

Amity supervisors question Pennsylvania American Water over fire hydrant issues

By Denise Larive, For 21st Century Media

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AMITY — Pennsylvania American Water responded to township concerns about fire hydrants that arose after efforts to control the fire that destroyed the former Sprinkles/Crab Crazy restaurant on Old Swede Road Jan. 26 were hindered when a nearby hydrant wasn't operable.

Michael Zomolsky, chief of the Amity Township Fire Department, told the Board of Supervisors on Feb. 19 that the fire hydrant's water was frozen that night and it appeared that the water pressure was low.

Representatives of Pennsylvania American Water Company addressed the supervisors' concerns about the hydrants at the board's meeting Wednesday.

Brian Hassinger, field operations manager in the southeast Pennsylvania office of Pennsylvania American, said the water company would provide the township office with a distribution map indicating hydrant locations (with identification numbers), water main sizes, and water pressures, as well as inspection and flushing records. PAWC will also notify the Amity and Monarch fire departments when a fire hydrant has been taken out of service he said.

Hassinger said all fire hydrants are inspected, flushed and greased annually.

"We did investigate one [hydrant] on Monocacy Creek Road," said Hassinger. "It had 112 pounds of very high system pressure. Some at low elevations have high pressure, but should be standard. At 112 pounds, it is pushing on the system and is harder to open than 40 pounds. The pressure could vary by 10 pounds."

He said that hydrant was inspected on June 4, 2013.

"We touch each hydrant twice a year," said Hassinger, admitting that the inspection and flushing may each occur within a one-month period.

Defective fire hydrants are repaired immediately or taken off-line and replaced with a new fire hydrant, according to PAWC protocol.

"Berks Communication can be notified when a hydrant is taken out of service," said Hassinger. "If one breaks at night, agencies are notified."

Supervisors also questioned the monthly \$6,057 fee the township pays for hydrant maintenance, which is not the township's responsibility.

"Eighty percent of the fire hydrants were put in by developers," said Supervisor Terry L. Jones. "Is it a fire hydrant rental? It's a little high compared to others in the area. I don't see where we're getting \$6,000 worth of service each month."

"The rate is not based upon only the inspection — but the operation maintenance cost of the entire system to provide fire protection," said Hassinger.

Township solicitor Brian F. Boland said the board also has an issue with the Fire Hydrant Indemnification it was forced to sign for BlackJax American Pub & Grill on Benjamin Franklin Highway.

PAWC required that the township sign the fire hydrant indemnification last September or it would "bag" the fire hydrant and prohibit the restaurant from opening for business.

Hassinger denied holding BlackJax hostage, but said their attorney would contact Boland.

"You most definitely did extort us for BlackJax," said Boland. "You're asking us to be responsible for something that we're not responsible for. It's the equivalent of you asking to hold us responsible for you driving home tonight."

"It is the only agreement we will sign," said Jones. "We did it only to allow that man to open his business."

In other matters, the board unanimously approved to submit the 50 percent matching grant application to the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to rehabilitate and refurbish the pavilion at Lake Drive Park. The estimated total project cost is \$31,500.

Township Manager Charles E. Lyon said tennis court lights at Amity Community Park will remain off at night until a clear need is shown by residents that the courts will be used on a regular basis at night. He said the lights were previously on a timer but were on when people weren't playing tennis.

The board unanimously approved a 25-foot-wide easement from the back of the Merritt's property at 1860 Weavertown Road that extends out to Weavertown Road.



URL: <http://www.pottsmc.com/general-news/20140417/amity-supervisors-question-pennsylvania-american-water-over-fire-hydrant-issue>