

Stormwater Stakeholders Advisory Group Minutes

February 22, 2016 (5:00-7:00PM)

400 South Main Street, Blacksburg Motor Company Conference Room (BMC1)

Stakeholder Group Members Present

Susan Anderson, Blacksburg Town Council

John Bush, Blacksburg Town Council

Joe Meredith, VT Corporate Research Center

Lindsay West, Resident

Carolyn Howard, Draper Aden Associates

Andrew Kassoff, EEE Consulting, Chair

Not Present

Donna Gresh, HH Hunt Inc., Vice-Chair

Town Staff Present

Kafi Howard, Town Engineer

Katherine Smith, GIS

Others Present

John Burke, Environmental Program Manager - Town of Christiansburg

Javad Torabinejad, Citizen

Welcome and Introductions

The meeting began at 5:07 pm. There were no new attendees to introduce at this meeting.

Review and Adopt Minutes

The meeting minutes from February 1st were approved with minor grammatical corrections from Susan.

Public Comment

Mr. Torabinejad was present and spoke during the public comment period. He began by stating that a stormwater utility was a good way to resolve the stormwater problems around town, but he did not feel that the current structure is equitable. Mr. Torabinejad explained that the credit system is not fair and the tier system is not viable. The current structure favors large properties. There are better stormwater fee programs in the state, for example Roanoke and Falls Church. Roanoke's billing system has an ERU of 500 square feet which favors smaller residences. The Town of Blacksburg's system of having one flat fee for all single family residences is not fair. The Edge apartment complex pays half as much as it should; it should pay more if its fees were based solely on the ERU. Manassas doesn't give credits to anyone. [Note: The Code of Virginia requires a stormwater utility fee have a credit system.] He stated that rain barrels do work; as per the EPA or DEQ. Rain barrels are also good for showing the importance of water quality; just like the one that is on this building we are meeting in tonight. If the stormwater utility were to bill solely on the ERU, then each entity would pay a few hundred, but it would be its fair share.

Mr. Torabinejad spoke briefly about the railroad exemption that is currently being reviewed in the General Assembly right now. He stated that it is more about the contribution to pollution from the railroad industry. It should not be exempted from stormwater utility fees.

Mr. Torabinejad thanked the group and staff and ended his public comment.

HOA Land Double Billing Analysis

Staff introduced a presentation outlining examples of how communities with common areas owned by homeowners associations were currently being billed. In this evaluation, the only communities that were reviewed were those that were “double-billed”. These communities receive bills for single family homes and also receive bills for the common area that is owned by the homeowners association. These sites were evaluated to see whether a formula could be used to identify whether the HOA land should be charged based upon the relative impact of the residential customers. Did their single family flat rate cover their common areas as well? This evaluation was completed and there were a total of 37 properties that met this standard. Out of the total, 34 of the properties had more impervious associated with the residences than the common area. Three properties had more impervious associated with the common area, but these were all small properties and the impervious from the single family was very close to that of the common areas. The committee has a choice between making no changes to the billing of these HOA lands, or selecting one of the two options below:

1. Waive the common area fees for the 34 communities where the common area impact was less than the residential impact, and
2. Waive all common area fees.

It was determined that if scenario #1 were implemented the stormwater utility would lose \$29,463 per year in revenue. If scenario #2 were implemented the stormwater utility would lose an additional \$1,000 for a total loss of \$30,463 per year.

Additionally, the Hethwood Foundation manages the common area for three single family communities: Tall Oaks, Pilgrims Point and Mission Hill. These common lands are not HOA property, but their use and billing method are the same. If changes are made to the stormwater billing of the HOA land, should these changes apply to the Hethwood Foundation property as well?

A Stakeholders member asked if we are making the single family too complicated by proposing all of these conditions for waivers. We need to be thoughtful of how this will be administered in the future. It may be simpler for the administration of the utility to have a structure similar to the City of Roanoke. These proposed waivers could be a slippery slope for introducing more and more waivers to the stormwater fee.

Another member reminded the group that our goal was to tweak the existing system and changing the administration to mimic Roanoke’s utility is more of an overhaul of the utility. Additional discussion was had with regards to Roanoke’s utility and the question of whether or not Blacksburg has the ability to administer a similar fee system. The conversation was concluded and staff was asked to provide some general information on the impact that a Roanoke city-type utility would have on the administration in Blacksburg.

Review of Non-Single Family Tier Structures and Evaluate Adjustments

Staff presented the existing tier system and identified some of the concerns regarding the tier system. First, the round-down method provides significant reductions for some of the largest impervious sectors. Second, the range between tiers varies widely and may not be equitable. The presentation reviewed the impact that using the average value and high value of each tiers would have on the stormwater utility annual revenue. The presentation also reviewed the impact that adding more tiers with smaller increments would have on the annual revenue.

Changing from Using the Low Value in Tiers to Using the Average or High Value			
	Do Nothing Option "Tier pays low value"	"Tier pays average value"	"Tier pays high value"
Revenue			
NSF	\$ 50,917.20	\$ 63,3036.76	\$ 75,309.39
Annual Revenue	\$ 1,079,947	\$ 1,228,581	\$ 1,372,649
Increase in Total Revenue	-	\$ 148,634	\$ 292,702

Add More Tiers with Smaller Increments			
	"Tier pays low value"	"Tier pays average value"	"Tier pays high value"
Revenue			
NSF	\$ 53,779.77	\$ 60,871.57	\$ 69,445.50
Annual Revenue	\$ 1,114,293	\$ 1,199,395	\$ 1,302,282
Increase in Total Revenue	\$ 34,346	\$ 119,448	\$ 222,335

One of the committee members suggested that he was leaning toward eliminating the HOA land fees, adopt the addition of the smaller range tiers, and charge the average value to the each tier. The member felt that jumping from a 10,000 range in a tier to a 100,000 range in a tier was too big of a jump. Additionally, it may also make sense to add a 50,000 range to some of the higher value tiers which currently have a 100,000 range.

Another committee member mentioned that she was not sure if we should adopt the average value. The impact to the customers could be significant.

Discussion of Gravel and Other Unpaved Areas

Staff presented a presentation discussing why the current utility considers gravel road to be impervious. Various definitions of impervious were presented to the group to illustrate how the perception of gravel as impervious has been interpreted differently. Staff provided documentation from stormwater management design calculations showing how gravel roads resist natural infiltration.

There was no discussion in the group regarding gravel as pervious. Members agreed that gravel when used in landscaping is considered pervious, but gravel compacted roads are considered impervious. This is reflected in our existing impervious layer used to calculate the fee. A stakeholder's member suggested that including gravel roads into the stormwater ordinance definition of impervious can help clarify to the public that gravel roads are considered impervious. Staff will come back to the next meeting with the draft language.

Identification of Future Discussion Items

The meeting wrapped up with the items to address in the next meeting. Staff will provide a single family tier system and estimated revenue impacts at the next meeting. Staff will provide an overview of the administrative burden of adopting a Roanoke city-style utility. The next meeting will also be a review of the credit system and credit alternatives. Staff agreed to send a reminder out to all committee members.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 6:34 PM.

After the meeting was adjourned, Mr. Torabinejad spoke with staff in the parking area. He asked that staff perform a complete evaluation of Blacksburg's stormwater utility billing using the billing structure used by Roanoke. He wanted staff to bring this information to the next meeting so the committee could review the total impact on the stormwater utility revenue. He suggested a solution to the administrative challenges was to have two Virginia Tech interns providing the data processing. He believes that this will reduce the administrative burden of managing a utility of this type.