

# Stormwater Regulations Focus Groups: Manual and Website

Prior to updating the Stormwater Regulations, application procedures, and technical design requirements for development projects, the Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) solicited feedback from the development community about the proposed changes. This document summarizes feedback from two focus groups with the same agenda but different participants. The first focus group was held on May 7, 2015 and the second on May 8, 2015 at the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society.

## Overview

Philadelphia Water hosted two focus groups to gather feedback from the development community about updates to the Stormwater Management Guidance Manual and Stormwater Plan Review Website. These focus groups followed earlier focus groups held in January and February 2015 about the technical and policy changes to the Stormwater Regulations. Approximately 40 people attended the manual & website focus groups. Attendees were divided into small discussion groups and responded to questions on the following topics:

- Remaining clarifications on technical and procedural changes
- Organization of content within the new Guidance Manual
- Content in the current Guidance Manual that is unclear or could be improved
- Updated content in the new Stormwater Plan Review Website
- Use of the new ERSA web application form with log-in account
- Use of the new Stormwater Plan Review website on mobile devices

## Summary of Feedback

### Stormwater Management Guidance Manual

*What do you think about the new organization of the guidance manual?*

Everyone thought that the new organization of the guidance manual made logical sense. In addition, participants agreed that the addition of a Construction Guidance chapter and a chapter on Post-Construction, Operations & Maintenance will be valuable to designers and property owners. Several participants commented that it is difficult to respond to a presentation about the Guidance Manual, noting that a clear understanding of the new structure isn't possible until it is in full or a plan is submitted using the new Guidance Manual. Many people liked the introduction of "fact-sheets" that summarize the benefits and drawbacks for each stormwater management practice (SMP) and commented that these would be useful for conversations with clients. However, participants wanted more details about the data Philadelphia Water used to determine the pros and cons of the SMPs.

*Is there content in the current guidance manual that is unclear? Do you think we have addressed that content with this update? If not, how can we do so in the future?*

Many people said it would be very helpful to have an executive summary that explains the overall Plan Review process, including the approximately timeline, that would be suitable to provide a client who is new to Stormwater Plan Review in Philadelphia. The revised Introduction may provide some of this content, but PWD will consider a separate document for this purpose.

In the current manual, it is unclear what information is a requirement in contrast to recommendations. PWD's plan to use different symbols to make better clarify this within the Guidance Manual text. There are also some inconsistencies in definitions across the Manual and across other Philadelphia Water resources. PWD has attempted to rectify these differences in the new Manual.

*Do you have other questions or comments on the guidance manual that we didn't address?*

Several people asked about the proposed timeline for releasing the Guidance Manual and the process for public feedback. Philadelphia Water will make the Guidance Manual available as a PDF the first week of June on our webpage: [www.phillywatersheds.org/stormwaterregulations](http://www.phillywatersheds.org/stormwaterregulations). The interactive Guidance Manual website will be published on July 1. In addition, Philadelphia Water will continue to collect feedback after July as people begin to use the Guidance Manual.

### **Plan Review Website and ERSA Application**

*What features that we've shown do you think you will use the most? Are there additional features not included you would like to see?*

Participants in the focus groups were excited about and overwhelmingly supportive of moving the Guidance Manual to a website in addition to providing downloadable PDFs. Everyone liked the new feature of logging in to the ERSA application and the ability to track multiple projects from one login. However, they suggested several additional features including:

- The ability to set permissions for different users (ex: read only vs. edit)
- The ability to provide property owners with a log-in that allows them to view all of their projects.
- Using the tracking tool throughout the entire Plan Review process including technical submission, construction and O&M. The project tracking tool could act as a central repository for information and submittals including review letters, construction photographs, plans etc.
- The ability to pay online with a credit card.

*Do you think the online format will make it easier to find what you need?*

Focus group participants were happy about the online format for the Guidance Manual, especially the user-friendly search function and the linkages between chapters. However, most people agreed that there is still a need for a downloadable PDF and were glad that PWD is providing this option.

*Do you think you will use the website on a cell phone or mobile device?*

Most participants said they might use their mobile device to check a quick reference in the manual or check on the status of their plan. However, most people said that they would use a desktop to submit an ERSA application, or to read chapters of the Guidance Manual.