

Palmer Township, Northampton County

Environmental Steering Committee Meeting Minutes

August 28th, 2024, 6:30PM, 3 Weller Place, Lower-Level Municipal Meeting Room

1. Roll Call

- a. Present: Karen Adams, Bill Hartin, Tony Rose, Celia Williams, and Phil Perhamus.
- b. Also present: Zach Trexler and Paige Strasko
- c. Absent: Michael Brett
- d. The meeting was called to order at 6:31PM.

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes from July 24th, 2024

- a. Adams asked if anyone had any corrections or comments on the minutes. Willimas had one correction to the minutes. Hartin made a motion to approve the minutes as amended and Rose seconded. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

3. Old Business

a. LCAP

- i. Paige Strasko was in attendance to coordinate an open discussion between Sean Nichols and the committee about the next steps of his capstone project. Strasko suggested focusing on short term goals like community engagement, construction of riparian buffers and installing rooftop solar panels.
- ii. Rose asked Nichols what the capstone project is, to which he stated it is his end of graduation project. He said it is not a master's program, but it is similar to a master's thesis.
- iii. Adams asked if it would be possible to have a meeting prior to having this discussion to review the LCAP so that she can be more prepared. Hartin asked Nichols what he thinks the committee should consider since he has all the working knowledge and resources around him. He suggested sticking with the short-term goals Strasko had suggested. Nichols gave specific mention to rooftop solar and community engagement.
- iv. Hartin asked Nichols if he was aware of the current Township project of constructing a new Police Station. He suggested that we get the solar panel implementation process into effect now so it can be included in the design of the new construction. Supervisor Bellis asked if the Township is legally allowed to run Solar and sell electric back to the power company. Nicholas was not aware of anything, but suggested this is something that he would be researching if the committee decided to move forward with solar. Hartin suggested that once an implementation process is decided on, it should be included in all future planning commission meetings and project applications. Rose said that solar is an easy sell due to its savings down the road.

- v. Ken Starace also mentioned that a new recycling center was in the process of being built but was not sure where the project stood. Trexler stated that the project is currently out to bid. He said that he believes the target date for completion is around Thanksgiving. Trexler said construction timelines are aggressive so that the Township does not lose out on State grants they have been awarded.
- vi. Hartin asked Nicholas if h had ever investigated wind power. Nichols said he has done some research, but the difficulties center around land and permitting. He said many small scale wind farms are not successful.
- vii. Adams said in summary, right now it seems like Nichols will be focusing on solar and community engagement. Nicholas said he would also like to look into turning some of the parks into water sponges and possibly more PAZA Tree of Life projects. Adams asked if there were any other short-term goals that had not been touched on yet. One of them is integrating social equity into the Townships emergency response plans. Adams stated she would like to see that idea prioritized. She said this project would need to be researched and completed alongside the Township's Emergency Management Coordinator. Adams asked Strasko to provide the committee with all six short term goals. Strasko explained them as community engagement, construction and completion of riparian buffers, social equity in emergency response, rooftop solar, make sustainability project data publicly available and develop additional projects like community gardens with PAZA Tree of Life. Adams suggested that community engagement would be difficult.
- viii. Perhamus asked about the intersection of social equity and those people who decide to live in flood prone areas and whether or not the question ever comes into play. Rose said that generally, places that flood are cheaper. Adams suggested that this is a loaded topic and that it deserves more of a deeper discussion at a later time rather than tonight. Hartin asked if the Township had identified any flood prone areas in the Township outside of the major ones. Strasko said there is a list of roughly 80 locations developed by the Stormwater Authority that lays out these types of locations which has been developed for years.
- ix. Perhamus asked if research had been done in other municipalities in regard to residents who do not have air cooling capabilities with rising temperatures. Nicholas said that it did not exactly fit into the parameters of the LCAP at the time of development. He said this data would be difficult to compile without having boots on the ground. Adams suggested that it could be as simple as doing research into what options residents have in case of emergency.
- x. Perhamus offered his assistance to Nichols in regard to the maintenance of riparian buffers since it is something he is very familiar with. Nichols said that it would be welcomed help.

- xi.** Adams asked if the committee has come to a consensus on whether or not this is how we want to move forward. Hartin said that it is a no brainer and everyone else agreed.
- xii.** Hartin asked Nichols if any research or thought had been given to solar farms. Hartin suggested if we do some research, we might be able to give our farmers an alternative for when developers want to purchase farming land. Nichols said this can be researched while looking into rooftop solar. Rose suggested that one of the hurdles for solar energy is acquiring land. He mentioned a lot of people are putting solar on top of parking lots. Strasko stated that another Township project is placing a canopy over the gas pumps near the public works garage. Strasko said this would be a great place to start. Perhamus again offered his support with solar, saying many of his clients at work are solar developers. He said he can walk everyone through the decision-making process of developers and the hurdles they can face. Nicholas again stated how helpful this would be.
- xiii.** Strasko asked Nichols if a presentation would be given to the Board of Supervisors at the end of the capstone project, but Nichols was not sure. He stated that he is more focused on the deliverables of all the research and projects he will be conducting. Hartin offered his help with writing down anything after the research is compiled with the goal of presenting it to his supervisors. Adams asked when the semester ends, and Nichols said he believes it is December 13th. Everyone thanked Nichols for his time and expertise.

b. Earth Day

- i.** Adams asked when contract negotiations will begin for the next trash and recycling contracts. Trexler said there is not a set opening date for those. He said he had been targeting this October because it would give the Township about 18 months of preparation prior to the current contract expiring. Adams asked if the committee could be set up with a tour of the Mascaro TotalRecycle facility. Trexler said that he has been trying to get something set up for some time now. Adams said that when she looks at our Township website, it is not clear what can and cannot go into our recycling cans. She said she wants to get together with Mascaro so she can continue to plan her event for this upcoming Earth Day about what is actually recyclable. Perhamus said that this would provide some great clarification for the Township. Rose said this could be a great event or contest at Earth Day.

c. E-cycle event

- i.** Trexler provided the committee with a draft of the flyer for the October event and asked if the committee had any questions. Rose asked Trexler if he needed any help during the event. He said they are more than welcome to help if they want to, but he thinks they will be okay.

- ii. Adams asked about the packaging materials and if it is okay that we are holding a recycling event while simultaneously creating large amounts of waste for packaging and shipping. Trexler said of the five packaging products, three of them are recyclable and one of them is biodegradable.

d. **Multi-Municipal EAC collaboration**

- i. Adams said that she attended the meeting, and they proposed three different platforms. She said the main components being discussed are document storage, sharing and communication so that EAC's in the Lehigh Valley have a common place to interact with one another. She said the platforms all have some free components and some paid components as well. At this point, she said they are diving into more research with the three platforms identified and visiting municipalities who were not able to attend the meeting. Adams said they are expecting to report back to everyone before the end of October. Hartin asked if minutes would be produced from the in-person meeting, and Adams said that they would be sent out. Adams proposed that a November meeting is held to further discuss this project as well as the LCAP capstone project. Everyone agreed it would be good to hold a November meeting, but that a target date would be the 3rd Wednesday rather than the 4th to avoid issues around the Holiday.

4. New Business

5. Reports

a. **Board of Supervisors**

- i. No reports at this time.

b. **Environmental branches of Township**

- i. No reports at this time.

6. Public Comment

- a. Tom Ganssle of the Earth Stewards of Palmer introduced himself to the committee. He explained their current project, Palmer Proud, is all about instilling pride in residents of Palmer. He said this project would not cost anything to the committee, it would just be more of a partnership so that we can work together to hold the best event possible.
- b. Ken Starace of the Earth Stewards of Palmer introduced himself and the Palmer Proud project. Ken said this all started with our group submitting an article for the Palmer Newsletter about Palmer pride. He explained that the goal is to get everyone in the Township mobilized. He said the presentation tonight is simply to open a dialogue about the project to begin sharing plans and ideas for the remainder of 2024 and into the early stages of 2025, which will all culminate in an event in August of 2025. Adams asked what the main focus and goal of the project is. Starace said they are hoping to see momentum gained across the Township within every age and agency with regard to having a sense of pride for the community that they live in. He said that the Earth Stewards would like to be the group that is driving the wheel of the project, but that they cannot do it all by

themselves. They are looking for support from other groups and committees within the Township. Tom informed the committee of all the partnerships they have formed over the years.

- c. Supervisor Bellis stated that the end game is to hold a Township wide litter cleanup event in August of 2025. He said the idea right now is to have everyone participating meet at Fairview Park and then go out all around the Township to clean up litter. Then, everyone will return to the park to weigh what they collected and to have a big picnic. Bellis said that tonight the Earth Stewards are looking to partner with the committee so that they can sort of run the event through an official Township committee. He said they would like to attend the monthly meetings so that they can continue to update everyone where things stand month to month. Hartin and Rose stated that this is a great idea and that they are both looking forward to it.
- d. Supervisor Bellis mentioned that the committee should think about working with the Recreation Board when it comes to the riparian buffer repairs across the Township. He also mentioned that the date has been set for the opening of the Youth Center. He said that Earth Day could be held at this venue, which would allow for easy access and participation with Palmer Elementary School. Adams asked if this is being suggested as a replacement for Earth Day at the Park or in addition to. Bellis said that it could be in addition to the regular event at the park. Adams reminded everyone that it is extremely easy to get into schools to ask for permission to involve students. Supervisor Bellis suggested that he is working on it.

7. For the Good of the Order

- a. Trexler asked Ganssle and Starace if they would like to be added to this committee's Agenda moving forward so that they can continue to provide updates on their project. They agreed this would be a good idea.
- b. Williams discussed a suggestion she had for the upcoming Palmer Township newsletter. She said it could be as simple as saying happy holidays from the ESC. She said an article must be submitted to the Township 6 weeks prior to the printing of the newsletter. Adams asked if anyone else had any ideas for a topic. After some discussion was had, they agreed to find out what the deadline is and then decided what kind of article they would write for the newsletter.

8. Next Meeting: September 23rd, 2024

9. Adjournment

- a. Hartin made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Williams seconded. The meeting was adjourned by unanimous voice vote at 8:39PM.