

**Special Meeting: Tuscarora Twp. Sewer Sub Committee**

**September 4, 2021**

**10:30 am**

Call to Order: 10:24 am

Roll Call: Robert Kramer (Committee Chairman), Janet Vance (Committee Secretary),  
Mike Ridley (Absent)

Agenda:

UPDATE: Commercial District – Township/County partnership on permits

UPDATE: Earmark Applications to US Senate and House of Representatives

UPDATE: USDA Applications

Discussion: Next Steps

Guest Speaker: Schwab family (Ana and Oliver), Aaron Nordman Performance Engineering

Community Q&A

Schedule next meeting

Citizens Comments

Board Comments

Motion to Adjourn

Motion to accept/amend the minutes of August 3, 2021 meeting

Janet made a motion to accept, Bob seconded – Motion passed

Agenda accepted as written

**UPDATE: Commercial District – Township/County Partnership on permits**

There has been an agreement with the County to inform the Township when a “Change of Use” or building permit has been applied for, when that particular change would have a possible affect with the present REU assignment for that particular property.

**UPDATE: Earmark Applications to the US Senate and House of Representatives**

Congressman Bergman has requested an Earmark of \$3.5m for Phase I (North of Mack Ave.). The request has passed through the House and we are awaiting authorization from the Senate. This would cover approximately 50-55% of the costs of Phase I or II. Phase I (North of Mack Ave.) is the more expensive of the two proposed sewer districts, mostly because of the size and the need for additional pumping stations. Representative Bergman personally toured the district August 6<sup>th</sup>, with a “meet and greet” hosted by Howe Marina.

Senator Stabenow has requested a \$14m earmark, but will probably be limited to around the \$3.5m that the House has agreed to. This Earmark is working its way through the system, but if all goes well, it still has to pass the full Senate. However, we will not be allowed to receive BOTH Earmarks, but we applied for both in hopes of receiving one of them. Senator Stabenow’s Senior Aide toured the proposed sewer district August 20<sup>th</sup>. The current Infrastructure bill winding its way through both the House and Senate may help with the availability of funds.

Senator Peters has requested a \$2m Earmark, but would not be very helpful because the Special Assessment costs would still be very high.

Both Senators have put forward requests to support funding the Township's sewer project.

As previously stated, if the Earmark requests are not successful, additional funding may be possible through the USDA/RD and EPA/Michigan State Tribal Assistance Grant Program (STAG).

#### **UPDATE: USDA Applications**

The application process is moving forward, but slowly. There seems to be a problems with certain requirements and conditions and communications with USDA. The USDA has not approved the requested grant application, but we are working with the USDA to specify exactly what they are requiring so we can respond appropriately. Representative Bergman, Senator Stabenow, and Senator Peters have agreed they will help the Township navigate through the USDA process, and help us get to a "positive outcome". Without a USDA grant and loan approval, even with the Earmarks, the project will be in jeopardy.

#### **Discussion: Next Steps**

There will be a preliminary review, which will take about 5-10 days for Phase I, and then begin work on Phase II. We are waiting for the decision on the Earmark funding, which should be towards mid-October. We are working with the USDA to meet their needs as well.

- Confirm funding
- Petitions to be sent out to the property owners
- Survey crews/area mapping
- State permits and reviews
- Township review
- USDA review
- Project goes out to bid
- If bids come back 10% or less of the estimated costs, the project will move forward
- If bids come back over 10% of the estimated costs, the property owners will be re-petitioned

#### **Guest Speakers: Schwab family and Aaron Nordman (Performance Engineering)**

Oliver and Ana Schwab were not able to attend due to issues in Washington D.C. They sent an e-mail to explain, and her letter will be included in the minutes as part of the permanent record.

Aaron Nordman (Precision Engineering) – He explained that the USDA recommended that we break the original district into two districts to maximize grants. The North District is more expensive than the South District. The collection system is extensive, requiring more pumping stations, as well as the distance to connect with the current system. The assessment costs between the two districts are similar, within about \$1,000 of each other.

#### **Community Q&A**

- Why was the original district divided into two districts?

This idea was suggested by those at the USDA/RD, and it may have actually made it more probable for funding possibilities. To receive an Earmark or grant for the entire project would have been extremely difficult and problematic, however, by breaking the district into two sections, the funding opportunities increased.

- Will the Township eventually try to combine the districts into one?  
 YES, if legally possible. That will be determined if we get enough funding for both districts, and if the lawyer, financial advisor and bond counsel agrees to the concept.
- Will the districts have the same or different assessment costs?  
 They will probably be different, but close to the same. At present, the estimates are within \$1,000 of each other.
- Could the residents of Sturgeon Island opt out of the sewer project?  
 Probably not, but it would a judgment for the Township Board to decide. The project has been in the works for about 2 years and if the residents of Sturgeon Island objected to their inclusion, opportunities to express their concerns and objections have been made available. The Township has had numerous meetings, information has been posted on the official Township website, the local newspaper has published many articles related to this project, and a citizens group distributes an informational newsletter to any interested party. The township provided the required public notice and held a public hearing. The Township has been as transparent as possible, so requesting removal of Sturgeon Island from the district at this time would jeopardize the entire project.  
 When deciding the regions to be included in the district, the focus was on the areas of greatest need. All the federal applications that have been submitted grant funding requests from the US Senate, House of Representative, and the USDA/RD, have included engineering reports on the proposed district(s). If the district(s) would change at this late date, we would have to start all over again, and thus forfeit any grant funding that may become available.
- There were several questions concerning grinder pumps.  
 Grinder pumps will be installed on private property, but will be owned and maintained by the Township. The costs of maintaining them will be included with the district(s) monthly operation and maintenance costs (O&M). This will assure the pumps will be working correctly at all times, preventing any major system failures. There will be warning lights in case of problems, and it may be possible for the warning devices to be hooked to the internet to give immediate notice if there are any issues with the mechanics.
- There were some questions concerning the special assessment petitions.  
 The petitions will go out to every property owner in the district(s). Current addresses for every property owner will be necessary. The petitions will be sent after funding is secured and all requirements have been met. If the Board receives over 50% of returned petitions indicating the property owners are IN FAVOR of the project moving forward, then it goes to the Township Board to either accept or deny the project. All petitions NOT returned will be counted as a NO vote.
- Question: Are you required to hook into the sewer system, even though you may have a working septic system?  
 YES. It is Michigan State law that requires everyone to hook into the system. Property owners are responsible for the expenses of hooking their house to the sewer

connection, and must disable their current septic system, either by having it removed, or filling the tank with sand.

- Questions about low Income financing.

There are funds available through the USDA/RD for low income aid and information will be made available for those interested. Also, there is a community based support committee looking into the possibility of helping those who need assistance. More information will be made available soon.

Next Meeting: October 5, 2021 6:30 pm

Citizen Comments: None

Sub-Committee Comments:

Bob Kramer (Chairman) and Trustee Vance thanked everyone for coming, and thanked Aaron Nordmann (Engineer) for his participation as well.

Respectfully submitted,  
Janet Vance, Township Board Trustee  
Sewer Sub-Committee Secretary

Written comments by Ana Schwab:

Good Morning Tuscarora Township,

My apologies for not being able to be in person with you all today. I wanted to share this statement as there have been a few updates since our last meeting together in July.

At the last meeting, I reported that Congressman Jack Bergman lead a funding request for the Township for the sewer project. This request passed the House of Representatives and awaits a vote in the Senate. Shortly after our meeting, the Senators of Michigan released the requests they were putting forward to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Environment. I am pleased to share that both Senators Stabenow and Peters put forward requests to support the Township's sewer project.

At this time, the House and Senate are finalizing a budget process which they hope to have wrapped up by September 30<sup>th</sup>. There is a chance that moderate Democrat Senators may not support the current size of the package and cause a delay. Should a delay arise, there will be a short-term funding measure that will give Congress a window to finalize the necessary pieces for the FY22 appropriations bills.

We are very hopeful that the support from Congressman Bergman, Senator Stabenow, and Senator Peters will lead to direct funding for the Township's sewer project.

Between our last meeting and now, the Township hosted Congressman Bergman and staff from Senator Stabenow's office.

The Congressman had an opportunity to come to the Township and meet with residents to discuss the sewer project. Residents shared the imperative nature of the project and appreciation for his support of the Township. Following the

visit, the Congressman shared how much he appreciated connecting with the residents, the Township Trustees, and to see for himself the need for a sewer system. The visit with Senator Stabenow's office was similar to Congressman Bergman's.

One piece that needs to be touched on is regarding USDA. As Trustee Kramer shared, the USDA did not support the application for a grant for the Township. This was incredibly disappointing. There have been a number of disconnects with USDA and this cannot go on any longer. When the Congressman and Senator Stabenow's staff were out, they were both informed of the disconnects and both reiterated their willingness to support the Township navigate the USDA process to lead to a positive outcome.

While it is disappointing that the USDA did not approve the grant, we are all still working together to ensure a positive outcome. In addition to USDA, there are a number of funding opportunities that will become available (should be by the end of the year) – that the Township is well positioned for.

Again, I am sorry I am not there with you today to answer your questions and dive into this further. I hope to be able to see you all at the next meeting.

I hope you all have a wonderful day and weekend.

Very best,

Ana Schwab