

Minutes from Meeting held September 8, 2020

The September meeting of the South Shenango Township Supervisors was held on Tuesday, September 8, 2020 at the South Shenango Township Building, located at 6865 Collins Road, Jamestown, PA 16134. The meeting was called to order at 2:30 pm by Chairperson Joe Livingston. Present were Supervisors Joe Livingston, Mike Richter and Nick Ceremuga. Roadmaster Jamie Fries; Solicitor Alan Shaddinger; Secretary Rebecca Andrew; and Property Maintenance Karen Hanna. Several visitors were present. Minutes from the August 11th meeting were reviewed and approved with a motion by Joe Livingston and a second by Nick Ceremuga. MC

The Treasurer's report was as follows:

South Shenango Township General Fund

Previous Month's Balance – July 31, 2020	\$ 164,851.05
August Credits/Deposits	\$ 38,510.78
August Credits/Interest	\$ 11.73
August Debits/Checks	\$ <u>36,819.71</u>
Balance as of August 31, 2020	\$ 166,553.85

South Shenango Twp. State Account

Previous Month's Balance – July 31, 2020	\$ 154,383.77
August Credits/Deposits – Interest	\$ 5.51
August Debits/Checks	\$ <u>21,245.81</u>
Balance as of August 31, 2020	\$ 133,143.47

Joe Livingston moved to accept the Treasurer's Report with a second by Nick Ceremuga. MC

Supervisors from North Shenango Township were invited and attended the meeting.

Attorney Brett Stedman of Ekker, Kuster, McCall & Epstein, LLP, attended to present information that was gathered from right to know requests and other sources, regarding the North and South Shenango Joint Municipal Authority. Attorney Stedman was hired by South Shenango Township to investigate allegations against the North and South Shenango Joint Municipal Authority.

Mr. Shaddinger asked to be excused from the meeting.

Attorney Stedman presented information that included the following:

SUMMARY OF CONCERNS WITH BOARD MEMBERS

Fiscal Irresponsibility

- Board members Valerie Kean Staab (chair), John Tucker, and Dieter Meyer, along with former manager Mike Klink, attended both the PMAA and WEFTEC conventions.
- From years 2015 through 2019, at least \$113,000 was spent on "Board Expenses". An overwhelming majority of this amount was spent on these 4 individuals attending 2 conventions per year. This accounts for nearly 2% of the annual spending. Board expenses were over budget every year during that period. For 2020, they simply doubled the budgeted amount to \$20,000.
- Covered sightseeing, booze, taxis, tourist items, \$800 meals. All expenses paid vacation. At the very least, some guest expenses were paid for. Likely illegal.

- The Authority bond rating decreased from A- to BBB. Board expenses were cited as a factor in the downgrade.
- At least \$113,000 spent in board expenses for an unpaid board position.

Mismanagement

- Revolving door employment – at least 6 employees have quit, retired, or been terminated this year, including the manager.
- At least 6 former employees have reported that the Authority board chair and a couple other members have been hostile employers who micromanage every aspect of the plant and leave members feeling as unappreciated, expendable employees.
- Basic operations have not been occurring for months.
- Staff asked to spy on other staff members, with wild rumors and accusations made.
- During manager's vacation, the board chair was made acting manager, a nearly unprecedented occurrence, especially considering the chair has no technical management experience.
- The plant currently lacks knowledgeable leadership, since the manager was pushed out the door by 3 members of the board.
- Employees openly berated by the board chair.
- Hostile work environment has resulted in new, inexperienced employees being hired, which increases the risk of injury or environmental damage.

Meetings concerns

- Failure to provide adequate notice to members of meetings.
-
- Emergency meetings called without need to avoid public notice.
- Abuse of COVID-19 relaxation of requirements to further lack of public input and knowledge into the board's operations.
- Board chair frequently screams and is abusive in meetings to fellow board members and the public who questions her actions. This includes township supervisors, who she acts disrespectfully toward and accuses of committing Sunshine Law violations for attending.

Invasion of privacy

- Audio and visual recording system throughout the office.
- Initially done without notice or consent, including in all office areas

Failure of confidence

- Board is entrusted to provide adequate operation of the sewer plant and infrastructure.
- Drama, inability to work constructively.
- Desire of some board members to turn Authority into personal business with friends and allies as employees

Explanation of the Sewer Authority Boards Role:

Board is Appointed-3 members from North Shenango Township and 3 members from South Shenango Township

They are an oversight body

The manager runs the plant and the employees are under the manager.

The Boards job is not to do day to day tasks.

Some of the questions that were asked during the discussion

When attending conferences did the board members attend classes?

Are we going to be able to recoup any of the money that the board members spent?

Are these allegations considered criminal?

Do you have to have a license to manage the Sewer Authority?

Yes

Are there laws regarding a hostile work environment?

Why did the investigation only go back to 2015?

What is the next step?

The Supervisors will be discussing this.

When will more information be available to the public regarding the investigation?

The township will provide information to the public as it becomes available.

Does the Sewer Authority send the Township reports?

They have in years past, but recently all information has had to be requested.

What are the requirements of being appointed on the Sewer Authority Board?

You have to own property in the Township.

How can you stop the Sewer Board from muting the public during meetings? How can the public be heard?

Some of the questions were answered and some were not able to be answered due to this being an ongoing investigation.

General Comments

Board members have stated they are entitled to the board expenses.

It is difficult to get an elected official or an appointed board member removed from office. The townships do not have the sole authority to do this.

The only people who can change the bi-laws of the Sewer Authority are the Board members themselves.

Bond ratings can result in higher interest rates.

It was stated that you need 2 operators to run the sewer plant.

Maintenance is lacking at the NSSJMA. There are tap-in backlogs and other day to day business is not being addressed.

Bills that were sent out from NSSJMA were incorrect.

The townships are receiving calls because they have been unable to reach anyone at the Sewer Authority.

Supervisors' Report – The South Shenango Board of Supervisors sent a letter to NSSJMA Board member John Tucker, asking for his voluntary resignation. The letter was sent by certified mail, and the return receipt came back to the township.

No further response has been received from Mr. Tucker.

Visitors Acknowledged – John Novak, commented on a property, he said he noticed the yard had been mowed. He thanked Karen for her efforts.

Kimber Brandon, 7021 North Dr., Grandview Allotment, had concerns regarding a fence and goats in the Allotment. Karen will look into it.

Roadmaster's Report – Jamie Fries reported on the following.

They finished single and double seal on Snake Road.

They plan to work on dirt roads and cold patch.

Attorney's Report –None.

Building Code Official – John Prosek reported on the following.

It has been a below average season for building.

Property Maintenance Official- Karen Hanna reported on the following.

Two properties in Douthett Allotment have corrected property maintenance issues.

She took pictures at another property in Douthett.

She continues to send violations, a lot of them are camper violations.

Karen questioned whether she is permitted to be on private and or public properties when looking into violations.

The response was: She should try to collect information from outside the property or get permission from property owners. Although anywhere the public is allowed, she is allowed.

Secretary's Report –

Presented

Mildred Rudge Estate

Joe Livingston made a motion to accept the Mildred Rudge Estate subdivision with a second by Nick Ceremuga. MC

Gave copies of current budget figures.

Proposals for private sale of tax claim land

Liquid Fuels Estimated allocation for 2021.

Correspondence Received – See Above.

Joe Livingston moved to approve the July bills with a second by Mike Richter. MC

At 4:30 pm the meeting adjourned into Executive Session. The regular meeting reconvened at 5:45 pm

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:46 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Andrew, Secretary