

## Plumbing Advisory Board

April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023

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

Absent Advisory Board Members: William Price, David Green, Regis Claus, Ruthann Omer

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

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

Mr. Grese informed the Advisory Board that ACHD had been in back-and-forth communication with the International Code Council's editor regarding Article XV. He complimented Mr. Czochara for having done a great job with this project. He stated that the final rendition of Article XV was sent to the printer on April 7<sup>th</sup>, and that it will be available in another 4 to 6 weeks. ACHD will meet with the plumbing schools to discuss the plumbing exam and implementation timelines. Mr. Cummins asked if plumbing school instructors will have input and the ability to ask questions. Mr. Grese stated that the plumbing schools will have input and that ACHD will reach out to Josh Ohrman of the Mon-Yough Plumbing School.

Mr. Grese next updated the Advisory Board regarding virtual inspections. He stated that the final version of the Virtual Inspection Policy had been signed by Acting Director Patrick Dowd on February 28<sup>th</sup>, and that virtual inspections went live on March 6<sup>th</sup>. Victor Hildebrand has been performing most of the virtual inspections, though other inspectors have done them periodically, but all inspectors have been stringently enforcing eligibility criteria for virtual inspections. 863 virtual inspections have been conducted, and no complaints about them have been received. Mr. Eichenlaub requested a copy of the virtual inspection policy. Mr. Grese stated that he would provide it. Mr. Rabinowitz asked if virtual inspections will be able to be requested when inspections will be scheduled online. Mr. Grese stated that they would be.

Mr. Grese then updated the Board regarding April's plumbing exam. In April, 100 applicants took the Journeyman exam and 50 applicants took the Master exam. The exam went well, but Mr. Grese reminded everyone that grading the exams will take time. He has already reserved the same location to conduct the plumbing exam on December 8<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Bogdanovich will update ACHD's website to reflect that information.

Regarding the discussion at the previous meeting about Siphonic roof drains, Mr. Grese stated that he had contacted his colleagues in Boston. They told Mr. Grese that two such systems had been installed in Boston for use as primary drainage systems and that nothing negative had been heard about them afterwards. Mr. Cummins noted that one such system already exists in Allegheny County and noted the applicability for such systems in large strip malls. Mr. Czochara stated that in meetings with

architects and engineers, such a system may potentially be used on the Warhol Museum's new building. Mr. Bigley asked if anyone had any reasons to be against these types of systems. No one expressed any concerns, and Mr. Inks noted that he has heard good things about these systems.

**Action:** Mr. Inks moved to accept Syphonic Roof Drains as a main conveyance, but with the caveat that emergency systems need to remain conventional. Mr. Cummins seconded the motion.

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

Mr. Eichenlaub asked Mr. Grese about the state of the program's staffing. Mr. Grese stated that one more inspector has been hired, and that a good candidate is in the pipeline. If the candidate is hired, the program will still be short by 3 inspectors. On the administrative side, a Senior Secretary is being hired and a temporary employee was being sourced. Mr. Eichenlaub asked about the potential to add another virtual inspector. Mr. Grese stated that it would depend how quickly virtual inspections take off. Mr. Eichenlaub suggested that it would be a good light duty assignment. Mr. Cummins asked how much money virtual inspections are saving the County. Mr. Grese was unsure of an exact figure, but stated that it was definitely saving money. Mr. Czochara stated that another inspector has recently retired, and therefore the program is short by 4 inspectors.

Mr. Inks expressed concern about an uptick in unlicensed plumbers within Pittsburgh. Mr. Grese stated that ACHD inspectors can't be everywhere at the same time. He told the applicants at the Journeyman exam that they need to inform ACHD when they notice unlicensed labor illegally performing plumbing work. He agreed that the problem is getting worse, but that there is not an easy solution. He stated that everyone needs to be part of the solution. Mr. Bigley stated that ACHD should be able to use state inspectors findings regarding unlicensed labor. Mr. Grese wondered about a legal way to pursue contractors who violate these provisions repeatedly. Mr. Turley suggested that Mr. Grese speak to ACHD Assistant Solicitor Elizabeth Rubenstein about that. He stated that he would do so. Mr. Rabinowitz expressed support for starting that conversation.

Mr. Inks asked about the ability for retired plumbers to downgrade their license. Mr. Grese stated that was done for a retiree who was in poor health. Mr. Czochara stated that the program will need to speak with the Department of Information Technology about the technical aspects of making such changes within the plumbing application. Mr. Grese asked Mr. Turley if this is something that can be implemented at the program level. Mr. Turley stated that it would need to be listed as an agenda item for the Advisory Board to consider at a future meeting.

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