



Storm Water Advisory Task Force

Emory Ford, Chair
Dan Felten, Vice-Chair

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, March 14, 2013

5:30 pm – 7:30 pm

Community Meeting Room, Northampton Police Department
29 Center Street, Northampton, MA

- Members present:** Emory Ford, Alex Ghiselin, Chris Hellman, David Teece, John Shenette, Megan Murphy Wolf, Norma Roche, Rick Clarke, Robert Reckman, Ruth McGrath, Dan Felten
Members absent: James Dostal
City Staff Attendees: James R. Laurila, P.E. City Engineer; Ned Huntley, P.E. Director of Public Works; Doug McDonald, Stormwater Coordinator
City Councilor Attendees: Marianne LaBarge, Paul Spector
Other Attendees: See attached sign-in sheet

2. Meeting Called to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 pm by Emory Ford.

3. Announcement of Audio/Video Recording of Meeting

The meeting was video recorded by North Street Association, Ruth McGrath. Videos of these meetings will be posted on youtube and a link will be placed on the DPW website.

4. Approval of Minutes of March 7, 2013

Who is on the Task Force: There was some confusion expressed by Task Force members in regard to who is on the Task Force and if any votes are taken, who is empowered to vote. At the first meeting both Task Force members and others were sitting at the table. It was discussed that consideration should be given to only having Task Force members at the table. The option of different name plates for people not on the Task Force, but are integral to the Task Force discussions, was mentioned. Councilor Spector suggested an informal arrangement where others are allowed to sit at the table might be appropriate.

Email distribution of Task Force information: It was noted that the Draft Meeting Minutes and other Task Force related information had been distributed by email to some people not on the Task Force. There was discussion about who should be receiving Task Force information. Staff mentioned that some Task Force information had been sent to some City Council members and Board of Public Works members. It was noted that all Meeting Agendas and Minutes, as well as technical resources available for the Task Force were being posted on the DPW web-site so that the public would have access to this information. For future meetings a sign-in sheet will be available for the public to sign and provide an email address. Staff will send Task Force information by email to anyone that requests it.

Changes to Draft Meeting Minutes: On a motion made and seconded edits to the meeting minutes were made and approved. Staff will make the approved changes and prepare final minutes.

5. Public Comments (At several points during the Meeting)

Councilor Spector offered suggestions to the Task Force. He suggested:

- arranging the room such that all Task Force members are facing the public
- not placing a time limit during public comment
- allowing the public to ask questions
- Task Force members should review state ethics laws related to public committees
- The Task Force should try and conclude by May 1st.

Councilor Spector also stated that the Task Force recommendations would be made to the Joint Committee of the City Council and Board of Public Works. He said that community outreach would be done by the BPW and the City Council as it related to the Task Force recommendations.

Ward 3 Resident Fred Zimnoch read from a prepared statement and submitted the document to the Task Force. He expressed concern about the City's flood control system if it is not maintained and is downgraded by FEMA. He is also concerned about rapidly escalating rates for a stormwater utility that were shown in the CDM Report. Other details are contained in the submitted document.

Mike Kirby stated that there are real problem issues and hazards with the levee systems, such as large trees growing in some locations. He also stated that the proposed budget discussed at the last meeting is opaque since it did not have any descriptive narrative.

Councilor LaBarge expressed concern about more costs and fees that residents will have to pay. She asked how other towns are dealing with these mandates. She also asked what will happen to rates in 5 and 10 years if a new utility is established.

6. Presentation of Approaches Taken by Comparable Towns and Cities

This item was tabled due to time limitations.

7. Discussion of the Presentation

This item was tabled due to time limitations.

8. Public Outreach Plans

This item was tabled due to time limitations.

9. Discussion of the Path Forward

Overall Schedule: Some concerns were expressed about the suggested Task Force completion date of May 1, since some feel that this will be too fast and rushed. It was discussed that it is more important to do a thorough evaluation and make sound recommendations to the City. It was stated that EPA may be delaying issuing and implementing the new stormwater MS4 permit and that may buy the City some time.

Proposed Budget: There were a number of questions about the budget numbers presented by Terry Culhane at the last meeting. Concern was expressed about how an equitable fee system could be derived at if the overall budget was not clearly understood. Staff offered to spend time going through the budget on a line by line basis. Staff also stated that it was expected that they would need to produce sample bills based on the budget for whatever types of fee structures the Task Force decides to explore. Several Task Force members wanted to see a longer term budget plan, maybe for a 10-year planning period.

CDM Report: During the discussion about the budget there were several questions about how the capital projects would be fit into the future budget and rate structure. Also, the CDM report depicted a rapidly rising rate if all the projects they described were undertaken. Staff replied that the flood control related projects described in the CDM report were the projects that were a priority. The large capital plan laid out in the CDM report for problem drainage areas in the City is not being considered by Public Works for implementation. The drainage projects being considered are related to flood control, street drainage reconstruction, like North Street, and for stream erosion projects as described by Terry Culhane in the first task meeting. The Task Force requested more information about the CDM report and how the Public Works Department is using that information in planning. This will be discussed at the next Task Force meeting.

Funding of Flood Control and Stormwater: There was discussion about paying for large, flood control projects using a Proposition 2 ½ override ballot question. A new utility could be used to fund stormwater system costs. Statements were made that the EPA may be backing off on the requirements and implementation dates for stormwater management issues. Using an override for flood control and the thought that EPA was delaying their requirements might provide more time for the City to fully determine if a utility is needed and what form it might take. The prospect of grants and other regulatory relief was also discussed by Task Force members. There were questions about why the City was exploring a new utility when there are only a few of these in existence in MA. It was explained that a fee system was more equitable to homeowners than using an override question or monies from the General Fund, since a fee would be paid by everyone including non-profit organizations that do not pay real estate taxes. The fee would also have some basis on impervious area on properties so the size of a bill is based on impacts to the stormwater system rather the real estate value of a property.

10. Review of Action Items

Action items considered for the next meeting included a summary of other stormwater utilities, an update on the CDM report, a 10-year budget scenario, and more about enterprise funds. Several task force members requested data about acreage of impervious surfaces, numbers of residential lots and other Northampton statistics.

11. Next Meeting Date and Time

The next meeting was scheduled for April 4th at 5:30 p.m. at a location to be determined.

12. New Business

No new business items were introduced.

13. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.