

**TOWNSHIP OF O'HARA
COUNCIL VIRTUAL TOWN HALL
MEETING MINUTES
JULY 28, 2020**

I. OPENING PROCEDURES

- A. Call to Order by President Smith at 7:02 p.m.
- B. Pledge of Allegiance led by President Smith.
- C. Roll Call

Council Members Present: Robert John Smith, President of Council; Charles A. Vogel, Vice-President of Council; George H. Stewart, Second Ward; Scott Frankowski*, Third Ward; Allison Berger*, Fourth Ward; Cassandra Eccles, Fifth Ward

Absent: John R. Denny, Jr., At-Large

Also Present: Julie A. Jakubec, CPA, CGMA, Township Manager; Daniel Garfinkel, Township Solicitor; Charles W. Steinert, Jr., P.E., Township Engineer; Cathy Bubas, Manager's Secretary

(*) Denotes late arrival.

The Manager noted the purpose of the Town Hall Meeting is to discuss the property owners' sanitary sewer connection responsibilities and any special fee for the connection to the public sanitary sewer, as well as provide an opportunity for the property owners to ask questions and comment. She then read a statement related to virtual meeting procedures and participation in the meeting.

II. PRESENTATION

- A. Dorseyville Road / Village Drive Sanitary Sewer Project

Manager Jakubec noted the project was completed in June. She compared the project to the Crawford/Mission Lane sanitary sewer extension project in 2005, which involved 10 parcels, nine with homes. The Dorseyville Road/Village Drive project is different from the Saxonburg sewer project due to the potential for development in the Saxonburg Boulevard area. The Manager stated the total cost of the project is \$184,558.21, which includes engineering costs.

Manager Jakubec recalled typically residents are assessed a fee for participating in the line. She recalled the Crawford/Mission Lane assessment was divided by the number of lots, and included incentives with regard to engineering costs. She then explained possible assessment options for the Dorseyville Road/Village Drive residents. Residents along Dorseyville Road would receive a \$500 credit on the assessment if they signed an easement agreement. Village Drive residents did not have to sign easement agreements because the line was installed in the Township's right-of-way. If engineering costs are included and the total project cost is divided by the ten properties, the assessment would be \$18,455.82 per property owner, less \$500 for the Dorseyville Road

residents that signed the easement agreement. If engineering costs are not included, the total project cost is \$159,272.01, and the assessment, if divided by ten properties, would be \$15,927.20, less \$500 for the Dorseyville Road residents that signed the easement agreement. The last assessment option would be for the residents to go before the Allegheny County Board of Viewers, who would determine the assessment amount for each individual property owner.

Mr. Stewart questioned the amount of engineering costs borne by the Township, which the Manager indicated since 2011, \$25,286.20 to KLH Engineers.

Vice President Vogel inquired about the Township-specific work, which Mr. Steinert, Jr., P.E. noted. The Manager stated the cost of Township-specific work is \$18,500.

President Smith noted the easiest form of assessment is to divide by the ten property owners. It was noted Mr. Denis Meinert owned one vacant lot, which he intends to develop. President Smith inquired about payment plans if the project cost is divided by ten. Manager Jakubec stated the assessments for the Crawford/Mission Lane and the Saxonburg projects could be paid up front, financed through a lending institution, or financing was made available through the Township and a lien placed on the property. The Township would charge 5% interest and the loan would be billed through the sewer bill. Residents that meet W.I.C. guidelines would need to reach out to Township staff, and would be charged 2% interest on a loan, a lien placed on the property, and the loan would be repaid when the resident is able or the property is sold. The Manager also noted an incentive to get the Crawford/Mission Lane residents to sign the easement agreement was Council waived the engineering fees.

The consensus of Council was to waive the engineering costs.

Vice President Vogel recommended a stipulation that **all** property owners must agree to the divide by ten assessment option, or the residents would have to go before the County Board of Viewers, in which case some property owners could pay more than others. He preferred not to go that route, but if they do, the assessments could be based on the total project cost of \$203,058. That is with no engineering fees deducted and no waivers of the tap-in fee. Manager Jakubec noted the tap-in fee is \$3,300.

Mr. Weber asked if the information would be disclosed to the residents, including the contracts and cost overruns. Manager Jakubec stated the contractor was North Beaver and there were no additional costs. She suggested residents contact the Township Engineer for any additional information regarding the project.

Mr. Weber noted the payment options and inquired about any other way to finance the assessments. Manager Jakubec suggested residents contact a financial institution, which may offer lower interest rates and/or longer repayment terms. She also noted Council is allowing property owners six months to connect to the sewer line, whereas Allegheny County requires connection within 90 days.

Vice President Vogel suggested property owners join together with the same contractor, which may provide a cost savings.

Mr. Meinert asked how the assessment would work since he does not have a home there now. The Manager recalled honoring the waving of the tap-in fee when a property on Crawford Lane was developed.

Ms. Beverly Harchick stated the easement was not followed. The manhole was installed on the opposite side from where the easement agreement states. She does not like the location the manhole was placed. Mr. Steinert, Jr., P.E. stated the manhole was installed where the property owner requested, which Mr. Ted Harchick disagreed. Mr. Steinert, Jr., P.E. noted to move the manhole would have cost an additional \$15,000.

Mr. Harchick stated he had been told the Saxonburg residents had programs based on zip code to help pay for the sewers. Dorseyville residents are not eligible for such programs because of higher income, but he is retired and living on a fixed income. Manager Jakubec stated there were no programs available other than W.I.C. and the Township loan.

*Ms. Berger entered the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

A resident asked if the additional cost to relocate the sewer line across the road was included in the calculations, which the Manager answered no. Mr. Steinert, Jr., P.E. recalled that was for a change early on and the property owner agreed to pay the additional cost they could incur for moving the line across the street and the cost to repair the road to Township specifications.

*Mr. Frankowski entered the meeting at 7:35 p.m.

Manager Jakubec stated a letter would be sent to the residents. The Township is offering a loan at 5% interest, but she encouraged residents to go to a financial institution which may offer better interest rates and loan terms.

Mr. Stewart noted if residents miss a few loan payments the interest rate increases to 10%, and asked if the Township could be more lenient to help the residents. The Manager stated if something happens the resident should reach out to Township staff and we would take the matter to Council to see what assistance might be available. The Township would work with the resident depending on the circumstance.

President Smith believed the divide by ten assessment option to be the best, as the County Board of Viewers would be more costly for everyone. Mr. Frankowski requested treating everyone fairly. Vice President Vogel recommended if one person does not want the divide by ten option, then everyone would have to go to the County Board of Viewers.

The Manager explained the divide by ten assessment calculation deducts engineering fees and waives the \$3,300 tap-in fee. If a resident opts for the Township loan, they will need to sign an agreement with the Township.

Mr. Stewart asked the Solicitor what is involved with going to the County Board of Viewers as far as additional cost to residents and the Township. Solicitor Garfinkel explained it is like going to a mini trial. Residents could have an attorney, and an expert to provide an opinion on what an individual property should be assessed.

President Smith noted Council is more inclined to waive the engineering and tap-in fee because it would be more costly and take longer to go before the County Board of Viewers.

Manager Jakubec stated a letter would be sent to the residents with all the numbers and the assessment options, which they will need to return to the Township indicating which option they prefer.

Mr. Weber stated he thought the Township applied for a grant but did not know if the grant would be awarded. The Township Engineer and Manager stated the Township did not apply for a grant for this project. Mr. Frankowski noted grants are awarded based on medium income and the Township's overall income is higher than some other municipalities.

Mr. Harchick stated by eliminating the septic system the property value will increase as well as property tax. Manager Jakubec stated the Township would not appeal property assessments because of the sewers. If a property is sold, the School District could appeal the assessment.

Mr. Harchick asked if the Saxonburg residents all used the same plumber. The Manager recalled they bundled with plumbers. She also stated residents can install the sewer line themselves.

Mr. Dan Stettmier, Dorseyville Road, requested further explanation of the calculations, and Ms. Brooke Bailey, Dorseyville Road, requested clarification of the \$500 credit for those who signed easement agreements, which the Manager provided.

A Dorseyville Road resident asked if all the Saxonburg residents agreed on the same assessment option. Manager Jakubec stated the Saxonburg residents did not have options because a special sewer district was established due to the potential of future development.

President Smith stated staff is available and will work with the residents and answer questions. A letter will be sent to the residents with all the information so they can decide what to do. The Manager indicated she would try to get the letters out by Friday, and the residents would have a week to respond regarding the preferred assessment option.

Vice President Vogel suggested going with the divide by ten option, as it is the path of least resistance.

IV. CONCERNS OF COUNCIL

Mr. Stewart recalled a call from a resident concerning dead trees around the trail at Squaw Valley Park and the potential for trees or limbs falling in a strong storm. Manager Jakubec indicated staff would address the situation tomorrow. Mr. Frankowski stated he also noticed trees that could fall along Kirkwood Drive which could affect emergency services access. He requested staff to work with the State, since Kirkwood Drive is a State road.

V. CONCERNS OF STAFF

The Manager requested Council to remain after the meeting for an Executive Session to discuss labor and legal matters

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Vice President Vogel to adjourn the Town Hall Meeting was seconded by Mr. Stewart and carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m. and Council proceeded into Executive Session.

Cathy Bubas, Manager's Secretary

Attachment: Attendance Sheet