

Allegheny County Council

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Meeting Minutes

Thursday, April 19, 2018

4:00 PM

Conference Room 1

Committee on Public Works

Bob Macey, Chair; Sam DeMarco, Cindy Kirk, Paul Klein, Robert Palmosina, Denise Ranalli-Russell and DeWitt Walton, Members

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:02.

Invited Guests:

William D. McKain, CPA, Allegheny County Manager (or designee)
Stephen Shanley, Director, Allegheny County Department of Public Works
Matthew Brown, Chief, Allegheny County Emergency Services

Mr. McKain was present from the Office of the County Manager.

Mr. Hurley was present from the Department of Economic Development.

Mr. Shanley was present from the Department of Public Works.

Chief Brown was present from Emergency Services.

Mr. Barker was present from the Office of County Council.

II. Roll Call

Members Present: 2 - Robert Palmosina and Bob Macey

Members Absent: 4 - Cindy Kirk, Paul Klein, Denise Ranalli-Russell and DeWitt Walton

Members Phone: 1 - Sam DeMarco

III. Approval of Minutes

[10599-18](#)

Motion to approve the minutes of the March 13, 2018 meeting of the Committee on Public Works.

A motion was made by Palmosina, seconded by Macey, that this matter be Passed. The motion carried by a unanimous vote.

IV. Agenda Items**Discussion Topic - Landslides Within Allegheny County**

In response to a question from the Chair, Chief Brown indicated that at least 19 municipalities are currently experiencing landslide issues, and the Chair, Mr. McKain, and Chief Brown discussed the extent of the problem and what the presentation would be covering.

Mr. Hurley described the land use planning functions of the Department of Economic Development, and indicated that, prior to extensive land use planning, there was a comparatively haphazard approach to stormwater management. Mr. Hurley noted that the hilly terrain of this area and the older buildings compound the issue, and that part of the intent of subdivision, land use, and stormwater management planning efforts is to minimize the potential for landslide and similar events. Mr. Hurley highlighted the fact that landslide insurance cannot be obtained, and that this inevitably has an impact on development of residential and other development risks. Mr. Hurley concluded by noting that all of these measures are prospective, and that they do not cure issues that may apply to construction undertaken in the past, nor are they completely foolproof.

Mr. Shanley discussed the mechanics of landslides generally, with a focus on cut-and-fill slopes, which are relatively common along roadways in the County. Mr. Shanley also highlighted the importance of cleaning the County's 10,000 or so storm sewers, because those serve a critical function in draining water away from roads and the slopes adjacent to them.

The Chair discussed things that people and businesses sometimes do without really giving them a second thought, but which can have significant impacts on drainage capacity (e.g. cutting brush and leaving it along stream banks or discarding packaging or transportation packing materials in a fashion that lets them find their way into storm sewers). Mr. McKain noted the difference between pruning trees versus cutting them down entirely, as complete removal will kill the tree's root system and destabilize the soil in the area. Mr. Hurley discussed a few strategies for limiting tree falls in general, noting that fallen trees can function as ad hoc dams under the right circumstances.

Chief Brown discussed the weather that has created some of the landslide issues, highlighting ice jams and rain/snow precipitation alternating in comparatively rapid succession, both of which can contribute to drainage difficulties and/or cause landslides directly. Chief Brown described some of the coordination efforts that are underway between the County, the local municipalities, and the Commonwealth. Chief Brown related some personal experiences in which he has observed structures or roadways that were built in particularly dangerous fashions, specifically noting a home that has an open mineshaft entrance in its basement. Chief Brown discussed Emergency Management's efforts to collect damage assessments and relay them to PEMA, as well as Emergency Management's efforts to convey current, accurate information to the local emergency management coordinators and the importance of the local municipalities working with their emergency management coordinators to respond and allocate resources in the most efficient, expeditious fashion possible. Chief Brown also discussed the importance of working groups, citing the utility of coordinating Emergency Services and Public Works efforts at the County level. Chief Brown described some of the upcoming meetings that are intended to facilitate communications of the nature that he had discussed, and noted that Allegheny County is by no means alone in experiencing difficulties, and that PEMA is faced with the task of attempting to allocate resources among them and/or determining whether to seek a Federal emergency declaration and funding.

In response to a question from the Chair, Mr. McKain indicated that the County's ability to respond is determined by a number of factors, including budgetary appropriations, equipment and staff availability, and the like, and noted that resources must sometimes be diverted from other functions when an emergency situation arises.

Mr. McKain and Chief Brown discussed some of their experiences with the Route 30 landslide.

Mr. Palmosina indicated that the County's response to a landslide in Carnegie had been both effective and timely.

In response to a question from Mr. Palmosina, Chief Brown offered to provide a listing of the local emergency management coordinators, as well as noting that the list also appears on the Emergency Management website.

Mr. Palmosina and Chief Brown discussed the role of the Bureau of Mining Programs.

In response to a question from Mr. Palmosina, Mr. Hurley noted that the Department of

Economic Development does not have the resources to provide a Countywide grant program to provide assistance, but has offered to arrange loans through the Economic Development authorities, although no applications have yet been submitted.

Mr. Palmosina and Chief Brown discussed the County's efforts to assist the local municipalities with issues arising on municipal property, but highlighted that the County's ability to assist on private property is severely limited due to liability concerns and the unavailability of landslide insurance.

Mr. Shanley discussed the impact of liquid precipitation in terms of increased weight on slopes that are comprised of soil.

In response to a question from the Chair, Mr. Hurley discussed the County's interaction with COGs on landslide and stormwater management issues, and highlighted some instances of assistance that had been provided.

In response to a question from the Chair, Chief Brown noted that 911 should always be called in emergency situations, but that for non-emergency scenarios, he and Mr. McKain suggested contacting local emergency management administrators and/or the Department of Public Works, as appropriate. Mr. McKain highlighted the 412-350-INFO number for instances in which County-owned property is involved.

In response to questions from the Chair and Mr. Palmosina, Chief Brown noted that the County's damage assessment has already passed \$12 million, and that this figure is aggregated with the rest of the Commonwealth for the purpose of determining federal emergency funding eligibility.

Chief Brown noted that the current weather models are forecasting below average temperatures and above average precipitation through mid-May.

In response to a question from the Chair, Chief Brown noted that small local streams are only referenced to the Army Corps of Engineers once they are over a certain size, and the DEP is often involved with remediating small stream issues in the Commonwealth. Mr. Hurley noted that the prevailing thought regarding streams at one time was essentially to cover them with culverts or tunnels, which inherently restricts water flow, while the more modern approach is to leave streams as unrestricted as possible.

Mr. Palmosina, Mr. Hurley, and Chief Brown discussed the rapidity and violence with which flooding can happen.

V. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:56.