert A. Lammi, Robert Blanchfield, Kendall M. Mitchell, Matthew Gunther, David Pyle, George White, Ryan Cummings, Lee Stinnett, Scott Kistler, and Paige Strasko.
- b.** Russell Grant from HRG attended the meeting virtually.
- c.** Absent: Craig Swinsburg, Philip Godbout, and James Farley.
- d.** The meeting started at 2:00PM.

2. Discussion Items

a. HRG Project Updates

i. Storm Sewer Inventory Presentation

- 1.** White summarized that he wanted to show the board members what was involved with the storm water inlet inventory and assessment and that a proposal would be submitted the same week for the board's consideration, and also introduced Russell Grant from HRG who specializes in GIS.
- 2.** Grant gave a brief presentation explaining the process for storm water inlet inventory mapping and condition assessments including the equipment used, how data is collected, capability of the software used for data collection and management, how the information is used and presented, and map summaries and capabilities after data collection.
- 3.** White explained how the data is used for asset planning and replacement and how to maximize cost efficiency in stormwater system replacement overtime. White also discussed the importance of the inventory and mapping for spill response during emergencies. White also discussed the use of the inventory in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), stormwater modeling, and the Public Works Departments' (PW) use for maintenance tracking purposes, that the map layer is a living document that is constantly updated and described the speed and methodology of inlet assessments.
- 4.** Blanchfield asked clarifying questions regarding Kistler's access to the inventory data. Blanchfield and Kistler briefly discussed PW's current mapping with the sanitary sewer system and frequent use of map layers. Blanchfield, Gunther, White and Kistler also discussed the timeline for inventory completion, if there are certain

priorities for assessment, how the Township would be separated to complete the inventory methodically, what can be included on the map layer on GIS, what is included in the HRG proposal, and clarification on next steps.

ii. Kingwood Street Construction

1. Blanchfield gave a summary of recent updates including the non-conformance letter that was issued, and a field meeting that occurred prior to the workshop meeting. Blanchfield stated that Kobalt acknowledged defects in the field, and they agreed to proceed with curb replacement. Kistler added that he came away from the meeting feeling positive.

iii. 25th Street Update

1. White stated that they completed a level B subsurface utility exploration (SUE) for 25th Street, found additional utilities and updated the project design based on findings from the SUE and construction feasibility, and that HRG is working on revising the construction easements needed. Strasko commented that there are two easements signed and notarized from residents, there is only one outstanding easement at this time.
2. PTSA members asked clarifying questions regarding updates from PennDOT and cost of changes to project design. White stated there are no further updates from PennDOT, and that HRG is absorbing the cost of redesign as well as change orders.

iv. Old Nazareth Road Update- Engineering Progress

1. White summarized that the PENNVEST loan was authorized, and the upcoming schedule of work and loan discussions was included in the Engineer's Report as a general outline for the next few months. White also stated that they are anticipating bidding the project in January, opening bids in February for review during the February workshop meeting, recommending a bid award at the February meeting, and that one of the project requirements will be for the contractor to be PennDOT certified to only receive qualified bidders.
2. PTSA members, Pyle and White discussed the PENNVEST settlement process and timeline, that next steps are dependent on the settlement meetings and the first PENNVEST meeting is scheduled for December 3rd, 2024. Pyle summarized that PENNVEST will be looking for a schedule like what was included in the November Engineer's Report.

3. Kistler asked if it would be possible to update the scope of the project to include a low-lying area adjacent to Old Nazareth Road on Westgate Avenue. White explained that the project scope was one of the reasons to have a field meeting. White and Pyle also discussed what PENNVEST funding will cover for the project, that there will need to be a separate line item for full paving of the road. Kistler commented and explained that the road was completely redone about three years ago, and PTSA members also discussed plans of relocating sanitary sewer in the street, that PENNVEST covers moving the sanitary sewer, additional costs for curb to curb paving, a site meeting on November 18th, 2024, size of piping, possible staging areas for materials, that there will be no impact to the water line, but there will be an impact to other utility services residents must be notified about.

v. Meadow Avenue Drainage Swale- Agreement Letter

1. White and Pyle discussed the FEMA BRIC grant briefly and updated the group that the Emergency Management plan was adopted by Northampton County in September 2024, other remaining steps for municipalities to apply for funding, and that the process takes time.
2. White and Stinnett also discussed that the agreement for the drainage swale improvements will be submitted to the Northampton County Conservation District shortly and that the agreement letter has been signed, sent and executed, and HRG will be moving forward with the property owner to execute permit documents. Blanchfield summarized that the PTSA agreed to pay \$2,500 for administrative services and an additional \$150 per hour for work beyond what the property owner anticipated.

vi. Schoeneck Creek Update

1. White stated that HRG will complete the bank pinning prior to Thanksgiving, will add monitors before the cold weather starts, and an HRG staff member will perform weekly monitoring at first to understand how often the pins should be checked for erosion.
2. Blanchfield commented that when he was in the area recently, the Schoeneck Creek was completely dry.

vii. Wedgewood Update

1. Cummings stated that the preliminary designs are completed, the level B SUE is completed, and they are scheduling level A SUE with the third-party contractor for some time in December.

2. Blanchfield and Cummings briefly discussed notifications for test pits and photo opportunities to update residents on the project.

viii. Hobson Street Detention Basin Update

1. Cummings summarized that they are working on finalizing three concepts for the basin, hopefully they will be ready to discuss in December or January, that HRG would recommend the design that provides the most sediment reduction for the highest credit, that flow monitoring is currently ongoing, and the monitoring can be extended if necessary.
2. Gunther asked clarifying questions about Pollutant Reduction Plan (PRP) projects and Cummings explained that there is no overlap in watersheds for sediment reduction requirements.

b. Bethlehem Township Intermunicipal Agreement

- i. White summarized that after assessing the drainage on Bayard Street, HRG determined that it was a larger regional drainage issue where stormwater flows from Palmer into Bethlehem, and that there are multiple drainage issues. Stinnett explained that his office obtained and used a similar agreement from Bethlehem Township, and they are working on finalizing the agreement and getting feedback from both parties.
- ii. Blanchfield asked if the agreement covers everything if a grant is received for the project area. Stinnett explained that yes it does cover funding sources, that it is meant to cover future relationships that may develop with PTSA and Bethlehem Township, what he has seen done in other municipalities regarding task orders for different projects, and that DEP has approved the same type of methodology for regional partnerships. Stinnett, White, and Blanchfield briefly discussed that Bethlehem Township has been agreeable so far in the process, that this could be a very large project, and that there are other projects along the Township line this agreement could help navigate in the future.

c. 2024 Audit Cost

- i. Blanchfield asked Strasko if she had any update from Farley regarding cost for the 2024 audit. Strasko stated that Farley explained to her that the auditors cannot present an exact cost until they see what type of files need to be reviewed, and what type of accounting the Authority has. Strasko also stated that Farley is confident that the cost will be no more than \$5,000. Strasko also reminded PTSA members that they asked Farley to schedule the auditors to attend the December workshop meeting to meet and ask any clarifying questions.

d. Preliminary 2025 Budget Discussion

- i. Lammi gave a summary of past budget meetings with Township staff, HRG and PTSA board members. Lammi also explained that the draft annual budget he prepared totaled roughly \$4.8 million, that he included funding by the Authority for three major projects next year, discussed how debt service will change the budget in future years, and differences between short- and long-term loans and goals. Lammi also discussed timing of budget approval in November, presenting the budget to the Board of Supervisors in December, and that the budget HRG put together was a five-year plan with projects to work on, that the group established the committee with himself and Swinsburg to review the five-year plan, and that he and Swinsburg need the CIP to prioritize projects and refine their list.

e. Township Staff Reports/Comments

i. Finance

- 1. Strasko and Blanchfield stated that they have heard nothing additional from Farley other than approval of the monthly invoices at the November meeting.

ii. Public Works

- 1. Kistler had nothing additional.

iii. Public Services

- 1. Strasko stated that Godbout would be out for a period for family medical reasons and asked that she be copied on all emails regarding project updates, meetings and site visits so that all staff members are on the same page regarding stormwater projects.

3. Public Comment

a. Frank Pullo- 144 Glenmoor Circle

- i. Pullo stated that he is the treasurer for the Condominium Association (COA) in the Glenmoor community and that the board attended today to ask for the Authority's consideration of being exempt from the stormwater fee. Pullo explained that the Glenmoor community has owned and operated their own stormwater system for many years, the Township has never assisted them with maintenance or repairs to their private basin, that their system takes on water from Corriere Road, and they fix issues on their own. Pullo also explained how the COA and homeowners have made environmentally friendly decisions including not fertilizing the stormwater basin, and that they are switching to brine instead of road salt for their roads this winter. Pullo also stated the definition of a fee, that the residents in Glenmoor do not receive a service for stormwater, that they do not contribute anything to the Township system, summarized past

conversations with DEP representatives, that they are asking for a fair review of their unique situation, and they just want to be left alone. Gunther asked clarifying questions regarding where their stormwater outfall flows to.

ii. Ralph Laubach- 91 Glenmoor Circle

1. Laubach, also on the Glenmoor COA board, discussed the field behind the adjacent Tuskes development and that the basin discharge for Glenmoor is approximately 500 yards before it would reach the Schoeneck Creek, but he has never witnessed any overflow leave the stormwater basin in 20 years of living in Glenmoor. Laubach reiterated that they are looking for a fair assessment.

iii. Linda Pasco- 11 Canterbury Lane

1. Pasco, another member of the board described that individual homeowners pay tier 2, the clubhouse was assessed at tier 4, gave a summary of past meetings with PTSA members and Township staff and consultants, and that the development is still paying money when the Township is not doing maintenance on the system. Pasco asked questions regarding who sets the fee rates and if they need to go to the Board of Supervisors for relief.
2. Blanchfield clarified that they are separate entities and the PTSA alone is the decision-making body for stormwater fees and management. Glenmoor COA members were unsure of the Township's awareness of their situation and wanted to meet again to discuss a fair assessment.

iv. Maria Liccardi- 606 Kingwood Street

1. Liccardi explained and summarized the Kingwood Street project from the resident's perspective including lack of communication from the contractor and Authority, that the project has been ongoing for five months when it was supposed to be completed in the summer months, that the process was not transparent, asked why there has not been communication with the residents on the street, that the road should not be paved with the condition it is in, there should be a meeting with residents at a reasonable time because people work during the day, described issues with gas lines, mailboxes being moved, that there was no Township oversight and asked how issues have been allowed to go on for this long.
2. Blanchfield responded that they are required to award the project to the lowest qualified bidder, that the contractor on the surface

was a qualified bidder, their work was not up to Township standards, summarized issues on site including rock excavation, that part of the agreement with the contractor was for them to communicate updates to residents, and that there are many items for this first project that have been lessons learned for the Authority.

3. Blanchfield and Liccardi discussed timeline for project completion, who will be working on repaving, how changes will be communicated with residents moving forward including a letter and social media communications, PTSA owning future projects, clarification of sewer cleanout pipes, telephone pole issues and process for repair, and proximity of catch basins to existing telephone poles.

v. Josephine Galloway- 2125 Stocker Mill Road

1. Galloway summarized that she shared fee comparisons for the area previously and that Palmer Township's fee is high compared to others. Galloway also stated that she attended the workshop because there is more detailed discussion but had not heard discussion of rate changes for the stormwater fee, and summarized her questions of why it was determined as a fee and not a tax since residents do not have a choice to pay, why there haven't been changes to the tiers or budget updates, and explained what she was okay with paying in terms of fees versus taxes.
2. Blanchfield briefly discussed that a fee and a tax both go to the greater good, that it was more inclusive to have it assessed as a fee so that all property types were paying the same way, rather than some properties being exempt or having a reduced stormwater payment if it was assessed as a tax.
3. Stinnett explained that many different factors determine a fee versus a tax, explained the fee structure, the regulatory aspect and project aspect of the fee, that a large percentage of the budget was determined for MS4 requirements. Pyle, Lammi and Stinnett discussed the service fee side of stormwater, that it is difficult to compare to other communities because each municipality has a different method and a different cost for being compliant with the MS4 program. Residents asked clarifying questions, discussed stormwater maintenance issues, and that if homeowners paid for stormwater through taxes, they would be paying 40-90 percent more than what they are now.

4. Galloway asked if there was a responsibility of the PTSA to do research to determine what residents can reasonably afford?
Stinnett explained that the MS4 permit is the first federal permit that has conditions within the permit for the permittee to ensure that there is adequate funding for program compliance without any other assistance or funding source detailed. Stinnett also discussed nuances of the program, and that other states are upset with Pennsylvania for not making more progress in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.
5. Galloway also discussed that residents are being double hit due to the school taxes being raised to pay for stormwater fees in the area. Pyle provided an explanation, and he and residents discussed tax breaks that warehouses receive. Another resident asked what would happen if the Township started the stormwater fees without forming the Authority, and Stinnett explained how some Townships cannot raise taxes to adequately cover funding that is needed for stormwater programs. Stinnett and residents also discussed where income is coming from, other state legislature regarding stormwater, the court case in West Chester that is still being discussed by the courts.

vi. Robert Fehnel- 2049 Stocker Mill Road

1. Fehnel commented on the timing for tax breaks for the warehouses in the north end and discussed his idea of looking at commercial and residential properties differently. Stinnett explained the trend of moving toward tier systems to make the fee more equitable for all properties. Stinnett and Fehnel also discussed why it is not just a flat rate based on square footage.

vii. Galloway asked if there were any plans to change the tier system and PTSA members said no.

4. Adjournment

- a. The meeting adjourned at 3:56PM.