



MCCD MONTHLY

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By Paula Heeschen for Brodhead Watershed Association

District board's 'business' should be conservation

The Monroe County Conservation District Board didn't achieve a quorum on May 18, but board Chairman Joe Hanyon called the meeting to order anyway.

Immediate past chairman Mark Sincavage promptly cited Robert's Rules of Order, noting you don't call a meeting to order without a quorum. The meeting proceeded anyway, without any formal action taken but with plenty of further contention.

Hanyon noted that supervisors from Tunkhannock and Tobyhanna townships might return to the board to repeat their opposition to the redesignation of Tunkhannock Creek to an Exceptional Value stream, based on scientific evidence reflecting its high quality. They have argued that an EV designation could harm development.

Sincavage said that the district board had written a letter in 2005 supporting the upgrade, and wondering why the board has to take the issue up again.

But board member Heidi Secord said Tunkhannock officials had asked for a current letter opposing the measure — a reversal she did not support. Meanwhile district Manager Adam Schellhammer suggested the board should heed science, not socioeconomic impacts.

Conservation district law in fact does not address such impacts. It does require directors to "provide for the conservation of the soil, water and related resources of this Commonwealth ... and thereby ... preserve natural resourcescarry out preventive and control measures within the district, including but not limited to ... changes in use of land."

Yet former district manager Craig Todd, who attended the meeting, encouraged directors to consider a stream redesignation's potential impacts on development. "There's plenty of ... information to demonstrate that a (stream) upgrade doesn't have a negative impact," Todd said. Sprawling Kalahari waterpark, for example, went up adjacent to an EV stream.

It makes sense, Todd said, for the district board to weigh in on stream redesignations because it is part of the district's mission under conservation district law to protect streams from adverse impacts.

The board remains deeply divided over issues like this. Hanyon and allied members Dave Moyer, an excavator, former Pocono Township supervisor Pat Ross and Monroe County Commissioner Charlie Garris often vote on the side of business interests rather than resource conservation. Moyer and Ross were absent on May 18, as was member Paul Canevari, an occasional Secord ally along with Sincavage, and without a quorum the board couldn't vote on the stream redesignation or any other matter.

Since that meeting Canevari has resigned from the district board, giving county commissioners an opportunity to appoint a new member. Recent appointees have been business-friendly rather than the

resource conservationists the law calls for. The law also directs the commissioners to choose a replacement from recent board nominees (Todd was the most recent nominee) or current associate members.

The redesignation will appear on this Thursday's Conservation District Board meeting agenda, along with other contentious issues like how the district assists townships with dirt and gravel roads. Without Canevari, the board is even more weighted toward business over environment.

The district board should steadfastly support its staff's efforts to protect the soil and water of Monroe County. Commissioners, likewise, should respect the spirit and letter of the law and appoint a conservation-minded member to the district board when they meet in on June 21.

The MCCD board next meets at 8 a.m. Thursday, June 15, at Kettle Creek Environmental Education Center, 8050 Running Valley Road, Bartonsville.