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HORSHAM WATER AND
SEWER AUTHORITY

PFAS authority hits ground running to meet deadlines

By Chris Ullery

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A new authority to provide state grant funding for PFAS cleanup met for the first time Thursday.

Creating a new authority to provide state grant funding for PFAS cleanup was a yearslong effort by lawmakers, but the hard work is just beginning.

The new Military Installation Remediation and Infrastructure Authority (MIRIA) met for the first time Thursday, with officials saying they are under a tight deadline to create state grant programs that will ultimately help pay for the remediation of chemicals linked to firefighting foams on local military bases.

Rep. Todd Stephens, R-151, of Horsham, said at the meeting the MIRIA board members and authority staff will “hit the ground running” to set up a “dedicated, recurring revenue stream” for water providers and municipalities by June.

Drinking water wells in Horsham, Warminster and Warrington near the bases were shuttered in 2016 after the Environmental Protection Agency set a lifetime health advisory limit for PFAS of 70 parts per trillion in drinking water.

Both private and public wells were taken out of service as the state’s Department of Environmental Protection headed the short-term remediation efforts, which included providing bottled water to affected residents.

New filtration systems, public water connections and other long-term clean-up efforts by towns and water suppliers have seen the upfront costs passed along to ratepayers.

“Unfortunately, to finance these extraordinary initiatives, water providers were forced to impose surcharges or otherwise pass their costs onto ratepayers,” Stephens said Thursday.

While area officials at nearly every level of government push for the military to fully reimburse residents for those costs, Stephens and other area lawmakers set out to create a state funding source to lower that upfront cost.

Part of Act 101, MIRIA is a brand new agency set up for the task. It needs to set up the specifics of the grant applications and other details over the coming months.

“Despite the amount of time it took for this idea to become a reality, the real work is just beginning,” Stephens said.

Stephens added current Reps. Meghan Schroeder, R-29, of Buckingham, and Todd Polinchock, R-144, of Warrington, and both of their predecessors, Bernie O’Neill and Kathy Watson, were instrumental in developing Act 101.

One thing is certain: The ratepayers themselves will not have to do anything.

A summarized description of Act 101, which was introduced by Stephens in 2019, provided by Horsham Township Manager Bill Walker states the funding available to MIRIA is state tax dollars “generated on specific parcels” for remediation costs “associated with military installations.”

The former Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Willow Grove, properties with development rights impacted by the base and up to 100 acres of other Horsham Township parcels could be part of those designated parcels, the summary states.

Walker said Thursday that a website for the authority will be set up, but web development is taking a backseat to creating the grant application process in the foreseeable future.

MIRIA meets the first Friday of the month at 9 a.m. in the meeting room of the Horsham Township Municipal Building, 1025 Horsham Road.