

Palmer Township

Environmental Steering Committee Meeting Minutes

February 23, 2022, 6:30PM at Palmer Township Municipal Building

1. Roll Call

- a. The meeting was called to order by Chair Bill Ruch at 6:31pm.
- b. Present: Bill Ruch, Tom Grube, Diane Halasz, Deanne Werkheiser, Ginny Sciorra, Josh Kasenga, Paige Strasko and returning board member Tom Dittmar. Board liaison Joseph Armato was also present.
- c. Guests: John Marks represented the Earth Stewards of Palmer (ESP).

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes from October 27, 2021, and January 26, 2022

- a. Tom Grube made a motion to approve both sets of meeting minutes and Deanne seconded. The motion was unanimously approved by voice vote.

3. Old Business

- a. 2022 Budget
 - i. The budget set forth was \$10,000 for recycling/e-cycling, \$3,250 for community education and \$55,000 for disposal of illegally dumped materials.
 - ii. Halasz, Ruch asked Armato clarifying questions on the budget set out for the ESC to determine how much of the funds were shared with the recycling department and what the longevity is of the ESC budget. Armato stated that the recycling department has their own budget separate from the ESC and the funds the ESC can work with are discretionary for the committee to use.
- b. Electric Lawnmowers
 - i. Ruch started off by giving an overview from the last meeting of what Kasenga had found in his research of electric powered lawn mowers and Kasenga picked back up with added information he had found pertaining to battery cost, warranties and the average lifespan for batteries used in the Mean Green mowers. He explained these kinds of mowers are still new but seem very dependable from reviews and manufacturers' claims. Grube and Ruch brought up that the Parks department should wait until there are more options on the market and batteries have a longer lifespan since the Parks department mows around three hundred acres a week in the summer. Dittmar also mentioned that batteries are recyclable, but the committee should also keep in mind the weight of batteries and ease of operation for employees. Werkheiser and Halasz also mentioned that there are grants available that the Board of Supervisors (BoS) can apply for to offset costs of an electric mower.
 - ii. Mower specifics: Mean Green Mower \$30,000. Mower has \$16,000 battery with a three year/1200-hour warranty. Rain is ok for the battery;

power washing is not. Dittmar stated that gas mowers cost \$7,000 and have a 5-year life.

- iii. Ruch and Strasko mentioned that starting smaller with electric weed whackers and leaf blowers would be a better and more cost-effective way to introduce Parks employees to battery operated equipment. Strasko mentioned the brand Kobalt from Lowe's saying that the brand has fifty tools with interchangeable batteries and Armato stated he uses the brand at home and purchased the same battery powered tools for the new hospital in Palmer Township. Ruch stated the board members did not want to discourage Kasenga from learning about and pushing for electric lawnmowers and all ideas are good, but this idea was more achievable in the short term.
- iv. Werkheiser made a motion to propose the BoS apply for a landscaping grant for electric equipment for Township employees. Dittmar seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved by voice vote.

c. *Green Guide* Articles

- i. Halasz spoke about multiple information articles she and various others have written in the recent past to educate residents about environmental topics such as insects, grass cycling, bees, and even a history of the Palmer Bike Trails. Halasz stated the articles are 95% complete and thinks a subcommittee is needed to complete a review and recommend final approval from the committee for the already completed articles.
- ii. Ruch asked some clarifying questions about the subcommittee and for what it is needed. Halasz and Ruch discuss for a few minutes, and it is decided that a subcommittee of Halasz, Kasenga and Strasko will be formed to discuss the *Green Guide* articles and recommend them for approval from the committee for the Palmer Township website as the Facebook page once it is established. Halasz asked that after the ESC approve the articles some should go to other departments in the Township for approval as well because they relate to parks, open space, and recycling.

d. Palmer Newsletter

- i. Halasz also mentions articles she had written for the Palmer Newsletter, one on leaves, one on native plant gardens. Werkheiser made a motion to add Halasz's native plant article to the May newsletter. Halasz seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved by voice vote.
- ii. Next newsletter will be published near second week of May with an article deadline of early March.

e. Palmer Days/Community Weekend

- i. Werkheiser suggested we postpone thinking about community weekend until BoS is on the same page.
- ii. Halasz also brought up community weekend. Various members discussed their plans for the committee at the event such as electric garden

equipment demonstrations, raffle prizes such as electric lawn equipment and says we need to start thinking about community weekend. Armato stated that the BoS is nowhere near thinking of Palmer community weekend. Werkheiser asked when BoS would be thinking about community weekend and to just let the committee know when they need to start producing ideas and planning for community weekend. Armato stated community weekend is typically held the second week of August. Armato also started mentioning his ideas, as well as Ruch discussing Stihl trailer demonstrations where company representatives would come out and display their different environmentally friendly products or tools etc.

- iii. Armato also stated that raffle tickets should be \$5 each. Halasz said that they have been free in the past; Dittmar said that in the beginning, there was a charge for tickets and more tickets were distributed at the event than when they were free. Halasz suggested that the change to free raffle tickets may have had something to do with gambling laws.

4. New Business

- a. Confirm ESC logo

- i. The committee as well as Armato decided on the ESC logo as a green leaf design.

- b. Facebook page

- i. Ruch asked Armato if we need to have a vote to establish a Facebook page and Armato confirmed that the committee does not need to vote to establish a Facebook page.
 - ii. Ruch starts discussing how they will need one member to head the page and oversee posting current information and that they can check with the committee before making any new posts. Ruch had Halasz in mind as the head of the Facebook page because she has written many articles intended to educate the public and that the Facebook page would be the place for her to share all this information. All committee members were in favor of establishing a Facebook page.
 - iii. It was stated that administration rights need to be given to a township employee, like Brenda DeGerolamo or Paige Strasko but Strasko stated she does not have a Facebook page.
 - iv. Ruch stated in the next meeting the committee can finalize the Facebook page and give Halasz more time to set up the page and be comfortable with the platform. Halasz said someone from the committee is needed to test the Facebook page and Werkheiser said she has an account.

- c. E-cycle event- Establish a timeline

- i. Ruch explained that the committee needs to establish a timeline for when we can hold an e-cycle event and what will be needed to make this event happen. He also explained that there was a press release stating that

Northampton County will reimburse and sponsor municipal e-waste collections.

- ii. Dittmar, who has many years of experience in such events, explained that due to COVID, there have not been many e-cycle events in the last few years. Now that COVID restrictions are lightening, all the townships in the area are looking to hold similar events. The company Dittmar has worked with in the past is booked until September. The committee will have to organize an e-cycle event in September or October. Dittmar described the BoS must meet with someone at Easton High School to use their parking lot and what dates that would be possible to schedule time with the AERC (now called Clean Earth, the company that recycles the electronics or make sure they get to the proper facility). Dittmar also discussed the particulars of prices for how long the event is; three-hour event costs \$4,000 and a four-hour event cost \$4,700 and shared a cost page that shows how much various large electronics will cost to recycle. Strasko is to share the price list with the whole committee. The committee decided on a four-hour event from 9am to 1pm since the cost of the extra hour did not cost too much.
 - iii. John Marks asked if our event will be for Palmer Township only and Armato answered yes, just Palmer Township for now, and he mentioned that the county will be reimbursing townships for these events. Since the event is only for residents it will be publicized only in the Palmer newsletter, Palmer website and on Facebook. Proof of residency would be required at the event.
 - iv. Werkheiser stated the committee needs time to complete this and Dittmar agreed they need time to publish the event and get the word out for residents. Dittmar also mentioned in the past they have seen over nine hundred cars come through these events to recycle their electronics. Marks who used to be on the ESC, mentioned that the Palmer Police Department can help with traffic control at the event and how they were always helpful.
 - v. Kasenga had an idea to try to collect donations for an arbor day fund at the e-cycle event, but Armato thought it would be smarter to use funds from the raffles at Palmer community weekend to get seedlings and plants for the township.
 - d. Earth Day/Arbor Day events- Establish a timeline
 - i. The committee agreed that they wanted to organize something for Earth Day in the township. The date was decided as Saturday 4/23. Werkheiser, who is also works with the Bushkill Stream Conservancy (BSC), mentioned that the BSC will be partnering with Trout Unlimited to do a clean-up event along the Bushkill on Earth Day.
 - ii. Armato thought it would be good for the ESC to partner with them, continue the clean-up efforts farther down the Bushkill, depending on the

scope of their work. Armato also suggested we could have tents with snacks for volunteers, give out T-shirts, do another landscape tool raffle, etc.

- iii. Marks then jumped in with his suggestions and expertise on volunteer turn out, he mentioned that the ESP will help the clean-up efforts and be there to support the ESC. Marks also had some ideas of actual stream clean-up operations and how groups could search different sections of the creek for litter.
- iv. Werkheiser and John Marks also mentioned that many of the roads that need to be cleaned are often too dangerous to have volunteers out on the roadside collecting litter. Then on the other hand, the roads, areas, trails etc. that are safer to clean are in decent shape. Werkheiser also mentioned that it could be a clever idea to start building a volunteer base since there are different projects and events the ESC would like to plan in the community. Werkheiser also mentioned that the next BSC meeting was the following Monday at 7pm.
- v. It was mentioned that the storm drain labeling would be a good project for boy and girl scouts.
- e. Climate Action Plan- volunteer to work on and report
 - i. Ruch decided to move this discussion to the next meeting since he did not want committee members spread too thin. Ruch stated he wants the focus right now on establishing a Facebook page, Earth Day, and an e-cycle event.
- f. MS4
 - i. Halasz had an item that she was following up on from a 2021 ESC meeting where the committee had asked for funds in the budget to restart efforts to stencil storm drains to warn residents not to dump any liquids into the storm drains. She mentioned this item for the committee to decide on a course of action. Strasko, who also works on the Township MS4 program doing inspections, reports and drafting articles, the township has an ordinance that requires any new building or development to include a cast-iron fish plate on the storm sewers that state the water drains to a river or a creek. Strasko also explained that the township has emblems on their storm sewers that last longer than a painted stencil. Halasz stated that ESP would like to stencil storm drains around the community center, library and parks where lots of people gather; these could then be used for educational purposes. Strasko said that Tom Adams has about 100 glue-on decals in stock that he would prefer to use; he may need more glue. It was mentioned by someone that it would be a good project for girl & boy scouts for Earth Day.
 - ii. Tom Grube then asked if anyone was working on MS4 or what the Township was doing for the program and Strasko stated she is the one working on MS4. John Marks had also mentioned that Bob Williams in an

earlier meeting mentioned that he wanted to establish a committee for MS4 in Palmer Township to help the BoS make decisions about the program. Grube reported that he has been doing some online MS4 education; he was suggested as a potential member of the working group that Bob Williams is putting together in MS4.

- iii. Werkheiser asked if there was a sediment erosion control plan in place for the Township and who works on that. Strasko stated she only does inspections and paperwork for the program, but Palmer has hired Pidcock engineering to help maintain the MS4 program specifics like the sediment erosion and control plan.
- iv. Strasko offered she would be able to report updates on the MS4 program from the other work for the township she does to help keep the committee up to date on what the township is doing for stormwater.

5. Reports

a. Board of Supervisors

- i. Armato discussed that Monday nights there are zoning meetings that it would be helpful for an ESC member to attend, he also stated someone from the ESC should attend the BoS meetings to offer the environmental side of plans to the Board.
- ii. Ruch and Armato discussed different environmental codes for the Township and how all the committees could work together on certain aspects of planning or zoning. Some ideas mentioned included requiring solar panels on warehouse rooftops, electric charging stations, and bigger riparian buffers.
- iii. Armato also mentioned that these BoS meetings are going to be important because there is only 12% of Palmer that is not developed, and that the remaining percent is not zoned for residences which means more factories and businesses.

6. For the Good of the Order

- a. Halasz mentioned that Strasko should send out an updated contact sheet with Tom Dittmar's information on it for all the committee members.
- b. Halasz also mentioned electric cars from the previous committee meeting she was absent from so Ruch explained how we had discussed finding ways to make businesses pay for electric car charging stations rather than putting the cost on the Township. Halasz said that the committee should look for more grants and other community grants that can help off-set those costs. Ruch ended the discussion by saying that the Township should just go directly to Sheetz or Wawa and have them pay for it.

7. Next meeting: March 23, 2022

- a. Ruch reported that he would not be at the March meeting and that Grube will be the acting chairperson.

8. Adjournment

- a.** Halasz made a motion to adjourn, Grube seconded. The motion to adjourn was unanimously approved by voice vote. The meeting was adjourned at 8:18pm.