COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP FUND GUIDANCE

The Community Partnership Fund Program provides funding to communities within the Summit County Surface Water Management District (SWMD) for community-specific stormwater management projects. To implement the SWMD Community Partnership Fund Program, each community is provided an annual allocation of partnership funding in amounts as outlined in Summit County Chapter 942. The SWMD fee collection year begins January 1 and continues through December 31 of that year. Funds collected for each community are held in a separate account with yearly funding allocation deposited to the community.

To utilize Community Partnership Funds, communities must be in compliance with the SWMD's Stormwater Management Program (SWMP). Activities using Partnership funding must directly support or align with the goals and objectives of the SWMP and aim to address existing flooding, erosion, stormwater, and water quality issues, while minimizing the potential for new problems. Community Partnership Funds generally cannot be used to improve or maintain roadways or roadway drainage systems except where such improvements are an essential component of a SWMD approved project. Community Partnership Funds cannot be used to replace funding for programs already in place or offered by the community, unless the program or activity is part of the MS4 program. Additionally, all activities funded through the Community Partnership Funds must be pre-approved, documented, and reported annually to the SWMD for inclusion in its annual report to the Ohio EPA.

Eligible Partnership Fund Activities – All activities undertaken by communities using Partnership funding must clearly align with the goals and objectives of the SWMD. They should aim to address existing flooding, erosion, stormwater, and water quality issues, while minimizing future risks. Projects must provide a regional benefit and comply with all relevant federal, state, and local regulations. Additionally, all applicable projects must include provisions for ongoing operation and maintenance. Eligible activities include:

- Projects that reduce volume, flow rate, and/or pollutant load of stormwater runoff into the local MS4 system. *Note: The ORC does not allow Townships to improve off-roadway drainage, therefore townships shall utilize the services of the County Engineer for their design, construction, and maintenance.*
    - Construction of local surface water improvements at the discretion of the community and with the approval of the County Engineer.
    - Installation of stormwater management practices on community or publicly owned properties.
    - Improvement of neighborhood drainage systems outside of right-of-way areas, subject to the establishment of easements and perpetual stormwater maintenance assessments. (Funds can be used to offset maintenance assessments).
    - Improvement of off-roadway drainage systems (i.e. streambank restoration, surface water conveyance systems, swales, etc.), subject to the establishment of easements and perpetual stormwater maintenance assessments.

    - Conversion of impervious surface areas to pervious (i.e. replacing traditional asphalt with permeable pavement, or converting impervious areas to natural green space)
- Projects or activities that help member communities meet the requirements of the SWMP, as required by the Ohio EPA NPDES permit for small MS4.
    - Retrofit existing stormwater management practices (i.e. adding water quality design standards to a quantity only practice).
    - Maintenance of stormwater management practices.
    - Stormwater-related training for community employees.
- Matching funds necessary for relevant grant applications.
    - Matching funds will be reserved at the time of application to ensure their availability once the grant is successfully secured.
- Purchasing land for natural area preservation and stormwater/flood control benefits.
- Provide a local funding component to a regional SWMD project to aid in project advancement.
- Implementation of Special Programs (i.e. community volunteer days, workshops, educational field trips, scholarships, etc.)
- Operation and maintenance activities necessary to address stormwater-related problems, including work required to address Ohio EPA MS4 Permit Compliance Notifications.

If a proposed project is not listed above, communities are encouraged to contact the SWMD before proceeding with a project application to determine if the project would qualify as an eligible activity. SWMD staff are available to assist partner communities in developing priorities and implementing programs and projects at any point during the process.

Non-eligible Partnership Fund Activities – Communities cannot use Community Partnership Funds for any project that causes, accelerates, or contributes to flooding, erosion, stormwater, or water quality problems or is otherwise detrimental to the MS4. Prohibited projects include, but are not limited to:

- The placement of fill materials in floodplains, riparian areas, or wetlands.
- The culverting or channelizing of watercourses.
- The offsetting of costs associated with projects, initiatives, and/or program support efforts that are currently in place (does not apply to MS4 activities).
- The improvement or maintenance of roadway drainage facilities.

Fund Allocation

Each year, the community will receive an annual allocation of partnership funds. Deposits will be made directly to each community twice per year, following the County's collection of first half and second half property taxes. These funds must be maintained in a separate account to allow for clear tracking of revenue and expenditure. These funds should not be co-mingled with general funds or road funds. An estimate of the annual funding allocation for each community is provided below.

Estimated Allocation by Community*					
Bath Township	$114,350	Northfield Ctr. Township	$54,000	Twinsburg Township	$46,100
Boston Township	$87,790	Richfield Township	$46,420	Village of Lakemore	$20,240
Copley Township	$141,000	Sagamore Hills Township	$96,240	City of Reminderville	$30,350
Coventry Township	$87,380	Springfield Township	$119,500		

**The amounts listed in the table are estimates and are provided for informational purposes only. They do not represent the actual or final Community Partnership Fund allocations.*

Communities may carry over funds from multiple collection years to cover larger purchases and expenses. Communities may also request allocation of funds for a project before funds have accrued in their Community Partnership Fund account. An agreement of this type is at the sole discretion of the SWMD and shall be limited to two (2) concurrent project agreements at any point in time with a maximum five (5) year agreement term.

Project Planning and Application Support – Partner communities are encouraged to consult with SWMD staff early in the project planning process to discuss potential projects and confirm their eligibility. SWMD staff are available to assist with identifying project opportunities, refining project scopes, and developing any special program requirements. Early coordination helps ensure that projects align with the goals and objectives of the SWMD and meet all necessary regulatory requirements. All projects must receive approval from the SWMD prior to implementation and use of Community Partnership Funds.

Submitting a Project Application – Communities are required to submit a project application prior to using their Community Partnership Funds. The application should include sufficient detail to clearly communicate the goals, objectives, and scope of the proposed project. The SWMD will review each application within a reasonable timeframe and provide feedback or approval as appropriate. *Note: Early submission and thorough applications help ensure projects align with program requirements and facilitate timely approval.*

Project Review and Authorization – After a project application is submitted, the SWMD will review the proposal to ensure it meets eligibility requirements, aligns with program goals, and includes all necessary documentation. SWMD staff may contact the applicant for clarification or to request additional information during the review process.

- Community Partnership Funds used for construction or maintenance activities on private property require an assessment of the benefits of the activity to the public vs the benefit to the private property owner(s). Only that portion of the project cost determined to benefit the public shall be eligible for payment from Community Partnership Funds. The remaining project costs may be covered by the property owner(s) or other funding sources.
- Projects located on private property are subject to approval by the SWMD. Approval will be based on the project's ability to provide a regional benefit to the community.

Once approved, the SWMD will issue a Project Authorization Form that formally documents the approved project scope, budget, and any applicable requirements. This form serves as the official approval to proceed with the project and must be signed by both the community and the SWMD. The SWMD will send the Project Authorization form to the primary project contact for signature. The Project Authorization form must be signed by the primary project contact and returned to the SWMD prior to the use of Community Partnership Funds.

- Funds must be used in accordance with the authorized amount indicated in the Project Authorization and Acceptance form. If the community fails to maintain a project funded through the Community Partnership Fund Program, the community will be responsible for repaying the full amount of Community Partnership Funds allocated to the project. This amount will be deducted from the community's Community Partnership Fund account and/or future allocations.
- A formal project agreement may be required for specific projects and activities, as determined by the SWMD.
- Some projects, particularly those involving construction of infrastructure, may include ongoing Operation and Maintenance requirements to ensure long-term performance and regulatory compliance. If applicable, these expectations will be specified in the Project Authorization Form. *See the "Operation and Maintenance" section for examples of O&M expectations.*

Operation and Maintenance – Certain projects may involve ongoing operation and maintenance responsibilities to support long-term functionality, regulatory compliance, and consistency with program objectives. This requirement may be addressed through perpetual maintenance agreements, which follow the guidelines of County Chapter 943. *Note: Failure to meet specified operation and maintenance requirements may affect eligibility for future funding.*

- **Private Property Projects:** If funds are used on private property, the community must secure necessary legal agreements with property owners for design, construction, and ongoing maintenance. These agreements must include provisions that ensure maintenance continues even if ownership changes. The costs of obtaining legal agreements are eligible for Community Partnership Fund expenditure.
    - Alternatively, townships may consider utilizing the Ditch Petition process to implement private property improvements, where maintenance assessments are established and paid for by the partner community. Approval for Ditch Petitions will be limited to projects of sufficient scale and benefit.
- **Maintenance Inspections:** Communities must ensure proper completion of work and conduct annual inspections to confirm ongoing maintenance. A permanent easement must be granted for work on private property.
- **Maintenance Fund:** Community Partnership Funds will be allocated for project maintenance and deposited into the SWMD maintenance fund, unless property owner assessments are involved.

Annual Reporting Requirements – The purpose of the Annual Report is to summarize project activities and provide a financial accounting of Community Partnership Funds provided to the community.

Partner communities are required to complete an Annual Report summarizing all projects and expenditure which have occurred during the reporting year. Annual Reports should include enough detail to allow the SWMD to use the information for both internal program tracking and MS4 reporting to the Ohio EPA. At a minimum, each report must include:

- A summary of each project undertaken or completed during the reporting year
- Total funds expended
- Ending balance of the Community Partnership Fund account
- Any supporting documentation or tracking spreadsheets (as applicable)

Annual Reports must be submitted to the SWMD by February 1st of the following year and must be prepared by the partner community. A standardized reporting template will be provided to assist with consistency and completeness. Community Partnership Funds are subject to future County audits.