

## Plumbing Advisory Board

October 19, 2023

Advisory Board Attendees: Ed Bigley, John Inks, John Cummins, Jim Eichenlaub, David Green

Absent Advisory Board Members: William Price, Regis Claus, Ruthann Omer, John Moffit

ACHD staff Attendees: Geoff Rabinowitz, Drew Grese, Jeff Czochara, Elizabeth Rubenstein,  
Todd Bogdanovich

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

**Action:** Mr. Cummins motioned to approve the minutes from January 2023. Mr. Inks seconded the motion.

**The motion passed unanimously by a 5-0 vote.**

Bill Culwell, a licensed master plumber from Harrisburg, gave a presentation to the Board to request approval for the use of Altro Flooring in the creation of a wet room or modified wet room shower area. Mr. Culwell stated that he has worked with Altro flooring for the last fifteen years. During a final inspection, ACHD Plumbing Inspector Supervisor Harry Fedorek identified Altro flooring as not being approved for use in Allegheny County. Mr. Culwell stated that a test conducted by a third-party demonstrates that Altro flooring does meet Allegheny County's standards.

Mr. Cummins asked what the product is used for. Mr. Culwell stated that the product takes the place of tile and liner. It does not fold or bend easily. It helps disabled individuals have shower access in spaces limited in size. It has a coefficient with friction to help prevent slipping. It is used in residential and commercial facilities. It is used in UPMC facilities. Mr. Grese asked what the waterproof mechanism is between this and the drain body. Mr. Culwell replied that a clamping drain and silicon seal are used. Mr. Czochara asked if the clamp is on top. Mr. Culwell replied that the screen covers the clamp. Mr. Eichenlaub asked if the product is installed by a plumber or a contractor. Mr. Culwell stated that it needs to be installed by someone who is certified, due to the use of specialized tools. Hands-on certification is attained during a four-day course in Massachusetts. Mr. Bigley stated that he has seen a comparable product used in hospital patients' rooms. He asked if any hospitals use this product for showers. Mr. Culwell stated that he would need to look for an answer to that, but believed that he could find an example. Mr. Grese asked how the product holds up over time. Mr. Culwell did not have data available for that. Mr. Cummins asked if data existed for the joints' expansion and contraction. He expressed concern about the constant flex over time, particularly in corners. Mr. Culwell stated that this is not a new product and has been utilized a lot in Europe. Mr. Cummins asked how it was bonded to the subsurface. Mr. Culwell replied that a two-part adhesive is used. Mr. Eichenlaub asked that if this product was adopted by the IPC and IRC since 2009, has it been removed from Allegheny County's Plumbing Code. Mr. Grese and Mr. Czochara replied that was not the case. Mr. Culwell reiterated that he has an open permit and is trying to get this product approved for his final inspection.

**Action:** Mr. Eichenlaub motioned to approve Altro flooring for use in the creation of a wetroom or modified wet room shower area. Mr. Green seconded the motion.

**The motion failed by a vote of 2 in favor, and 3 against.**

**Mr. Eichenlaub and Mr. Green voted in favor of the motion.**

**Mr. Inks, Mr. Cummins, and Mr. Bigley voted against the motion.**

**Action:** Mr. Eichenlaub motioned to re-examine this agenda item at the Board's next meeting. Mr. Green seconded the motion.

**The motion passed unanimously by a 5-0 vote.**

Mr. Grese introduced Josh Ohrman, the head of the Mon-Young Plumbing School to the Board. Next, he updated the Advisory Board regarding virtual inspections. 1,955 virtual inspections have been conducted, mainly by one inspector. This has reduced the workload burden for the other inspectors. Mr. Cummins asked if virtual inspections are available to all plumbers, or if the program is still trialing virtual inspections in a closed, beta test. Mr. Grese stated that requesting virtual inspections are possible for all plumbers, and that a mass email had been sent to inform them of this.

Mr. Grese informed the Board that the next plumbing exam will be held on December 8<sup>th</sup>, and that the venue has been booked. Regarding program staffing, two Account Clerk positions have been combined into one Senior Secretary position. At the time of April's Board meeting, the program was short-staffed by 4 inspectors. Since then, Patrick Nestler has been promoted from Inspector to Plans Examiner, 2 other inspectors had been hired and are working for the program, and the program is currently onboarding 2 other applicants who the program had interviewed and extended employment offers to.

The planned move of the Lawrenceville office to the North Side's Fulton Street has been cancelled. A new location to move to has not yet been identified. Mr. Grese did state that he would like the program to again have a presence in McKeesport.

Mr. Grese suggested that the Board meet on January 18<sup>th</sup>, April 11<sup>th</sup>, July 18<sup>th</sup>, and October 17<sup>th</sup> in 2024. There were no objections or concerns raised about these dates.

Mr. Green shared the news that he was named the Acting Director of PLI in July.

Mr. Cummins shared that there has been pushback from plumbing instructors regarding the potential of a practical portion of the plumbing exam. He stated that the concerns regarded safety. Mr. Grese stated that this will need to be discussed further, and that he likes in theory the idea of a practical component for the plumbing exam. Mr. Eichenlaub suggested that the NOCTI test be looked at for ideas.

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