

12/20/2023 Workgroup Meeting Notes by Dan Van Schalkwyk

Attendees: Robert Pontbriand (Town Manager), Jonathan Kranz (Planning Board/Resident/Workgroup), Dan Van Schalkwyk (Ayer DPW), Matt Herson (Ayer DPW), Barbara Tierney (Ayer Finance Manager), Beth Suedmeyer (Resident), Jannice Livingston (Selectwoman/Resident), Heather Hampson (Conservation Agent), Emily Scerbo (Tighe and Bond), Natalie Koncki (Tighe and Bond)

Impacts of a Cap on the Rate Structure

- Tighe and Bond presented the impact of a cap on the rate structure. The cap presented was no more than \$10,000 for any one property. The impact would increase the Single Family Residential (SFR) annual fee from \$127 to \$143. Discussion:
 - The users are paying based on the impervious cover on their property as a measure of impact to the waterways, higher impacts should pay higher fees
 - Large impervious properties could reduce their fees through a credit system
 - Large businesses have the ability to generate revenue as opposed to a residential household, equity concerns with the price shift
 - As the MS4 Permit becomes stricter, one of the anticipated regulations will be for the Town to meet TMDL discharges to its impaired waterways, having a structure in place to incentivize and work with large properties will be helpful
 - Instead of requiring the large properties to pay their full fee, the group discussed the potential to phase the fee from a partial fee in year 1, to a full fee at a future year. This would allow the large properties time to construct stormwater controls and apply for a credit.

Assignment 1: Tighe and Bond will provide a summary of the impacts of the cap to the group. The Group members will review and discuss the phased approach at the next meeting.

Comparison: Annual cost to fund stormwater from General Fund versus the proposed Enterprise Fund

- Tighe and Bond presented the approximate cost for a lot to fund stormwater from the General Fund (i.e., taxes) versus the proposed Enterprise Fund (fee). The typical SFR would pay approximately \$208 per year through taxes to fund stormwater as oppose to \$127 per year through the proposed Enterprise Fund. The large property users would see a significantly lower payment through taxes as compared to the Enterprise Fund (e.g., Pan Am property approximately \$40,000 through taxes and \$120,000 through stormwater fee). Discussion:
 - Stormwater Utility Fee provides equity based on the impervious cover which leads to stormwater impacts
 - Large properties should have opportunity for credit relief
 - Stakeholder outreach required

Rate Model Review – Comments from Finance Director

- The Streetsweeper was discussed as to determine if it was solely a stormwater expense or also general fund. In the opinion of the DPW Director the streetsweeper was also related to the general fund. One reason is the streets would be swept by the Town regardless if it was a requirement of the Town's MS4 stormwater permit, in order to keep the roads clean for appearance especially on Main Street and other areas of businesses.

- We also discussed the setup for borrowing, the Town usually bundles projects into a larger sum for a borrow.

Preview of Online Map Viewer

- Tighe and Bond presented the preliminary online map viewer to the Workgroup.
 - Comments during the previous stormwater utility funding effort (c. 2014)
 - residents would let their driveways go into disrepair to lower their stormwater fee. This would not be the case in the current rate structure, as one ERU for a Single Family Residential is a flat fee that applies to all SFR.
 - Which properties are exempt, e.g., tax exempt such as church, municipal, etc. This will be recommended by the Workgroup as it further develops the funding. The rate structure will be accompanied by a Regulation that will include such policies.
 - Can we have discounts for seniors or low-income?

Assignment 2: The Workgroup should “beta” test the online viewer and comment on any issues.

Assignment 3: The Workgroup, through the Town Manager’s Office, will work with Town Counsel to determine ability to provide a discount to certain groups.

Public Outreach Discussion

- Jonathan Kranz summarized the work he had completed since the November 15th.
- Jonathan is working on finding a speaker to provide a presentation related to the importance of the environment, including stormwater.
- Dan Van Schalkwyk presented a draft timeline for public outreach, including various activities and meetings.
 - The timeline is a living document and will be reviewed by the Workgroup routinely.
 - Discussion of preparing a draft FAQs document prior to next meeting. This would entail known topics the Group has discussed as well as other important information we have learned from other communities.
 - Discussion of providing a financial explanation for the purpose of the stormwater utility (enterprise, general fund, or do-nothing options)

Assignment (Jonathan): Jonathan will continue to procure a speaker.

Assignment 4: The Workgroup shall review the Draft Timeline and provide initial thoughts and recommendations at the January meeting.

Assignment 5: A draft FAQ document will be prepared and circulated to the Workgroup prior to the next meeting. The Workgroup members shall review and provide any comments or additional FAQs to add to the document.