



Storm Water Advisory Task Force

Emory Ford, Chair
Dan Felten, Vice-Chair

Meeting Minutes
Thursday, June 13, 2013
5:00 pm – 7:00 pm
Public Works Conference Room
125 Locust Street, Northampton, MA

- 1. Members present:** Alex Ghiselin, Chris Hellman, Robert Reckman, Ruth McGrath, Dan Felten, Rick Clark, James Dostal, Megan Murphy Wolf, David Teece
Members absent: Emory Ford, John Shennette
City Staff Attendees: James R. Laurila, P.E. City Engineer, Doug McDonald, Stormwater Manager, Ned Huntley, P.E. Director of Public Works
Other Attendees: Terry Culhane, Board of Public Works, Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 pm by Dan Felten, Vice-Chair.

- 2. 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.

- 3. Public Comment**

Prior to the start of the meeting staff distributed two tables entitled:

- City Properties and City, State and Federal Roadways Excluded from Stormwater Billing
- Federal and State Properties

Mr. Culhane said that the Task Force members had voted to exempt City properties from billing. He asked that the Task Force consider reviewing the list of municipal properties and attaching a final list of exempt municipal properties to the Task Force Report. Similarly, he requested that the list of state and federal properties be reviewed and a final list attached to the Task Force report.

Mr. Paul Walker from Ward 6A requested copies of letters sent to the City by the Army Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency. He also requested copies of all Task Force meeting minutes.

- 4. Discussion and Approval of Minutes from May 29, 2013**

The minutes were approved for the May 29th meeting.

- 5. Presentation of any new fee algorithms from committee members**

The following documents were distributed:

- Sample Annual Stormwater Bill Comparisons – updated 6/13/13
- Percentages of Areas, Property Tax, and Proposed Stormwater Fees by Property Types –updated 6/13/13
- Felten3 (Hydraulic Acreage) – Proposed Stormwater Fee Billing Structure – Sample Calculations

Mr. Felten described the updated information for the hydraulic acreage billing structure. Mr. Felten had worked earlier in the day with staff to make some modification to the fee structure. This resulted in some changes to sample bills when compared to the fees presented at the last meeting. Using the hydraulic acreage method the average single family home would pay \$144 per year; a 2-family would pay \$125/year; and a 3-family would pay \$150/year. Ms. McGrath asked why the 2-family fee dropped below a single family house fee. Mr. Felten said the change occurred when the algorithm was applied to a listing of all residential properties. Mr. Hellman said someone, such as a politician, might apply a fudge factor to increase the 2-family to be higher than a single family home. He noticed that the fee for undeveloped land also increased. Mr. Clark also questioned why the fee for the 2-family property is less. Mr. McDonald suggested that task force member refer to the sample calculation page that was handed out which illustrates how the fees are calculated. Mr. Felten described the need to adjust for very large residential properties that skew the average property size. Ms. McGrath said she did not understand the calculations and asked what hydraulic acreage means. Mr. Felten described the contribution to the amount of surface water runoff from different surfaces. Ms. McGrath expressed concern about not being able to explain the fee calculation and that the fee is confusing. Mr. Reckman said he felt the virtue in the Felten3 model is that it is a mathematical model. Mr. Hellman said he is also comfortable with the model but said he is committed to preparing a frequently asked questions sheet to help explain it. He added that the final report will need a glossary of terms to make it easier to understand. Mr. Felten said that the glossary should be added to the final report. Mr. Reckman suggested that 2 tables be prepared for the final report. One table would be for the 2 recommended fee structures only – and would show the sample bills. The second table would show all the proposed sample fee structures and bills. Mr. Culhane asked Mr. Felten about the background for calculating the fee for undeveloped property. Mr. Felten described that there is a maximum charge based on a one acre area. Mr. Culhane asked if this was arbitrary and Mr. Felten replied that it is. Mr. Clark said that each model has some degree of arbitrary decision-making and described the ERU model and the assumption for billing undeveloped land. Mr. Teece said that the facts are the facts and can not be disputed. There is some arbitrary decision in preparing a credit program. Some of the items that are arbitrary could be changed by anyone. Ms. Murphy asked how the bills would increase if the overall budget was increased to \$3million per year. Mr. Felten described how the rate would change and the bills would increase. Mr. Dostal said that a cap of 2 ½ percent increases could be used. He also suggested a sunset clause for the review of the cap should be set at 3 to 5 years. Mr. Ghiselin said the \$2 million is arbitrary and it could be more or less and that the number is only being used to define the fee calculations. Mr. Hellman said the \$2 million is based on the Department of Public Works research and that the City Council could decide a higher number would be better. Mr. Clark said for the ERU model if the budget was \$3 million the bills would increase by 50 percent. Mr. Felten said the fee increase would also be proportional for the hydraulic acreage method. He added that the Task Force should focus on the two recommended models and their differences. For example, for undeveloped land the Clark2 model a 50 acre property would have a bill of \$745 versus a bill of \$130 using the hydraulic acreage model. Mr. Clark said that the ERU could use a cap for undeveloped land and the resulting fee for undeveloped land would be smaller and would benefit open space goals. Mr. Felten said all the models have arbitrary assumptions to some degree. Mr. Clark said that the ERU without the fee for undeveloped land does not have that flaw. He added that for a 10 acre undeveloped parcel the fee would be equal to a 3-family house fee and if the revenue requirement increases the fee for undeveloped land would also be increased. Mr. Felten asked the other members how does it work for each model to be considered fair and equitable? There are arbitrary fees caps and fees that could be applied. What is the basis to support these models? Mr. Hellman said that you may have to give up exactness for simplicity. You have to chose a number and it may not be perfect but it's good. Mr. Felten said that the hydraulic acreage model is way out ahead of the ERU and it's the model of choice. The ERU was a distant 2nd vote. He suggested the task force focus on that model. He questioned why 2 models were being included in the final report. Mr. Hellman said that including two models helps to tease out the points of contention. He added that the ERU is commonly used and it got votes. Mr. Ghiselin added that they illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of each. Mr. Clark said it was good to show the two recommended models as well as all the other models that were discussed. Mr. Felten said it is important to get these points into the narrative. Mr. Reckman said the report needs to say how much one model was preferred over the other. He suggested adding the actual vote counts into the narrative. Mr. Clark asked if it was relevant to include the column with tax information in the fee summary spreadsheet. Since it is not a fee setting factor it should be removed. Mr. Hellman agreed.

6. Any Report from DPW – Jim Laurila

No specific report had been requested and none was provided.

7. Review of Progress of Report Section Drafts by Committee Members

8. Individual Member Comments on Report

9. Report Writing – Who does what next

A statement that was prepared by David Teece was distributed. Mr. Felten said that this statement should be included in the final report, possibly as a forward to the document. Prior to the meeting each draft section of the final document was distributed to each task force member. The task force members discussed the content of each draft section and edits and additions to the document were discussed. The task force members will work on the discussed changes and a revised draft for the next meeting. Mr. Shenette will review, edit and format the final document for distribution to the Joint Committee for their meeting on July 8.

10. Path Forward

This was discussed above.

11. New Business – Reserved for topics the Chair did not reasonably anticipate would be discussed.

No new business was introduced.

12. Setting Next Meeting Date

The next meeting was scheduled for June 20th at 5:00 p.m. at the Public Works Conference Room.

13. Public Comments

There were no additional public comments.

14. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 7:05 p.m.