

**LUZERNE CONSERVATION DISTRICT
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
325 SMITHS POND ROAD, SHAVERTOWN, PA 18708
October 21, 2021**

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

Tim Ference, Chairman, called the meeting of the Luzerne Conservation District Board of Directors to order at 6:02 PM, noting that the meeting was being held in-person and via video/phone conference and that it was being recorded.

ROLL CALL - BOARD MEMBERS:

Timothy Ference	Chairman	Present
John J. Wilkes, Jr.	Vice-Chairman	Excused
Tracey Chonko	Secretary/Treasurer	Excused
Leonard J. Burger, Jr.	Member	Present via phone
Walter Griffith	Member	Present via video
John P. Hanish, Jr.	Member	Present via video
Gary A. Moyer, Sr.	Member	Excused

Ference noted Associate Director Tom Herbert was in attendance.

DISTRICT EMPLOYEES:

Hunter Bednarczyk, Conservation Specialist (E&S/NPDES Program)	written report submitted
Heather Graham, E&S/NPDES Program Coordinator	written report submitted
George Jones, MDC Program Technician	written report submitted
Deborah Josuweit, Office Administrator	Present /written report submitted
Jennifer Lauri, Ag Conservation Specialist	written report submitted
John Levitsky, Watershed Specialist	written report submitted
Joshua Longmore, Executive Director	Present/written report submitted
Michael Schlauch, Conservation Specialist (Ag & Roads Programs)	written report submitted
Owen Sprau, MDC Program Technician	written report submitted

AGENCY REPRESENTATIVES:

Andrew Kears	NRCS	Present via phone
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ORDER OF BUSINESS

(**Denotes motion or action taken by the district board)

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

MINUTES: Submitted by Josuweit.

****Motion by Griffith, seconded by Burger to approve the September 16, 2021, meeting minutes as submitted. The motion carried unanimously.**

FINANCIAL REPORTS: Submitted by Josuweit.

Ference noted the financial reports in the board packet. Longmore stated that E&S service fee income continues to be trending well above budget.

****Ference ordered the Financial Reports to be filed for audit.**

COOPERATING AGENCY REPORTS:

NRCS – Kears provided a written and verbal report. He noted the COVID-19 vaccine mandate requires all federal employees to be fully vaccinated by November 22nd.

DEP – Ference noted a written report was included in the board packet.

PACD – Ference noted a written report was included in the board packet.

PA DCNR – Ference noted the new PA DCNR Pinchot Forest District Service Forester for Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties, Julian Maza, submitted a written report.

Ference noted staff reports were included in the board packet under Item 4.

BUSINESS ITEMS:

Implementation Phase of Countywide Action Plan for Clean Water

Ference noted item 5a in the board packet. Longmore reported that DEP has announced an application round that will close next Friday for grants that will fund the next steps to get the Countywide Action Plans (CAPs) implemented. They are asking the county-level agencies that developed CAPs to submit the first set of projects that they would like to undertake within the next 12 to 18 months. Longmore and Levitsky met with Josh Glace, who will compile the information for the grant application to be submitted electronically. With the board's approval, Longmore will apply for funding for the projects. Without knowing how much funding to expect, Glace suggested an application of about half a million dollars. The proposed project requests are for: funds to supplement existing Growing Greener grant funds to implement the Conyngham Agricultural BMP project; riparian buffer plantings and a stormwater management rain garden on properties within the East Fork Harveys Creek Watershed; a staff position that would help provide outreach to municipalities, land users, and the public; and funds to support a WWSA rain garden project at Wyoming Valley West school district property. DEP also announced the grants to continue funding the CAP coordinators. Longmore spoke with his counterparts at the Susquehanna and Lackawanna CDs, and they all concurred that they appreciate the service received from Josh Glace and Larson Design Group and would be supportive of Lackawanna making the request to continue the shared position between the three counties. Longmore asked if the board was agreeable to this approach for 2022.

****Motion by Burger, seconded by Hanish to approve the implementation phase as presented by Longmore. The motion carried unanimously.**

Griffith asked about the impact of the WWSA PENNVEST grant/loan that was just reported in the newspaper. Longmore stated that Jeff Colella from WWSA explained that it was a loan that they will have to pay back unless other grants are received to offset the loan.

PENNVEST Grant/Loan Application for Drasher Ag BMP Project

Ference noted item 5b in the board packet for Drasher Ag BMP project. Longmore received a call from Team Ag, a private agricultural service consulting firm, inquiring about the district's willingness to sponsor a PENNVEST application for a local farmer, Kevin Drasher, to implement a plan for Ag BMP projects. Drasher had a conservation plan developed and applied for funding through the USDA Farm Bill EQIP Program, but the project didn't rank high enough for funding. He decided to work with Team Ag, which has experience coordinating PENNVEST grant/loan applications for similar projects. PENNVEST requires that a public entity act as the sponsor for the project. The requirements for the district would be to function as the formal sponsor and to act as a pass-through for the funding, with Team Ag handling the application, project bidding, implementation, and grant reporting. The district could request reimbursement for some administrative costs from the grant. Longmore spoke with Schlauch about his familiarity with the needs at Mr. Drasher's farm and asked for his input on whether the district would support the project being proposed by Team Ag. Schlauch indicated that the project is very similar to the one that was submitted for EQIP funding and that it would achieve the same goals. In a meeting with PENNVEST representatives, it was explained that this would be a loan or grant application. If PENNVEST chooses not to provide a grant, then a loan will be offered to the landowner. Mr. Drasher indicated that he would not be interested in a loan, and PENNVEST explained that the offer can be declined. Team Ag estimates that the request will be for about \$600,000. Longmore asked if the board was interested in taking on the sponsor role for this project.

****Motion by Griffith, seconded by Burger to approve the district acting as a sponsor in the PENNVEST application for the Drasher Ag BMP project. The motion carried unanimously.**

Longmore noted that he asked Lauri to contact Team Ag about the possibility of doing something similar with the Manzoni Project for which the district hasn't been able to find enough funds to implement project.

Plans for 2022 Mosquito-borne Disease Control Program

Ference noted the MDC program's season is winding down and it's time to plan for next season. Longmore mentioned how the mosquito season went longer than normal due to all the wet and warm weather, which resulted in a record number of complaints this year. He explained the proposed plan for 2022 is to apply for the grant to fund a program specialist and a program technician at the maximum hours DEP will offer: 1,320 hours and 1,000 hours respectively for the seasonal positions. The total grant application would be for \$95,840, and Longmore will submit the application with board approval.

****Motion by Hanish, seconded by Griffith to approve submitting the 2022 MDC grant as described. The motion carried unanimously.**

Use of Medical Loss Ratio Rebate from Highmark BC/BS

Ference referenced item 5d in the board packet. Longmore explained that the Affordable Care Act requires insurers to refund some of the premiums back to the premium payers if certain thresholds are not met. Because of this, the district received a rebate for 2020 from Highmark for \$2,244.29. There are two options for the use of those funds: distribute the rebate to staff members or apply it to next year's employer premium expenses. Since the district covers all premium costs and there aren't any out of pocket costs to the employees, Longmore recommended the second option – to apply it to next year's health plan costs.

****Motion by Griffith, seconded by Burger to approve the Highmark rebate to be applied to the 2022 health care premium costs. The motion carried unanimously.**

Alternative Health Insurance Reimbursement Benefit

Ference explained that more research is needed on the topic, so he entertained a motion to table this item until the next board meeting.

****Motion by Griffith, seconded by Burger to table the item until the next meeting. The motion carried unanimously.**

Snow Blower Purchase

Longmore requested approval to purchase a snowblower and presented the following options:

1. Bartron's – Husqvarna 24" wide self-propelled - \$899.
2. CH Waltz – Cub Cadet 24" - \$899.
3. Valley Power – Cub Cadet 26" - \$999.
4. Lowe's and Home Depot have a few in the same price range.

****Motion by Griffith, seconded by Burger to approve the purchase of the snowblower at a price not to exceed \$1,000. The motion carried unanimously.**

Employee Step Increase Notification

Ference acknowledged that Levitsky has successfully achieved a step increase within the district's Employee Pay Schedule.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: November LCD Board of Directors Meeting – 11/18/21 at 6:00 PM

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

****Motion by Griffith, seconded by Hanish to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried unanimously.**

The meeting adjourned at 6:42 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Deborah Josuweit, Office Administrator.

Approved by action of the Luzerne Conservation District Board of Directors on November 18, 2021



Chair or Vice Chair



Treasurer/Secretary