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LUZERNE COUNTY

Council to discuss ‘responsible contractor’ proposal

By Jennifer Learn-Andes
jandes@timesleader.com

Luzerne County Council is set to discuss a proposed “responsible contractor” ordinance Tuesday that would require

prospective contractors to participate in apprenticeship programs and meet other conditions to perform county construction projects over a set dollar amount.

The proposed threshold

is for county projects costing \$100,000 or more, although there’s discussion it may be increased to make the package more amenable to a council majority.

County Councilwoman

Brittany Stephenson introduced the ordinance, saying in a release it is a “major reform in public contracting” that would “protect taxpayer dollars

See LUZERNE | 2A



Luzerne County Courthouse

File photo

Restoring the waters



Sam Zavada | Times Leader

Orange ferrous iron has risen to the surface of Nanticoke Creek from the mines below, making the water inhospitable for aquatic life. This particular stretch of stream leads to the Askam treatment system.

Earth Conservancy leads charge to rehabilitate Nanticoke Creek

By Sam Zavada
szavada@timesleader.com

The flow of Nanticoke Creek was heavily impacted by the Wyoming Valley’s coal mining industry from the 1900s until the mid-20th century — so much so that it’s now a shell of its former self. The team at Earth Conservancy is taking on the mammoth responsibility of bringing it back to life.

According to Terry Ostrowski, president of CEO at Earth Conservancy, and Elizabeth Hughes, director of communications, the Nanticoke Creek Watershed Restoration

Project is the biggest undertaking in the organization’s history.

They say deep and surface mining, not to mention shoddy environmental regulations, caused Nanticoke Creek to fade.

“One of the main problems that happened during that time was that when the coal companies came through and they did their stripping, they really didn’t care too much about what was going on with the stream...,” Ostrowski said.

Years of redirecting streams to suit the needs of the coal companies took their toll on the flow of



Sam Zavada | Times Leader

Running water flows alongside Holly Street in Hanover Township, representing one of the only currently active areas of Nanticoke Creek.

Nanticoke Creek, which should naturally flow through the municipalities of Nanticoke City, War-

rior Run Borough and Hanover Township.

In many parts of the old

See NANTICOKE | 2A

SUPER BOWL LIX

Fearless forecasters offer their picks

By Bill O’Boyle
boboyl@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE — It’s Super Bowl time! Are you ready for some indigestion?

Many “fans” will gather in all sorts of places to party down for the “Big Game” — Super Bowl LIX.

And this year, Pennsylvania is represented by our Philadelphia Bar-kleys, err, Eagles. They will be up against the Kansas City Swifties, err, Chiefs, in New Orleans.

It should be a good game. My extremely superficial analysis shows that the Eagles have the better team position by position. However, the Chiefs have the best head coach, possibly of all time, in Andy Reid; the best defensive coordina-

tor, perhaps of all time, in Steve Spagnuolo; and the best quarterback, perhaps of all time, in Patrick Mahomes.

And one more very tangible plus for the Chiefs — they rarely lose, especially in the post-season.

And oh yeah, the Chiefs have Taylor Swift and all those Swifties on their side. The Eagles, however, have very loyal and intimidating fans.

Let’s just hope for a great game. Get those snacks ready!

Are you ready for some chicken wings, pizza, deviled eggs, kielbasa, Nachos Grande, jalapeno

See SUPERBOWL | 6A

INSIDE

For full Super Bowl preview coverage, see Sports, 1C.



AP File Photo

A bin of official balls for the NFL Super Bowl football game wait to be shipped inside the Wilson Sporting Goods football factory, Monday, Jan. 27, 2025, in Ada, Ohio.

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Nanticoke

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creek, water was funneled through concrete or wooden flumes, such as those still visible on Holly Street in Hanover Township. This caused additional changes to the creek’s natural stream, which eventually flows into the Susquehanna River.

At one point, the creek ran below a railroad embankment. That location, now with no clear evidence of a stream in its vicinity, is the crux of Nanticoke Creek’s current issues.

“Probably for about the past 50 or 60 years, waters were cut off at that point, so all the waters from the headwaters of the Nanticoke Creek watershed, which was about a square mile of land, basically stopped at this old railroad embankment,” Ostrowski explained. “And it holed up there until it eventually seeped down into the mines.”

In time, the mine waters rise again, though they bring orange ferrous iron along for the ascent. This hue indicates, among other things, a dead area of stream that is unsafe for aquatic life to live and grow. In Earth Conservancy’s new plans, the restored stream will be lined with clay to prevent similarly destructive min-

erals from rising.

Earth Conservancy’s plan to restore these damaged or forgotten areas of Nanticoke Creek is multi-pronged. In total, they plan to restore 15,000 linear feet of Nanticoke and Leuder creeks, the latter of which feeds into the former in Hanover Township.

The first part of the plan pertains to reworking critical stretches of Nanticoke Creek’s main stem, with projects including:

- A new alignment will be established for Nanticoke Creek at Clarks Cross Road. This will be a reroute of the Nanticoke Creek’s original flow, which traces through current-day residential properties. Those homes, according to Ostrowski, will not be at an added risk of flooding due to the creek’s new path.
- A new water conveyance structure will be established on South Main Street.

The second part of the plan includes projects related to Leuder Creek, including:

- A new culvert at Hanover Street.
- The removal of Leuder Creek dam.
- The replacement of a reservoir (or silt pond) with a natural channel and shallow overflow ponds. Reparations in this area of Hanover Street will allow for Leuter Creek’s connection to Nanticoke Creek to

be restored.

- The replacement of a buried culvert and deteriorated bridge with a new culvert.

Nanticoke Creek’s upper reach will be the focus of the plan’s third component, including the following projects:

- Restoring a deteriorated masonry arch with slip lining.
- Eliminating an existing obstruction and replacement with an open channel.
- Removing a bridge and stone arch from the stream’s path.
- Reestablishing a channel based on historic alignment to reconnect the upper and lower watersheds.
- Reopening a buried railroad tunnel and lining it with a smaller culvert.

These plans are being funded predominately by two grants, one each from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The DEP grant, totaling around \$17.5 million, is possibly the largest ever received by Earth Conservancy. These funds are, to say the least, essential to making the Nanticoke Creek Watershed Restoration Project a reality.

“It’s a huge project. It’s not an inexpensive project to do,” Ostrowski said.

The DEP, EPA and Bureau of Abandoned



Sam Zavada | Times Leader

Construction is underway on Clarks Cross Road in Hanover Township, where a new alignment of Nanticoke Creek is set to be developed.

Mine Reclamation partnered with Earth Conservancy to work out a design plan and manage the needed permits. Local engineer George Albert and Plains Township-based developer Stell Enterprises are also involved with the planning and execution of the Nanticoke Creek Watershed Restoration Project. The individual projects detailed above will be carried out on land already owned by Earth Conservancy.

“All of the work that’s being done here is actually on Earth Conservancy property, which makes it a lot easier to do this, rather than trying to obtain rights to the properties,” said Ostrowski. “That’s

what made this project possible.”

The Nanticoke Creek Watershed Restoration Project also has broader environmental, recreational and commercial implications. As the stream becomes healthier with time, the hope is that aquatic life will return to the restored areas. Earth Conservancy is seeing these results in the similar — yet comparatively small — project to restore Espy Run, which was completed in December 2022.

In order to carry out the full set of plans, Earth Conservancy has had to cut down many trees in Nanticoke Creek’s path. Doing so has caused some concern in the impacted communities,

but Ostrowski has assured residents that a plan is in place to bring greenery back to the creek’s banks.

“We’ve actually received a lot of calls over concerns about the trees that are being cleared, but the reassurance there is that we are going to be reestablishing tree cover...,” he said, adding that 5,000 new trees will be planted to replace those that are lost.

With established funding and a consistent team of collaborators, Ostrowski estimated that the Nanticoke Creek Watershed Restoration Project will be completed in two to three years, a fraction of the time it took to complete the Espy Run project.

Luzerne

From page 1A

and strengthen the local workforce.”

The ordinance is up for discussion at Tuesday’s 6 p.m. work session at the county courthouse on River Street in Wilkes-Barre. Ordinances require introduction by at least four of 11 council members to advance to a public hearing and vote at a future meeting, when a majority vote is required for passage.

According to the ordinance posted to the agenda:

To achieve the goal of selecting responsible contractors for public projects and safeguarding the county’s investments, prospective contractors and subcontractors must meet

clearly defined, pre-established minimum standards of responsibility that include criteria related to technical qualifications, competency, experience, adequacy of resources and satisfactory records of past project performance, safety, legal compliance and business integrity.

“Additionally, recognizing the critical role that skilled construction craft labor plays in public works projects, along with the challenges posed by limited availability and potential labor shortages, it is essential for contractors and subcontractors to participate in established, formal apprenticeship training programs,” it said. “This requirement aims to promote successful project outcomes and ensure the development of a skilled workforce for

future needs.”

As a condition for performing work governed by the ordinance, a general contractor, construction manager or other lead or prime contractor seeking a contract award must, among other conditions:

- Employ craft employees in the trades and classifications necessary to successfully complete the project.
- Pay all craft employees working on the project the prevailing wage rates and fringe benefits required by applicable federal, state or local laws.
- Participate in a Class A Apprenticeship Program or an equivalent training program for at least three of the past five years for each trade or classification in which it employs craft workers and maintain participation

throughout the duration of the project to ensure employees are graduates of a state-registered or federally-registered apprenticeship program or equivalent training.

Apprenticeship programs are formal training programs approved by the U.S. Department of Labor or a state agency, providing hands-on training and education to develop skilled workers. A Class A Apprenticeship Program graduates apprentices to journeyperson status for at least three of the past five years.

Prevailing wage is the standard wage and benefits rate determined by Pennsylvania’s Prevailing Wage Act or the Federal Davis-Bacon Act for workers on public works projects, it said.

Public works projects are any construction, demolition, alteration or maintenance projected funded by the county that meet the dollar amount stated in the ordinance, which was proposed at \$100,000 or more.

representatives on both sides of the issue. An altered version was on council’s agenda at the start of 2017 but was rejected by a council majority.

Advocates

Stephenson said in the release the ordinance is a “true investment in the people of Luzerne County” because it ensures county-funded projects are completed efficiently, safely and with accountability while also strengthening workforce development and protecting taxpayer dollars.

“With this legislation, we are setting a foundation for our community by ensuring that public projects create good-paying jobs, support local workers, and hold contractors to the highest standards of fairness and accountability.”

The ordinance does not eliminate competition and instead ensures that bidding is fair and responsible, the release said.

“Bidding will still be competitive, but it will prioritize quality, experience, and workforce training, not just the lowest price. This levels the playing field for contractors who follow the rules, treat workers fairly, and invest in training,” it said.

It also argues the setting of higher standards for contractor accountability will help prevent cost overruns, project delays and substandard work.

The requirement to participate in Class A apprenticeship programs will guarantee a “pipeline of well-trained workers,” it said, adding that the investment in workforce development will help address the construction labor shortage and create good-paying jobs for county residents.

The ordinance also introduces stronger contracting vetting of companies and oversight of off-site fabrication, it said.

Contractors caught submitting false or misleading information will face a three-year ban from county projects.

The release included

comments from Stephenson’s three fellow Democratic council members — Jimmy Sabatino, Patty Krushnowski and Joanna Bryn Smith:

Sabatino emphasized the ordinance’s impact on workforce development, stating, “This ordinance is about fairness, safety, and accountability — but it’s also about investing in our workforce,” he said.

“It ensures that public projects aren’t just about bricks and mortar but about investing in people — giving workers the training, protections, and wages they deserve. This isn’t just policy; it’s a commitment to a workforce that’s stronger, safer, and built to last.”

Krushnowski highlighted the workforce benefits.

“By prioritizing skilled apprenticeship programs, we’re building a stronger future for Luzerne County workers. This ordinance ensures that public projects create good jobs and opportunities for local families, building our future with local talent from our own high schools.”

Bryn Smith said the ordinance is “overdue for Luzerne County” and that she is “proud to be a part of its introduction.”

“This RCO will not only keep our taxes down, but it will also support our current efforts, such as the excellent apprenticeship skilled trade programs at our impressive Luzerne County Community College,” she said. “I am proud to endorse legislation that will promote a living wage and ensure that Luzerne County’s contractor-hiring process is fully transparent.”

For passage, votes will be needed from at least two of the Republican council members. The Republican council members: Harry Haas, Kevin Lescavage, Chairman John Lombardo, LeeAnn McDermott, Chris Perry, Vice Chairman Brian Thornton and Gregory S. Wolovich Jr.

Reach Jennifer Learn-Andes at 570-991-6388 or on Twitter @TLJenLearnAndes.

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