

February 3, 2022

Lindsay Hanna
Project Scientist
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253 North State St., Suite 101
Westerville, Ohio 43081

RE: Stormwater Drainage Manual (SWDM) Type III Variance Request – Simpson Strong Tie Expansion Site

Ms. Hanna:

This letter is in response to the subject variance request to the SWDM Sections 1.3.2 *Permanent Protection of the Stream Corridor* and 1.3.3 *Prohibited Uses in the Stream Corridor Protection Zone*. More specifically, SWDM Section 1.3.2 provides for permanent protection of the Stream Corridor Protection Zone (SCPZ), and Section 1.3.3 lists specific activities and facilities prohibited within the SCPZ, which include buildings/structures, parking lots, filling, excavation, and other changes in topography within the SCPZ. A variance is requested to allow an expansion of the existing Simpson Strong Tie manufacturing facility north of Roberts Rd. The goal of the project is to expand the existing facility by adding warehouse capacity and a new employee training center.

The original request was submitted to the City on November 9, 2022. As part of the Variance review process, the subject Variance request was posted on the City website on November 23, 2022 to solicit public comments. Public comments were received in response to the posting. The Variance Review Committee met and reviewed the subject Variance application on December 14, 2022. Subsequently, a site meeting was held with the applicant on December 21, 2022, followed by a virtual office meeting on January 5, 2023 to discuss the Variance Review Committee and the public comments. Following these two meetings and follow-up discussions, a revised variance application was submitted by the applicant on January 7, 2023, and posted on the City website on January 9, 2023. Additional public comments were received in response to the second posting. The Variance Review Committee met on February 1, 2023 to review the revised application and the additional public comments.

The submitted variance application was found by the Variance Review Committee to be in compliance with the SWDM Stream Protection Type III Variance application requirements.

Three alternatives were considered within the application for the requested Section 1.3 variance – Full Compliance (No Impact), Minimal Impact and the Preferred Alternative.

- Preferred Alternative – This Alternative fulfills the overall project purpose and need by providing an economically and functionally feasible plan for the proposed facility expansion. The stream impacts



of this alternative include prohibited SCPZ use/impact of 2.75 acres of existing wetlands which are part of the SCPZ.

- Minimal Impact Alternative – This Alternative would reduce the proposed SCPZ impacts to 2.35 acres, but would also require a direct stream impact to 41.6 lf of the existing unnamed tributary of Roberts Millikin Ditch by reorienting and relocating the proposed detention basin. While functionally and economically this alternative is similar to the Preferred Alternative and results in smaller overall SCPZ impact, it was evaluated to have a larger negative impact to the ecological health of the onsite streams and their SCPZ.
- Full Compliance (no Impact) Alternative was found to be not feasible due to the significant reduction of the size and dimensions of the proposed expansion, thus not being able to fulfill the functional and economic requirements of the site owner/applicant.

To provide the SWDM-required mitigation for the proposed SCPZ impacts, the applicant proposes to create 2.75 acres of the new emergent wetlands on site which will be contiguous and hydraulically connected to the existing wetlands/SCPZ. This proposed mitigation will assure that the required 1:1 ratio is met. Additionally, to fulfill the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the Ohio EPA Section 404/401 Certification Requirements, the applicant proposes to purchase an additional 1.5 acres of credits through the Streams + Wetlands Foundation's in-lieu fees (ILF).

Upon reviewing and discussing the application submitted by the applicant, the Variance Review Committee agreed with the applicant that the Preferred Alternative with the proposed SCPZ mitigation plan represents the applicant's good faith effort to comply with the SWDM stream protection requirements to the maximum practical extent. The Committee further agreed with the applicant's argument that the Full Compliance Alternative would impact functional and economic viability of the proposed facility expansion project to the point of making it infeasible. The Committee also agreed that the Preferred Alternative would overall be less impactful to the on-site stream ecology than the Minimal Impact Alternative.

In light of the above, the subject Variance Request (Type III SWDM Section 1.3), the Preferred Alternative is conditionally approved contingent upon the following stipulations:

- Storm CC-Plan and Stormwater Management Report must be submitted and approved by the City of Columbus. The plans shall include an SCPZ impact mitigation plan as conceptually described above and in the variance application submitted to the City on January 7, 2023, which must be approved and deemed acceptable by the City.
- The proposed SCPZ mitigation site as well as the remaining on-site SCPZ will be protected by a permanent conservation easement, and SCPZ signs will need to be installed per SWDM requirements to demarcate the SCPZ.

No approval contained herein relieves or absolves the applicant of any provisions of applicable state or federal laws. Please contact PR/SRM Section Manager Greg Fedner, P.E. at 614-645-8072 with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R. Priestas', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robert S. Priestas, P.E., Administrator
Division of Sewerage and Drainage

pc: Variance Review Committee
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