

Healthy Pine River

January 22, 2024

7-8pm

Call to order: Gary Rayburn

Approval of Minutes: Dave/Charlotte

Financial Report: Dec 1, 2023 \$24,009.78 Bills paid \$3,753.26

Dec 31, 2024 \$20,256.52 Note: much of fall payouts are reimbursed by Watershed Council grant

Updates: Brittney- HPR has begun membership drive for 2024. Dues remain \$5.00/person. Donations welcome

Grants- Gratiot Community Foundation \$7500 for water testing in Alma and St Louis

MI nonprofit \$10,000 for Covid relief

EGLE Watershed Council- Capacity Building grant \$34,400 towards

1. Farming Community Engagement
2. Septic work in rural communities (finishing Elm Hall, Sumner next)
3. Outreach- educate/inform citizens/communities about watershed

Guest speaker: Laura Campbell, Michigan Farm Bureau's Senior Conservation and Regulatory Specialist. Laura works with farmers on environmental issues: understanding regulations on water, soil, air quality, permitting, giving resources as well as information on voluntary contributions they can make towards the environment. One of current programs is Anaerobic Digester. A digester turns organic waste materials (manure, food, oils, greases, as well as yard waste-clippings/leaves) into usable products rather than going into landfill. Breaking down organic waste by microbes can be done with or without air. Composting is a dry process that bringing air (oxygen) in. Anaerobic digestion is without oxygen in an enclosed container. Anaerobic method produces a natural gas, methane. Methane can then be used in generator to produce electricity or cleaned and go into natural gas pipelines. Left behind is digestate, odor, pathogens removed, nutrients remain. Farmers can use digestate to fertilize land. Additionally it can be used as animal bedding, fuel pellets or in the construction as fiber board. Benefits: reducing greenhouse gas emissions, nutrient recycle-fertilizer, reduces pathogens like E.coli, waste reduction (food and other organic waste from going into landfill). Concerns: no they don't drive farm economics ie: farms getting bigger (more animals); foul odors-no as microbes are in enclosed tank; does not increase greenhouse gas emissions rather reduces use of natural gas from fossil fuel; spill or leaks – accidents happen when loading or removing materials from tank or in storage of materials, not in the system itself. Standards and regulations would be in this area to prevent problems. Currently there are approx. 130 digesters in Michigan. Most operate with waste water plants. In Genesee County they also take in food waste. Increasing interest in digesters located near farms. Michigan Public Service Commission has conducted a study on the potential of Renewable Natural Gas – available online. Downside: cost, large size (technology not there for mini-digesters), maintenance (time consuming, trained personal needed without potential for accidents), return on investment rate is low. California provides a premium for natural gas sources to offset realizing benefit to the environment remove greenhouse gas. Digesters have been around since 1980's – one farm one digester. Not economical. Today we are looking at third party investors. A digester will service multiple sources- farms (large, small), food waste (restaurants, institutions). Providers receive royalty checks. A third party owns and maintains vs the old model. It will take coordination of different permitting departments (air, solid waste, surface waters, ground water) to develop guidelines, then decisions as to who the responsible party will be for the oversight/monitoring of not just the digester operation, also the supplier of waste going in and final utilization of digestate. Coalition of interested parties (Farm Bureau, environmental, manufacturing, utilities, agriculture groups are working to develop a streamlined permitting process. Legislation to be introduced this year. Advantage of a third party digesters- many small groups can utilize vs one large operation. Transportation of manure, particularly liquid, needs to be considered – long distance not economical. Volume and nutrient content of digestate isn't greatly reduced compared to the volume going in. Benefit is reduction of pathogens (E.coli). Antibiotic resistant bacteria reduction will vary depending on genetic makeup of bacteria.

HPR priorities and recommended priorities: reviewed, handout at back of room

Elections: Any nominations for board? No names

Meeting adjourned

Next Meeting - February 8, 2024 Alma Public Library 7:pm