

THE VANTAGE POINT



American Planning Association
Pennsylvania Chapter

Making Great Communities

A Publication of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association

Untangling a Catch 22: “Selling” Stormwater Authorities to Skeptical Residents

By Eric Eckl, Water Words That Work, LLC

“I would support the charge to promote a continued standard of living, free of the constant worry of storm damage. Also to ensure what we have left today is there for my own children.”

“I DON’T OPPOSE WHAT YOU ARE TRYING TO DO. I OPPOSE IT COMING OUT OF MY POCKET”

These two quotes from Pennsylvania residents illustrate how water pollution and flooding are the proverbial “Catch 22” for local officials. If homes or streets flood, or if you close a swimming hole, affected residents cry foul. But when you try to solve the problems, other residents howl about the “rain tax.” So what’s a well meaning public servant to do?



Stormwater contributes to flooding and water pollution, and local governments facing mounting challenges with both of these problems. Recognizing this, the state legislature passed Act 68 in July, 2013. This law authorizes localities to create new stormwater authorities, or add stormwater responsibilities to any existing authorities that serve their residents.

Municipal authorities are commonplace in the commonwealth. About half of the state’s residents enjoy the services from at least one authority, which provide drinking water, sewage treatment, waste management, and recreational and community projects. And now, thanks to the state legislature, local governments have the option to add stormwater to that list, too.

Here are six reasons a stormwater authority might be right for your community:

1. **Funding.** Authorities can use the dollars for stormwater management, comply with state and federal requirements, and match grants.
2. **Maintenance.** Fee dollars can be used to maintain the stormwater system, reducing flooding and water pollution.
3. **Choices.** Fees can be set several ways to best address each community’s situation.

4. **Green Infrastructure.**

Stormwater funds can be invested in rain gardens, tree planting, wetland construction, stream improvements, etc.

5. **Focus.** Authorities can concentrate activities and funding exclusively on stormwater management, rather than all other responsibilities faced by municipalities.

6. **Compliance.** Many authorities already manage PA DEP and EPA pollution permits and other regulations that will impact stormwater management responsibilities.

So why *wouldn't* a local government adopt a stormwater authority? According to a survey of local government officials, the number one reason is fear of “backlash from residents.” And the reason for this anticipated backlash is simple: the stormwater authority is supported by a dedicated fee.

Between June and October, 2014, the Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds, a nonprofit environmental grantmaker, engaged Water Words That Work, LLC, a marketing and public relations agency that specializes in these types of issues, to explore the best ways for a local government to broach the subject of a stormwater authority with residents.

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The Foundation also convened a steering committee to oversee the firm's work. The committee included representatives from the the Pennsylvania Municipal Authorities Association, Pennsylvania State Association Boroughs, and Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors. Two consulting firms with expertise in this area, AMEC and Brian Auman Landscape Architects, carried the flag for the private sector. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund supported the effort.

Water Words That Work, LLC conducted three separate research projects to explore the issue from different angles:

- A literature review of case studies, market research, feasibility studies, and academic papers that touched on the introduction of dedicated stormwater fees.
- An online survey of authority, township, city, and borough officials
- An online panel survey of Pennsylvanians in 30 counties

Want to learn more? Plan to attend **"Solutions to the Alphabet Soup of Water Regulations"** our 2015 Spring Planning Forum on April 14, 2015. Details can be found at <http://planningpa.org/news/spring-forum-solutions-to-the-alphabet-soup-of-water-regulations/>

The researchers discovered that, by a slight margin, Pennsylvanians are more likely to approve than disapprove of a stormwater authority. But they also determined that there are five simple steps that a local government can take to move public opinion in favor of the move:

- Call the line item on the water bill a "Pollution Control and Flood Reduction Fee" or something similar. The name should emphasize the benefits rather than describe the problem.
- Clearly show ratepayers how the money will be invested. Most importantly, use "before and after" photos of that explicitly show residents how their dollars will be used.
- Present the fee as a solution to local problems and providing local benefits, and *not* as a measure to meet Chesapeake Bay or other regulatory requirements.
- Present the fee in its smallest increment: (e.g. dollars per household per month) rather than it's overall target (e.g. \$3 million over 5 years).
- Affirm to ratepayers that the money will be used for its stated purposes — and that the funds will not be "raided" for other priorities.

If your local government is giving any thought at all to adopting a stormwater authority, here is a simple step you can take to avoid the Catch 22! Visit this website: <http://stormwater.pennsylvaniawatersheds.org>

On this site, you will find copies of all the research studies, as well as a collection of customizable outreach product templates:

- Sample FAQs for you to customize and present to ratepayers
- A collection of photos to illustrate stormwater problems and solutions
- A collection of "before and after" illustrations
- A customizable PowerPoint presentation that you can use to brief community groups and civic organizations

Stormwater authorities present your community with an opportunity to become cleaner, greener, and safer. And the research and outreach materials available on this website can help you make that clear to your residents. ♦

Announcing Elections for Chapter Officers

Here is your chance to help lead your association *dedicated to promoting a culture of planning*

2015 is an election year for the Chapter. This summer we will hold elections for the Chapter's Board Officers - the positions of President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer.

Are you interested in serving?

- The bylaws are available at: <http://planningpa.org/about/bylaws/>
- The Chapter for two year terms which begin in January 2016 and conclude in December 2017.
- Talk with current officers for additional information.
- Share your interest with the Nominating Committee. Send an email of interest to Board President Brian O'Leary at BOLEARY@montcopa.org.
- Have additional questions? Please contact Brian at BOLEARY@montcopa.org or 610- 278-3728!

The official elections ballot will be **distributed online ONLY** by APA, our national office. Ballots will be distributed on August 1st, and voting will end in early September after Labor Day. APA will give the results to PA Chapter of APA in September. **If you are a voting member, it is important that we have an up-to-date email address for you.**

The election results will be announced via *The Vantage Point*, email news blast, Facebook, our website, and at the Chapter Annual Meeting. ♦



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Contact information is available at
www.planningpa.org under "About Us!"



INSIDER

A Message from President **Brian O'Leary, AICP**

Hello Fellow Planners. The Chapter and its Sections had another strong year in 2014, which we're now highlighting in the annual report published in this issue of Vantage Point. In 2014, we supported innovative training for professional and citizen planners, held an informative conference in Philadelphia, honored cutting-edge planning initiatives with our awards program, began a Great Places program, began a spring educational forum, created a Shale Energy committee, and adopted a new Strategic Plan for the Chapter for 2015 through 2018. *As always, we continue to be the voice for planning in Pennsylvania.*

The Chapter Board met in early-December and adopted a budget for 2015, which is expected to be about \$220,000. Once again, the budget is very tight, but we've managed to **not raise our Chapter-only membership fees for another year.**

Our largest expenses include approximately \$78,500 for the professional firm that runs the Chapter, \$74,900 for the annual conference, \$8,550 for our communications and newsletter, \$8,300 for the six Sections, and \$5,950 for training and Certification Maintenance programs.

As one would expect, running the Chapter on a day to day basis is our biggest expense; it's also our most important one, since we couldn't accomplish any of our work without this help. Although the annual conference is very expensive to run, we often receive a lot of revenue to offset or even exceed the expense.

Overall, our membership remains stable, although we've seen a very slight decline from 2495 members in 2013 to 2401 members in 2014. I encourage all of our members to reach out to folks who don't belong to encourage them to become members, either through the American Planning Association or as a Chapter-only member.

We had two new, exciting and successful ventures in 2014, and we expect to continue these in 2015:

- The Chapter will once again be sponsoring a **Great Places** initiative, with a theme of Great Public Spaces and Great Neighborhoods for 2015. Program criteria and nomination forms will be available in the late winter, and awards will be announced later in the fall.
- In cooperation with PA DCED and the Local Partnership Training Series, the Chapter will organize a Spring Planning Forum to be held in **Harrisburg on April 14**. This one-day event will feature Mark Gutshall of LandStudies and will focus on understanding water regulations and responding to requirements with projects that address needs, build partnerships, and capitalize on overlapping interests. *Solutions to the Alphabet Soup of Water Regulations* will help attendees clarify their understanding of TMDL, MS4, stormwater, and other water-based issues and regulations, and provide details on innovative projects that have addressed these difficult issues through partnerships.

The Chapter will also continue its annual training series and annual conference:

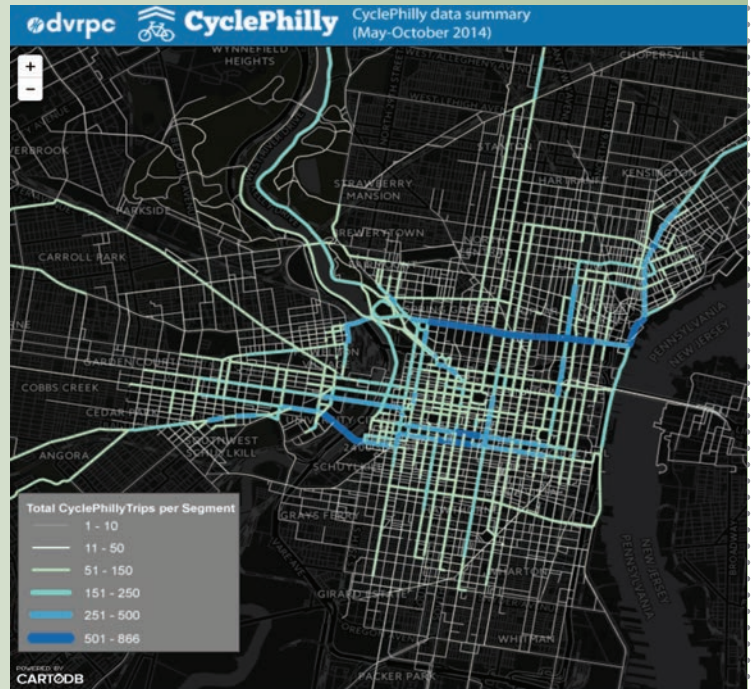
- This year, our annual training series will focus on the impact of **public private partnerships** and their usefulness to local municipalities. Four sessions around the state will be led by Sean Garrigan of Stromberg/Garrigan Associates.
- The "2015 Annual Conference *Making Great Communities Happen*" will be in Pittsburgh this year from October 18 to the 20! The conference will be held at Westin Convention Center Pittsburgh, close to the strip district (not what you think!), Market Square, the Andy Warhol Museum, Consol Energy Center (The Who will be there on the 23rd!), and many other venues, museums, restaurants and shops.

Hope to see you in Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, or some other great location around the Commonwealth. ♦

CyclePhilly

helps planners in Greater Philadelphia build better bike routes

Last spring, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) partnered with Code for Philly, an open group of citizens using technology to modernize citizenship in Philadelphia, to launch CyclePhilly, a smartphone app for recording regional bicycle trips. Data from the app will be used by regional transportation planners to make Philly a better place to ride. DVRPC recently launched an interactive webmap that symbolizes CyclePhilly bicycle trips by trip purpose, and allows users to identify and download trip data. To learn more, visit www.dvrpc.org/webmaps/cyclephilly. ♦



welcome
New PA Chapter Members!

WE WELCOME THE FOLLOWING NEW MEMBERS who joined the PA Chapter over the past few months. The PA Chapter membership includes nearly 2,600 planning officials, professional planners, and others who care about how Pennsylvania continues to grow the places where we live, work, and enjoy recreation. The Board and staff are available to answer any questions. Feel free to contact the Chapter Office at 717-671-4510. Board member contact information is available at www.planningpa.org under **About Us**.

Individual Members:

- Dina Klavon, *Southwest Section*
- Michelle MacKinnon, *Southeast Section*
- Ashton Mook, *Central Section*
- Raymond Robbins, *Central Section*
- Elizabeth Woods, *Southeast Section* ♦

STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS Available!

Each year the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association offers a scholarship program to support individuals seeking funds for academic degree programs, internships, and professional development activities that enhance planning at the local, regional, state, and national levels. The program is supported by:

- The Francis Pitkin scholarship fund and funding from the Richard P. Byler Charitable Fund of The Philadelphia Foundation
- Funding from The Leslie and Greta Spaulding Education Fund
- Funding from the Richard G. Bickel, FAICP, Planning Education Award

The annual applications have been released to fund scholarships for the 2015-2016 academic year. **The deadline to apply is April 30, 2015. Recipients will be notified by June 30, 2015.**

Detailed information can be found at <http://planningpa.org/for-planners/professional-planners/student-scholarships/> ♦



2015 Nominations Now Open for Great Places in Pennsylvania

Nominations are now open for the APA PA “Great Places in Pennsylvania” initiative to recognize and celebrate Great Neighborhoods and Great Public Spaces. Both are essential components of successful communities, whether they are rural, suburban or urban.

Great Places are unique, memorable places that display a wealth of best practices in community planning and serve as models for other communities. They represent the gold standard in terms of having a true sense of place, cultural interest, community involvement, and a sustainable vision for tomorrow.

Pennsylvania is full of amazing neighborhoods and public spaces that make it a wonderful place for people to live, work and play. **Do you know of a neighborhood or public space that truly stands out in what it offers residents and visitors? Do you think it merits designation as a Great Place in Pennsylvania? If so, NOMINATE IT!**

Nominations will be accepted through April 10, 2015. For more information, including guidelines, category criteria, and the nomination form, please visit the APA PA website (<http://planningpa.org/>). All Great Neighborhoods and Great Public Spaces

nominations must be submitted online at <http://planningpa.org/events-training/great-places-in-pennsylvania/great-places-submission-form/>

Chapter members are not only encouraged to submit nominations, but are also encouraged to promote the Great Places initiative to colleagues, local municipalities, and others. A total of 27 nominations were submitted in 2014 and resulted in the designation of four Great Neighborhoods and three Great Public Spaces. With your help, more Great Places can be designated in 2015 and we can celebrate these achievements together. ♦



The Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association celebrates excellence in planning.