

## Plumbing Advisory Board

January 19, 2023

Advisory Board Attendees: Ed Bigley, John Inks, Regis Claus, John Cummins, Ruthann Omer (via phone), Jim Eichenlaub

Absent Advisory Board Members: William Price, David Green, John Moffit

ACHD staff Attendees: Geoff Rabinowitz, Drew Grese, Jeff Czochara, Brendan Turley, Todd Bogdanovich

Mr. Bigley called the meeting to order and requested votes to approve the minutes from October.

**Action:** Mr. Claus motioned to approve the minutes from October 2022. Mr. Cummins seconded the motion.

**The motion passed unanimously by a 6-0 vote.**

Mr. Grese provided the Advisory Board with the program's end of year statistics (such as number of plans submitted, amount of revenue, number of inspections performed, etc) for 2022. He stated the program is still short on manpower. The program is down five inspectors and two administrative roles. He did note that an interview was scheduled for the following week to fill an inspector position. He also informed the Board that he, and Mr. Bigley, met with County Manager McKain in November. Mr. Bigley stated that this administration is on its way out, and that it would be wise to get in right away with the next administration to advocate for getting the inspectors moved out of their current bargaining unit so that their pay could be increased so that the positions will be easier to fill after wages are made more competitive. He also noted that the increased service requirements, from 5 years previously to now 10 years, to vest in a pension also contributed to recruitment difficulties.

Mr. Eichenlaub floated the idea of having contracted municipal building inspectors help with plumbing inspections. Mr. Inks noted that those building inspectors are not plumbers. Mr. Eichenlaub stated that they could be certified. Mr. Inks stated that the certification exam being referred to is an open-book, two-hour test. Mr. Grese stated that the exam tests knowledge of the ICC, not Article XV. Mr. Bigley stated that the plumbing program brings in millions of dollars per year, and that ACHD's plumbers are just asking to be paid what Allegheny County Airport Authority plumbers are paid. Mr. Cummins agreed that the pay is less than what it should be.

Deputy Director Rabinowitz asked if the policy is for inspections to be conducted within three working days of being requested. Mr. Grese stated that it was, and that inspections were performed the day they were requested, or the next day. Mr. Cummins stated that the virtual inspections are very helpful.

Mr. Grese stated that a contract has been signed and that the program had met with the ICC in the middle of December, that the draft code update has been started and he expects to receive it within the next few days from the ICC.

Mr. Grese stated that ACHD's fees have increased by 6% across the board, not just within the plumbing program. He shared a copy of 2023's new fee schedule with the Advisory Board. He stated that the plumbing test was administered in December. 32 plumbers took the journeyman exam, of which 21 passed. 29 plumbers took the master exam, of which 15 passed. The next exam is scheduled for April 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023, in the same location. The deadline to apply to take the exam is March 13<sup>th</sup>.

The Advisory Board next heard a presentation by Eric Fehr regarding the Fernco International Pushfit Coupling. He stated that this product is an internal coupler, in either 4" or 6" diameter. It is strictly for DWV application and complies to AJTMC 1173. He noted that a sister company exists in England, this product had been approved by the Water Research Center, it is intended for drainage applications, he is looking for the Advisory Board to approve the product, and he is curious if the Advisory Board has any objections regarding the product. Mr. Bigley asked about debris being caught within the product. Mr. Fehr replied that slope exists within the product. Mr. Cummins expressed skepticism and stated that he would never install this product inside of a house as toilet paper would jam it up and catch and cause clogs. He could envision using the product for stormwater applications, but not with sewage. He stated that the flow line will be interrupted and that there will not be enough volume to push through. He stated that this product will cause back-ups on horizontal sanitary lines, but acknowledged that it would be fine on vertical sanitary lines. Mr. Fehr stated that there have been no such issues elsewhere in the country and that every county around Allegheny County is using this product. Mr. Inks stated he agreed with Mr. Cummins' concerns. Mr. Eichenlaub asked what the benefit of this product was, versus the approved Fernco product. Mr. Fehr stated that the other Fernco doesn't have internal coupling. Mr. Bigley asked if this product is severely cheaper in price. He didn't see the times that it would be needed as being few and far between. Mr. Fehr stated that the product is used extensively by radon contractors. Mr. Eichenlaub said that it fine, and that radon isn't in our code. Mr. Inks asked if the product was tested in one day. Mr. Fehr stated that it was, at a lab in Atlanta. Mr. Inks stated the NSF does more testing of products and that the drainage has not been checked over time.

The Advisory Board next heard a presentation by Chad Conley and Brendan Daugherty regarding Siphonic roof drains. Mr. Daugherty stated that this system has been approved in Ontario. The system is a replacement for traditional gravity roof drains. It eliminates air from the venting system, and can use half the diameter of the pipe. There are no installed slopes or pitches, which can eliminate vertical builds. This is a big advantage for large buildings. It has been used in Europe since the 1980s, and has been used in thousands of projects across the United States. Mr. Conley pointed out that emergency overflow is still part of the system. Mr. Cummins asked how the volume is handled in emergency drain situations. Mr. Daugherty replied that the system is IPC and UPC approved, and that the velocity of the water is how the water is gotten through the pipe. He stated that water won't sit in horizontal pipes. Mr. Inks stated that this is not the first time that siphonic drains have been in front of the Advisory Board, the drains work, and he likes them. Mr. Bigley noted that they are not approved in Kentucky. Mr. Cummins asked to clarify if they are not currently approve for use within Allegheny County. Mr. Grese replied that this is correct, but that one was accidentally installed in Moon Township but did not suffer from any problems. Mr. Czochara concurred, and noted that 8 or 9 years have passed since the Moon Township installation.

**Action:** Mr. Bigley moved to reject the acceptance of the Fernco Pushfit Coupling into the Allegheny County Plumbing Code. Mr. Inks seconded the motion.

**The motion passed unanimously by a 6-0 vote.**

Regarding the Siphonic Roof Drain, Mr. Bigley suggested looking into Boston's acceptance of the product. Mr. Cummins suggested tabling discussion of this product until the next meeting. Mr. Grese stated that he will call Boston and put this item on the agenda for the next Advisory Board meeting.

**Action:** Mr. Bigley motioned to table discussion on acceptance of the Siphonic Roof Drain System until the Advisory Board's next meeting. Mr. Inks seconded the motion.

**The motion passed unanimously by a 6-0 vote.**

**Mr. Inks moved to adjourn the meeting, Mr. Cummins seconded the adjournment.**