



REPORT ON MCCD

January 2020

By Paula Heeschen for Brodhead Watershed Association

MCCD excels at speedy permit review

Technical staff at Monroe County Conservation District offer the average shortest permit review times in Pennsylvania.

Head Resource Conservationist Lori Kerrigan shared that statistic with board members attending the Jan. 16 meeting, noting also other results of a statewide report on districts.

“We are 60% faster than any other place across the state,” Kerrigan said.

Districts are allowed a total of 107 business days to review development plans. “We’re at 52 business days,” she said, while some applications go 130 days before permits receive approval. That’s because in many cases developers must resubmit their plan to correct shortcomings, and counting starts again.

Kerrigan and board Chairman Pat Ross credited the district’s efficiency to the fact that MCCD has two engineers on staff, while other districts have one or none. County commissioners authorized the second engineer position several years ago, noting the pressure to move building and development plans more quickly.

Kerrigan said both the district staff and directors have taken steps toward working more effectively with project applicants and entities such as the county Industrial Development Authority. “It’s stuff that we should all be proud of,” she said.

New District Manager Kristina Heaney, at her first board meeting, reiterated a commitment to working with the public, including municipal officials and builders/developers.

“We are going to try to create a face-to-face” approach, Heaney said, by giving each of the county’s 20 municipalities a review of what the district does and what services it can offer.

After the meeting, Heaney expanded on the need for education and communication. District engineers and technicians review building project plans and inspect sites that often involve creating infrastructure, from culverts to retaining ponds. Those structures will exist, in effect, “in perpetuity,” Heaney noted, adding that’s why district staff so carefully review plans. It’s thus key to explain the “why” and “how” up front.

Also at the meeting, state Department of Environmental Protection Conservation District Field Representative Shane Kleiner encouraged board members to sign up for a Feb. 27 leadership training session. The session will outline directors’ responsibilities under conservation district law, he said.

In other business, the district board:

- Hired senior office assistant Alesia Gallo as a full-time environmental educator. The district’s Environmental Education section has been understaffed since the death last fall of longtime educator Karen Boyle, and current EE Josie Bonham-Marino is going part-time.
- Approved the reclassification of staffer Barbara Bistras, now administrative coordinator, to finance manager to better reflect her role.

- Heard Brodhead Watershed Association Executive Director Bob Heil welcome Heaney and offer her a “whirlwind” tour of the watershed.
- Approved sending a letter of support to the BWA for a Japanese knotweed removal project on Mill Creek. The support does not involve funding, but BWA could tap the district’s pesticide application specialist for assistance.

The MCCD board’s next meeting is at 8 a.m. Thursday, Feb. 20, 2020, at Kettle Creek Environmental Education Center, 8050 Running Valley Road, Bartonsville.