

Chester stormwater authority receives \$10.8M in loans

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POSTED: 04/23/18, 9:57 PM EDT | UPDATED: 59 SECS AGO
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CHESTER >> Officials from the Stormwater Authority of the City of Chester were joined by members of City Council and private partner Corvias on Monday to announce the authority has received two low-interest loans totaling \$10.8 million.

The loans, provided by the Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority, or PennVEST, will fund five projects approved by the City Council in a resolution passed Feb. 28. The projects named in the resolution are: Memorial Park – GSI (Green Stormwater Infrastructure) Project; City Hall Pavers; Water Quality Inlet Improvements; Rain Garden at Eyre Park; and Eyre Park Greenway.

The projects will be the first carried out by the authority incorporated in 2016 and publicly announced in 2017 to remediate stormwater runoff pollution in the city while creating economic development.

“(Mayor Thaddeus Kirkland) only gave us three words two years ago. He said, ‘Make it happen.’ Mayor, we are making it happen,” said authority Executive Manager the Rev. Horace Strand, D.Div.

A recurring theme from all speakers was the avenues for job creation the remediation projects can provide in the city.

“We’re excited for the progress that’s been made to get \$10.8 million to invest – and I stress the point ‘invest’ – in the city of Chester,” said Greg Cannito, partnership innovator for Corvias, a management firm specializing in public-private partnerships working with the authority in its development. Cannito said the projects will be carried out “not just for Chester, but by Chester,” with plans to hire city residents and subcontractors both for construction and long-term maintenance.

The “Water Quality Inlet Improvements” named in the resolution will restore 300 of the city’s 1,700 water inlets and cover costs of maintenance.

“I am so thankful that help is now on the way,” said Councilwoman Portia West, director of the city Streets and Public Works Department and a board member of the stormwater authority. “It’s my understanding that I will be able to sometime in the near future hire eight additional people in my department” to handle only inlet maintenance, West said. The department currently has fewer than 20 employees according to West.

To connect with city residents and businesses about job opportunities through the authority, it is holding its first contractor fair at City Hall on Wednesday morning.

“This investment (in creating the authority) is now starting to show dividends,” said Kirkland, who’s also a Democratic candidate in the 5th Congressional District. “We look forward to Chester residents being gainfully employed by way of this progress.”

The announcement comes as the authority is being challenged in the Delaware County Common Pleas Court. Three separate lawsuits on behalf of Widener University, Chester Charter School of the Arts, and other city businesses and residents were filed in January and February. The petitions for preliminary injunction challenge the authority’s fee structure as arbitrary and state the authority’s projects “allegedly to help combat the effects of polluted stormwater runoff” would duplicate the stormwater control already performed by DELCORA.

Closing memorandums have filed with the court and the case is now awaiting the decision of Judge Sprios E. Angelos.