



Storm Water Advisory Task Force

Emory Ford, Chair
Dan Felten, Vice-Chair

Meeting Minutes
Thursday, April 25, 2013
5:30 pm – 7:30 pm
Public Works Board Room
125 Locust Street, Northampton, MA

1. Members present: Alex Ghiselin, Chris Hellman, David Teece, Robert Reckman, Ruth McGrath, Dan Felten, Emory Ford, John Shennette, Megan Murphy Wolf, Rick Clark, James Dostal

Members absent: None.

City Staff Attendees: James R. Laurila, P.E. City Engineer; Doug McDonald, Stormwater Coordinator

City Councilor Attendees: Marianne Labarge

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, Chair.

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. Public Comment

Resident Fred Zimnoch questioned why some of the City data did not match data on Wikipedia. Resident Mitch Bolotin asked when would a new system be effective? Mr. Ghiselin said that any new fee system would require City Council approval. Councilor Labarge said that the Task Force recommendation would be issued to the Conference Committee and then on to the City Council. She said she expected there to be a public process at the Board of Public Works and at the City Council. Mr. Bolotin asked if there was an estimated budget. Mr. Laurila said that a budget of about \$2 million per year had been discussed. Mr. Bolotin said that he wanted to see fee proposals. Mr. Felten indicated that specific fee proposals would be discussed tonight. Mr. Teece asked if there was a deadline to submit fee proposals. Mr. Hellman said he thought more models could be anticipated. Mr. Teece added that is new models keep coming in it may make it more difficult for the Task Force to complete their work by May 31. Mr. Reckman said it's an evolving process and there may be more ideas. Mr. Bolotin asked who could submit a fee model and how it should be submitted. Mr. Ford said any new models could be submitted to the Task Force directly or to Jim Laurila.

5. Discussion and Approval of Minutes from April 18th Meeting

On a motion made and seconded the draft meeting minutes were approved.

6. Review of visit to pump station

On April 22nd there was a tour of the Hockanum Road flood control pump station that was given by Public Works Director Ned Huntley. Mr. Clark said it's amazing that the pump station still works and that it's well taken care of.

Mr. Felten asked if the consequences of the engines failing was discussed. Mr. Reckman said not specifically. Mr. Shennette asked what would happen if the pump station does not work. What is the timeframe for flooding and what would be impacts be. Mr. Dostal said that the equipment in the flood control station is 70 years old and that it has been well maintained. He said that the engines are so old that replacement parts are no longer available. He said the station needs rehabilitating. If the station fails water could flood up to Pleasant Street and Pearl Street, with many millions of dollars worth of property damage resulting. Mr. Hellman asked if full or partial replacement of the station is needed. Mr. Ghiselin asked what if the pumps didn't start the first or second time. Mr. Teece added that it would be catastrophic with \$100's of millions in damage and that it's a very high risk. Mr. Hellman said the cost of rehabilitation and full station replacement needs to be considered and that a new station could cost \$15-\$20 million to replace.

7. Presentation of any new fee algorithms from committee members

8. Discussion by committee of new algorithms

Rick Clark proposed a new model based on the equivalent residential unit (ERU) method. Sample calculations were distributed. Jim Laurila said that the ERU method is based on impervious area and that CDM had recommended this method for determining fees. Mr. Felten asked the task force what is the fairness standard that should be considered? Mr. Reckman asked if agricultural and conservation areas should get a bill? Mr. Dostal questioned if it made sense for land not protected by the levees to pay a bill. Mr. Felten asked if the levees did not exist how much land would be under water? Mr. Dostal said that elevation 121 is the Connecticut River highest flood level. Mr. Ghiselin asked what the cost would be to determine the impervious area for every property in the City as proposed in the Felten method. Mr. Laurila said the cost would be on the order of about \$100,000. Mr. Hellman said there is an elegance to the Felten Method and that data management considerations are important. Mr. Dostal said that lot size could be used and that could be used. Mr. Teece said the City assessor has building size information that should be available.

9. Report from Jim Laurila on Test Case Bills from the Proposed Fee Algorithms

Mr. Laurila distributed a sheet of "discussion factors" for each of the proposed methods, a summary table that compared sample bills using each proposed fee method, and sample bill calculation pages for each method. These handouts were discussed.

10. Discussion by Committee of test case bills

General discussion about whether the City should receive stormwater bills ensued. Mr. Felten indicated that the City pays other utility bills now and it may be the most equitable if the City pays any new stormwater fees. Mr. Ghiselin said that we all benefit from City roads and said it might be ok to exempt City roads from fee calculations. Mr. Hellman said that he had just completed a summary of credits and exemptions to fees that would be distributed to the Task Force to read. He thought that it might make sense to exempt property that is not protected by levees and that conservation lands might also be exempt from fees. Mr. Clarke stated he has been reviewing various credit manuals used in other communities. He said streets are part of stormwater conveyance but that not all streets have catch basins. He indicated have some problems with the concept of the commons fee. He said that he thought that the City should not pay a stormwater fee out of the general fund. Ms. Murphy expressed an interest in considering if there should be a cap on the overall fee or other types of caps. She asked if properties outside the levees were subject to MS4 permit requirements. Mr. Reckman said he was not supportive of the Felten method. He said exemptions for conservation lands should be considered. He added that he liked the idea of the "commons" fee. Mr. Laurila suggested that the Task Force may want to consider the information in Table 1 from the New England Environmental Finance Center which discusses options for the various fee setting factors. Mr. Teece inquired if it was up to the Task Force to determine exemptions. Mr. Hellman said that exemptions should be considered since they will impact fee setting. Mr. Ghiselin said he liked the Felten method, it is fact based and detailed in fee setting. Mr. Felten suggested that the Task Force needs to resolve if a "commons" fee should be used and if the City should receive a bill. He added that the issue of cap alternatives needs to be discussed in more detail. Bob Reckman made

a motion that the City not get stormwater bills. The motion was seconded by Ruth McGrath. Ms. McGrath expressed concern about City overhead costs if the City does receive bills and that it might be more cost-effective overall if the City does not bill itself. Mr. Dostal agreed that administrative fees would end up being included in the bills issued to the residents. Mr. Hellman agreed that there was no need to bill the City. On a vote of 8-2 the motion passed. Mr. Felten and Mr. Teece were opposed and Mr. Ford abstained from the vote. Mr. Ghiselin said he wanted to see the impact of the bills now that the City will not be billed. Mr. Felten said that all the fees would go up proportionally. Mr. Teece made a motion to exclude all non-profit organizations from any new stormwater fees. Mr. Ghiselin seconded the motion. Mr. Teece said that at an earlier task force meeting a vote was taken to bill everyone including the City and the vote just taken reversed that decision. For this reason he wanted to have a discussion about an exclusion for non-profits. Mr. Ghiselin said he opposes an exemption for non-profits and that the City is a unique situation. He added that specific exemptions might be considered but that a blanket exemption was not appropriate. Mr. Reckman said he was open to considering credits but he was not in favor of exempting non-profits. Ms. McGrath, Mr. Shennette and Mr. Clark all agreed that case by case credits or exemptions could be considered but they did not favor a blanket exemption. The vote to exempt non-profits unanimously failed.

11. Discussion of Path Forward

12. Action Item Review

13. New Business

Items for discussion at the next meeting include whether to include a “commons” fee, issues and options with possible caps, and further discussion of fee algorithms.

14. Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for May 2nd at 5:30 p.m. at a location to be determined.

15. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.