

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
BUDGET HEARING  
NOVEMBER 6, 2025**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

John J. Merhottein, President  
John K. Gallagher, Vice President  
Matthew Deckman, Commissioner  
Michael Hudak, Commissioner arrived at 6:06 pm  
DeAnn Lawrence, Commissioner

**OTHERS PRESENT**

Doug Bruce, Township Manager  
Casey Lalonde, HRG (stormwater engineer)  
Ryan Killen, HRG (stormwater engineer)  
Samantha Smith, Community Development Director  
Andy Freda, finance director  
Felix Martinez, Assistant Finance Director  
Matt Miranda, PPIS Director  
John Bartholomew, Assistant PPIS Director

**STORMWATER**

Mr. Bruce said the stormwater authority, fee, and program had been implemented as of January 1, 2022. The original stormwater fee was \$103 for the average residential property owner and the board at the time committed to keeping that rate level for four years and revisiting it prior to the fifth year of the program, which will happen in 2026. In the past four years, the board had approved more than \$28 million in stormwater construction projects, which will cost approximately \$33 million in total debt service payments over the next 25 years. There will be further additional costs to maintain the stormwater conveyance system and replace aging or damaged pipes. The estimated cost to line the worst pipes (Category 5) is \$350,000 in 2026. As such, the internal stormwater committee recommended a 10 percent increase in the stormwater fee for 2026.

Mr. Gallagher said he supported the 10 percent proposed increase, but would also like to move some operations and maintenance costs from the stormwater fund back to the general fund.

Mr. Deckman said residents don't often see the results of stormwater projects. He asked how many homes and properties had been affected by current projects. He also asked for a summary of all stormwater projects, with timelines and schedules. Mr. Bruce asked the HRG representatives to provide this information by next week, if possible.

Mr. Hudak asked if the board can delay some projects to ease the financial burden.

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4323 CHETWIN TERR.**

Mr. Roth asked how many Category 5 pipes there were. Mr. LaLonde of HRG said about five percent of the 100 miles of pipes were classified as Category 5. Mr. Roth said the proposed apartment complex at the former V7

site would cause more stormwater problems in the Ohio Street neighborhood. Mr. Roth said PennDOT's recent paving of Route 191 had caused flooding problems at Oakland Road and Brodhead Road East.

The board took no action on stormwater issues at this point in the meeting.

## **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Ms. Smith reviewed the community development department's proposed revenues, expenses, and capital requests. She said permit revenues were trending up. Regarding a capital budget request for \$35,000 for a new vehicle, Mr. Gallagher said the township should try to repurpose a police car instead of buying new. Ms. Smith said she would happily take either a new or used car.

## **BARRY ROTH 4323 CHETWIN TERR.**

Mr. Roth said the township has to start using old vehicles instead of buying new ones.

## **PPIS**

Mr. Miranda presented the PPIS Department's projected revenues, expenses, and capital items. Mr. Hudak asked about sewage capacity at the City of Bethlehem's sewage plant. Mr. Miranda said the township remained comfortably under its allotted capacity as the city continues to study a planned plant expansion.

Speaking about the sewer fund debt service expenses, Mr. Miranda said the department planned to lease-purchase a new CCTV truck to replace a 2014 model. He said the truck is used daily to televise sewer lines, investigate problems, and monitor the condition of the lines. The estimated cost over five years for a new truck was \$450,000 or \$94,500 in annual lease payments. The existing truck will be sold with a projected price of \$100,000.

Mr. Gallagher asked for a chart of PPIS/sewer vehicles and scheduled replacement dates. Mr. Miranda said he would provide that information.

Mr. Miranda said the sewer fund capital budget included a \$55,000 pick-up truck purchase, which would be used to cut down on wear and tear on more expensive vehicles. Mr. Miranda said he would accept a repurposed car instead, if necessary.

Mr. Miranda said the sewer fund capital budget also included a \$75,000 expense to begin upgrading the township's meter-reading system by installing new radio-transmitting readers for all properties. Total overall multi-year project cost would be \$200,000, with an expected return on investment of three to five years. Mr. Deckman asked if the radio meters would allow for any staff cuts in the department. Mr. Miranda and Mr. Bruce said staff cuts were not being considered or proposed.

Mr. Bruce said the PPIS general fund capital budget included \$250,000 to add extra spaces to the municipal building parking lot and to completely resurface the lot. He said this was the last project included in the budget and

noted it was difficult to propose repaving the parking lot when there were many township roads that also needed to be repaved. Discussion ensued on the proposed parking lot project, but the board took no action at this point in the meeting.

Mr. Gallagher said the PPIS budget did not include any ongoing maintenance at Johnston mansion. He said he would like to see some accounting for needed window, painting, and stucco work. Mr. Miranda said he thought some of those issues had been addressed previously, but he would look further into it.

Mr. Gallagher said he would prefer the \$200,000 township contribution to the Johnston mansion interior renovation project come from the general fund, not the park fund as proposed.

Mr. Hudak asked for the capital budget pages to be printed in larger type next time around.

## **GENERAL DISCUSSION**

Mr. Merhottein said he would like to see four items in the proposed 2026 budget addressed:

1. The non-grant radio request from Nancy Run Fire Company can be cut in half, based on input from the fire company representatives at the last budget hearing.
2. The stormwater fee should not be raised.
3. The fire tax rate should be raised to pay for the fire companies' new "incentive" program.
4. The municipal parking lot project should be postponed and the \$250,000 cost be used to pave township roads instead.

Mr. Deckman asked the staff if the current stormwater fee rate is enough to pay the bills in 2026. Mr. Freda said, yes, we can pay the bills and get through next year. Mr. Hudak said then any increase should wait until next year. Mr. Deckman agreed. Mr. Gallagher said that might necessitate a larger increase next year and that kicking the can down the road is not a solution.

By consensus, the board decided there would be no stormwater fee increase in the 2026 budget.

Mr. Merhottein said an increase of 0.125 mills in the fire tax rate would create an additional \$120,000 in revenue and could be used to pay for the fire companies' incentive program with fire tax funds instead of general funds. Mr. Freda said such a change in revenue use would require the fire tax resolution to be changed, as currently the only use for the funds is for vehicles..

After lengthy discussion and by consensus, the board decided to increase the fire tax rate by 0.125 mills, from 0.45 mills to 0.575 mills in the 2026

budget, and to revise the relevant resolution to allow for the funds to be used for purposes other than vehicles. The board also asked staff to consider having the ordinance state what percentage of fire tax funds can be used for vehicles and what percentage can be used for other purposes.

**BARRY ROTH**  
**4323 CHETWIN TERR.**

Mr. Roth said the future purchase of a new tower truck might be extremely expensive and necessitate revisiting the fire tax rate again.

Mr. Merhottein asked the board to consider postponing the municipal building parking lot project.

By consensus, the board decided to remove this item from the proposed capital budget.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting concluded at 8:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura G. Zapata  
Recording Secretary

