

**Palmer Township, Northampton County**

**Stormwater Authority Meeting Minutes**

**April 17, 2024, 5:00PM, 3 Weller Pl, Lower-Level Municipal Meeting Room**

**1. Pledge of Allegiance**

**2. Roll call**

- a. Present: Robert Blanchfield, Kendall M. Mitchell, Craig Swinsburg, Ann Marie Panella, Luke Gibson, Ryan Cummings, Bruce Hulshizer, George White, James Farley, Philip Godbout, and Paige Strasko.
- b. Absent: Robert A. Lammi.
- c. The meeting was called to order at 5:01PM.

**3. Approval of Meeting Minutes from March 20, 2024, and April 9, 2024**

- a. Mitchell made a motion to approve the minutes from March 20, 2024, and Swinsburg seconded. The minutes were passed unanimously by voice vote.
- b. Swinsburg made a motion to approve the minutes from April 9, 2024, and Mitchell seconded. The minutes were passed unanimously by voice vote.

**4. Public comment, other communications**

- a. Pat McPhearson- 214 Oxford Drive
  - i. McPhearson described her ideas of a three-tier system that would separate residents, businesses, and warehouses where there is a set fee of \$20 for residents. McPhearson also discussed the budget that would be generated from a tier system established in the way she described and how residents cannot charge more or create more income to offset the costs of fees, but businesses can, how costs are passed to consumers, charging warehouses for the roads leading into them, and charging an initial stormwater fee to builders in addition to a quarterly collection, as well as charging a stormwater fee with building permits. Lastly, McPhearson discussed farmers being exempt altogether because farm fields accept stormwater and how impervious areas would increase if the farmer's had to sell.
  - ii. Blanchfield asked clarifying questions about the proposed tier system. McPhearson asked about the status of her appeal and if someone would be contacting her to visit her property. Strasko explained that she and David Pyle are the only two people working on appeal forms currently and that they will not be visiting every resident's home that submits an appeal. Blanchfield stated that the Authority would take her comments into consideration and that PTSA is working with the farmers on a credit application.
- b. Josephine Galloway- 2125 Stocker Mill Road
  - i. Galloway asked questions about what happens at workshop meetings. Blanchfield explained that workshop meetings contain more detail than

- the Authority meetings, the workshops are public, and that there are minutes online for residents to read.
- ii.** Galloway also stated that she supported McPhearson’s comments that there was a false impression given of tier four charges and about her concern. Galloway also discussed looking through Facebook, how the fees were thought to be nominal but are not and how concerning it is for her. Galloway also described that the fees should have been shared before they were sent in the mail and how there are a great number of senior citizens and residents on fixed incomes.
  - iii.** Blanchfield and Galloway also briefly discussed water quality and quantity issues, the Authority members considering the public’s comments and that the Authority is currently discussing how the fee structure can be updated for residents.
- c.** Pete Shaheen- 2631 Northampton Street
- i.** Shaheen discussed the construction of his deck, that there is crushed stone under the deck for drainage and wanted to know why he is being charged.
  - ii.** Blanchfield stated that the PTSA members will be discussing decks at their next workshop meeting.
  - iii.** Shaheen also stated that his interactions with Pyle and Strasko have been very professional, and he thanked them both for their help in the process.
- d.** Sara Hogan- 8 Wedgewood Drive
- i.** Hogan stated that Strasko suggested she attend the meeting and discussed her ideas for fee updates and credits related to the percentage of impervious area to pervious area, considering a more wholistic view of the fee in this way, and if the Authority could use a ratio in some way to give those with more open land a reduction based on the size of their parcel.
- e.** John Wonus- 2509 Newburg Road
- i.** Wonus discussed how his property sits roughly two feet below the grade of Newburg Road and that his lawn usually takes on more water than it ever puts into the street, how he was not the only resident in this situation, and that more needs to be looked at for the fee than just the impervious area.
- f.** Tina Walton- 209 Brentwood Avenue
- i.** Walton asked if the Township would consider changing the ordinance guidelines on lawn mowing and maintenance to allow more homeowners to grow native vegetation and plants and described a past situation with Code Enforcement where she received a notice for her cultivation of red clover. Walton also asked about the status of her appeal.

- ii. Strasko stated that she and David Pyle are working through appeals as quickly as possible and Walton recommended suspending the fee until there is a new plan, and that the process is too slow.
- g. Colleen Renner– 2920 Agnes Street
  - i. Renner asked if the runoff from a home’s roof onto the property is considered in the stormwater charge. Strasko explained the difference between an appeal and a credit application for the stormwater fee.
  - ii. Renner discussed her assessment from the County’s website and asked if patios made from pavers are considered impervious. Cummings responded and stated that he believes pavers are included in the Township’s ordinances as impervious, and that it depends on the construction and design of the paver patio.
  - iii. Renner also asked a question for her neighbor who has a French drain system installed on his property, his water does not run down the street, how is he being charged for stormwater? Godbout discussed a credit he applied for and received from Bethlehem Township for their stormwater charge, that a French drain may qualify, explained the difference between a credit and appeal application, and briefly discussed the process moving forward, the appeals manual, and his thoughts on how to apply credits to residential properties.
- h. Kevin Dotts- 1164 Stones Crossing Road
  - i. Dotts stated that he agreed with the other comments made by residents, explained that he is in a similar situation to Hogan since his home is farther away from the road with a long driveway, and that his home does not contribute to the storm sewer system. Dotts also asked if the Township is charging churches and schools and Authority members confirmed that all landowners in the Township are charged a fee based on the same tier structure. Dotts expressed his concern on being triple taxed by the school and then his church raising fees to pay for their stormwater bill as well. Lastly, Dotts stated his issue with the utility fees listed on the informational flyer and how he believes them to be misleading and not comparable to the stormwater fee that people are receiving.
- i. Galloway came back to the podium and expressed her concern about the confusion over pavers and discussed how residents will not be able to calculate and figure out what their measurements are and will end up just paying the fee, especially older residents, and stated that she was not able to find the minutes on the Township website.
- j. Dotts came back to the podium to discuss that we are the last in line on almost all the water bodies within the Township and described how Palmer should not be responsible for other municipalities pollution. Dotts also asked what the method

of validation for the work that Palmer does to improve the stream is, and what is the gauge for pollution and water quality requirements. Cummings explained that Palmer is required to remove ten percent (10%) of the sediment in the Lehigh River and Schoeneck Creek.

- i. Dotts, Blanchfield, Cummings, and Hulshizer briefly discussed and clarified the methods used to quantify water pollution and reduction. Hulshizer, Blanchfield and Cummings explained that water samples are taken, explained the engineering and environmental testing for projects like the Hobson Street Basin, and how these projects help to meet the goals of the MS4 permit.
  - ii. Dotts explained his idea for flood prone areas in his neighborhood, that the Stones Crossing Swale should be redesigned, two catch basins should be installed past or above his neighbor's driveway to capture water before it ponds in her front yard.
- k. Hogan came back to the podium and stated that the amount of money in tier four is similar to an entire year of her Township taxes and reiterated that pervious surfaces should be included in the calculation for stormwater charges, the cost to receive a credit and install a management system, the small number of ways to obtain a credit, and asked if the fee or penalties can be suspended, or leniency given for those who can't afford it.
  - i. Godbout discussed the \$3,000 escrow for credits and stated that he believed most residents would not pay \$3,000. Blanchfield stated that the PTSA is open to suggestions, and they need to make corrections.
- l. McPhearson came back to the podium to discuss that her real estate taxes are less than her stormwater fee and that people who live in flood areas don't have insurance and pay lots of money to fix their homes after a storm. McPhearson also showed photos of damage to her home after a storm in 2005.
- m. Matt Gunther- 716 Chestnut Lane
  - i. Gunther requested that the PTSA share more information with the community at large about stormwater controls, general hydrology principles, how water does not stay in yards, how decks and pavers impact the hydrology of a yard, as well as how rain for three days straight can impact the hydrology of the soil and affect runoff. Gunther also asked for more information about pollution in the main waterways.

**5. Reports**

**a. Solicitor**

- i. Gibson stated that Salzmann and Hughes have been generally advising on Authority matters and the experience that the firm has with PENNVEST loans to assist the Authority members soon.

**b. MS4**

- i.** Strasko summarized the MS4 activities occurring in the next few weeks with different community events including an Earth Day and Arbor Day celebration, where stormwater information will be available, that there have been 200 appeals received so far, there are site visits scheduled with Pyle next week, the information for the farm credits is still under review, and that the next step to secure the Section 219 funding are support letters.
- ii.** Strasko also updated the board on upcoming MS4 requirements including between 25 and 30 outfall and basin inspections, newsletter articles, employee training, and that the reporting year ends on June 30.
- iii.** PTSA members also briefly discussed development in Lower Nazareth adjacent to Meadow Avenue projects. Blanchfield asked clarifying questions regarding if there was a new developer who owns the land and White stated there was not, and that there would be more information next month after HRG has a chance to obtain plans and update the Authority.

**6. Committee reports**

**a. Engineering**

- i. Action Items**
- ii.** Blanchfield explained workshop meetings, the extreme detail at the meeting, and that there will be three new projects discussed later in the meeting that were originally discussed in depth at the workshop meeting.
- iii.** White discussed the April report that was submitted and briefly discussed more detail for specific projects including 25<sup>th</sup> Street repairs and comments were received from PennDOT, HRG will be responding shortly, and they will need to obtain drainage and construction easements for the project.
- iv.** White and Cummings discussed the opening of the Kingwood Street construction bid and that they are requesting the Authority award the contract to the low-bidder and authorize the notice to proceed.
- v.** White and Blanchfield briefly discussed the Bayard Street and Sheridan Drive preliminary findings, having a joint meeting with the Bethlehem Township Sewer Authority, joint projects, where funding would come from, and scheduling a meeting with Bethlehem Township within the next few weeks.
- vi.** White also stated that the survey work was completed for both Wedgewood and Old Nazareth Road, and that HRG is exploring the most cost-efficient way to complete work with pipe fitters for the project.
- vii.** Lastly, White discussed drainage issues reported from residents, how he was out in the field on Northwood Avenue and a few other locations in the

Township where catch basins are not collecting water the way that they should, and other issues like closed systems with bubbler inlets.

**b. Finance**

**i. Action Items**

- ii.** Farley reported that the collections received for quarter one has been \$808,392, how they extended due dates for utility bills, the delay for warehouses due to incorrect mailing information, and that more revenue is expected by the end of the month.
- iii.** Farley also explained and presented the first quarter invoice for the Authority from the Township which includes the Township’s cost to manage MS4, monthly reports submitted by Public Works, the administrative costs and that the hours are high this quarter due to call volumes and questions from residents, a small fee for supplies and postage, start up costs, as well as costs from the July 2023 storm damage and that some charges have more detail from invoices included in their packet.
- iv.** Blanchfield asked clarifying questions about the storm repair invoicing and if there were more charges to come. Farley explained that the storm damage cost is a fixed amount, but HRG has been re-evaluating permanent repairs for the storm damaged areas and that the current charges are for the temporary repairs that were already put in place. Blanchfield asked more clarifying questions about approval of the invoice and having the opportunity to review and ask questions at the next workshop meeting.
- v.** Lastly, Farley stated that he had signatory paperwork for the Authority members to sign to complete the opening of their bank account when the PTSA members had time to see him.

**7. Township staff comments**

- a.** There were no further Township staff comments.

**8. New Business**

**a. PRP Phase 1- Hobson Street Basin Proposal Approval**

- i.** Blanchfield briefly summarized the project objectives of retrofitting the basin, reducing sediment pollution reaching the Lehigh River, and the timeline included in the proposal of four months. There were no questions regarding the proposal.
- ii.** Mitchell made a motion to approve the proposal and Swinsburg seconded. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

**b. Schoeneck Creek Restoration Project Approval**

- i.** Blanchfield summarized that this was also a Pollutant Reduction Plan (PRP) project that aims to stabilize the Schoeneck Creek stream channel and that this project has an estimated ten-month timeline.

ii. Swinsburg made a motion to approve the proposal and Mitchell seconded. The motion was passed unanimously by voice vote.

iii. John Marks- 207 Hunter Street

1. Marks asked clarifying questions about the restoration project including its specific location and discussed aspects of the creek area with Cummings including stream banks washing out, the project goals, hydraulic models, how HRG must prove that the headwaters will not negatively impact the stream, that the product needs to be naturalized, and the current conditions of the site and the stream overall.

**c. PENNVEST Old Nazareth Road Proposal Approval**

i. Blanchfield provided a brief explanation of the proposal for HRG's administrative assistance and submission of a PENNVEST application for the Old Nazareth Road project.

ii. Mitchell made a motion to approve the proposal and Swinsburg seconded. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

iii. Cummings and White noticed that there was not an agenda item to approve the low-bidder for Kingwood Street Construction and asked Gibson if they would be able to amend the agenda and add the item. Gibson stated that it cannot be added to the agenda since it was not previously advertised. Strasko apologized and stated that she thought PTSA members had already approved the lowest bid at the workshop meeting. Gibson, Cummings, White, Strasko, and PTSA members briefly discussed holding a special meeting to approve the Kingwood Street bid because the agenda could not be amended.

**9. For the Good of the Order**

a. Strasko stated that Palmer Township was recognized as a Tree City for the second year in a row.

b. Charles Bellis thanked the Authority members for their work on the utility fee and listening to and considering all of the comments from residents who were able to attend.

**10. Next meeting: May 15, 2024**

**11. Adjournment**

a. Mitchell made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Swinsburg seconded. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote and the meeting was adjourned at 6:35PM.