



## **2023 Annual Report**

**Public Works/General Office &  
Zoning/Codes Office**

**January 2024**

# 2023 Annual Report

## Public Works and General Office

### Street Opening/Driveway Permits

Applications for excavations in streets are jointly reviewed by Public Works and Zoning/Codes employees. During 2023 a total of nine (9) permits were reviewed and issued to PNGCO at multiple locations. These generated fees in the amount of \$575.

During 2023 one (1) Driveway Permit was reviewed and issued. These permits are generally for surface improvements to existing driveways and/or expansion of driveway widths accessing Borough streets.

### Miscellaneous Revenue Collection

Office staff carried out daily revenue collection activities during the year, including the following in a comparative format with 2022:

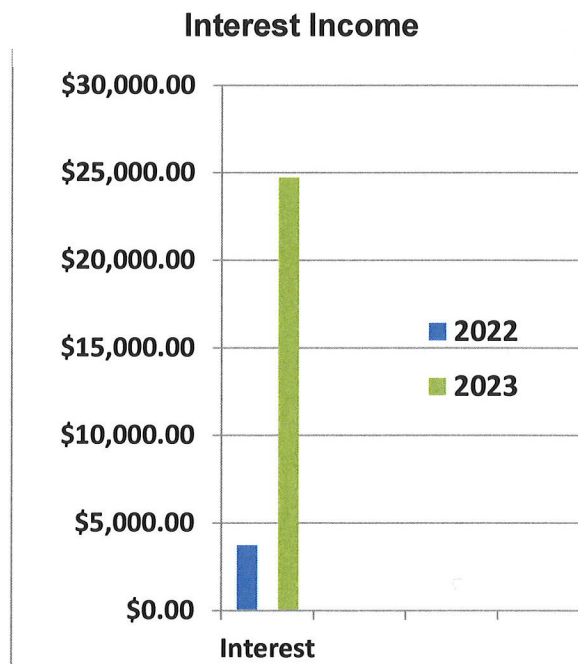
Tax/Fee	2022	2023	\$ Change	% Change
Mercantile Tax	\$ 33,970.40	\$34,333.63	+\$363.23	+1.07%
Flat Rate Occupation Tax	3,567.20	3,783.70	+\$216.50	+6.07%
Local Service Tax*	35,801.83	32,721.57	-\$3,080.26	-8.60%
Mechanical Devices Tax	260.00	660.00	+\$400.00	+153.85%
Business Privilege Tax	21,688.55	26,493.52	+\$4,804.97	+22.15%
Garbage Fees	164,631.18	168,261.68	+\$3,630.50	+2.21%
TOTAL	\$259,919.16	\$266,254.10	+\$6,334.94	+2.44%

\* Reflects receipts as of 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter for each year (4<sup>th</sup> Quarter is received in March)

Overall, the compared revenues increased by nearly 2 ½% with all categories sustaining increases with the exception of a decrease in the Local Service Fee, which is based on number of employees working in the Borough. There are a number of delinquent taxes for each of the above tax categories also collected by office staff that amounted to an additional \$6,774.77 in 2023, and Berkheimer collected \$294,171.19 in Earned Income Tax revenue for the Borough during the past year.

### Interest Income

In a related revenue matter, due to a prudent change in investment policies by Borough Council, General Fund Interest in 2023 was \$24,739.79, far exceeding the \$2,000 Budget target for the year and 563% greater than the \$3,728.83 interest figure for 2022. See comparative chart to the right.



### Routine Public Works Activities

Employees carried out the everyday necessary activities needed to maintain Borough streets, stormwater systems, recreation and public spaces. These vary by season but include patching, street cleaning, snow/ice treatment and plowing, mowing, maintaining/repairing catch basins/inlets and planning and monitoring the 2023 contracted paving projects. Paving was completed on Danner, Clayton, and Hornick, and portions of Hawthorne and West Oakmont. The total project cost was \$167,800.28, funded via ARPA, Liquid Fuels/Highway Aid and General Funds. Before and after photos of the work sites are on pages 4 and 5.

### L-28 Machine

The Borough placed this unit into service on January 13, 2023, with several of the attachments we ordered, however, several other attachments are on back order and are anticipated to be received in January 2024, as per the dealer. The unit is primarily used for winter maintenance on the new sidewalks associated with the Roundabout Project, but the Public Works Department has found other uses for it as well.



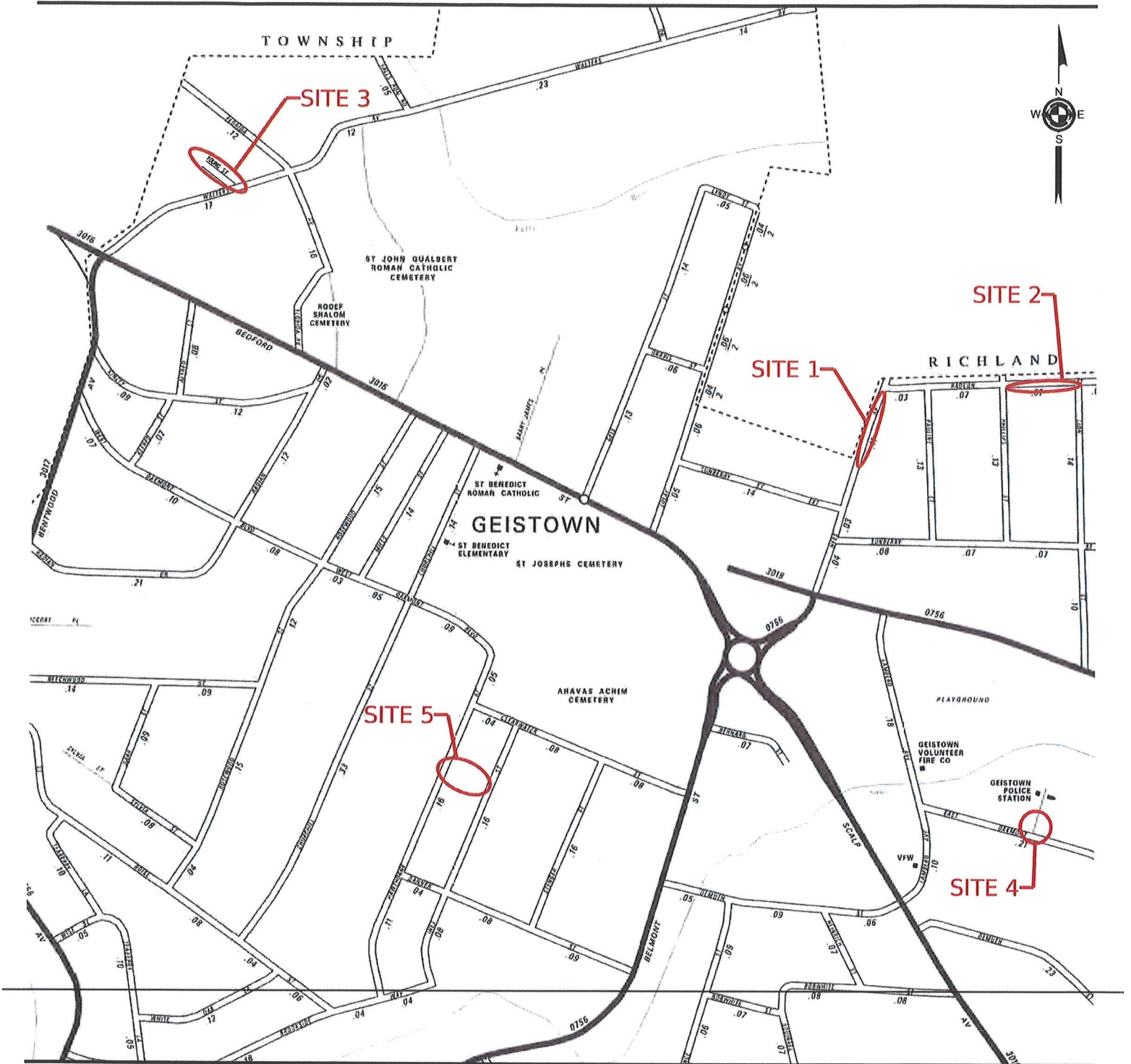
### Stormwater Management

During 2023 Geistown Borough received a monitoring of the Borough's State-mandated Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS-4) process by PA Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP). We received a largely favorable exit conference and we are awaiting any formal written report and findings from PADEP.

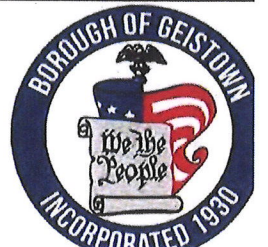
In addition, the Borough was notified that an application under the *COVID-19 ARPA H2O PA & PA Small Water and Sewer Programs* that was submitted in December 2022 was funded in the amount of \$414,035. The application focused on five (5) problem stormwater areas in the Borough – Nees Avenue, Radcon Street, Young Street, Hawthorne Street and the culvert at the Borough Complex (see Map on following page). This grant will require a local match in the amount of \$73,065.

In November 2023 the Borough submitted an application to the PA Department of Community and Economic development (PADCED) under the *Local Share Account Fund Statewide (LSA)* program requesting \$265,000 for stormwater and related paving work along Phillips Street. There was no local share requirement for this program. The timing of the review and announcement by PADCED is not known at this point.

# GEISTOWN BOROUGH LOCATION MAP



600 0 600  
SCALE IN FEET



## 2023 Paving Project

### *Clayton Drive*



### *Danner Street*



## 2023 Paving Project

### *Hawthorne Street – between Clearwater and West Oakmont*



### *West Oakmont Blvd – between*

### *Hawthorne and Churchill*



### *Hornick Street*



## Roundabout Right-of-Way Issues

During the growing season we discovered a turf and top soil issue with the project completed by the contractor during 2022 while fulfilling Borough mowing responsibilities under a PennDOT maintenance agreement. Rocks and poor soil were used resulting in unsustainable grass ground cover. Contact was made with PennDOT District 9-0, officials from which toured the site with Borough representatives. PennDOT issued a work order to the contractor to place new top soil and seed on the area, which was completed at the close of the 2023 growing season. Photos below and on the following page illustrate the problem and the resolution. While the ground cover seems to have taken root, we will monitor conditions during 2024.

### Before



After



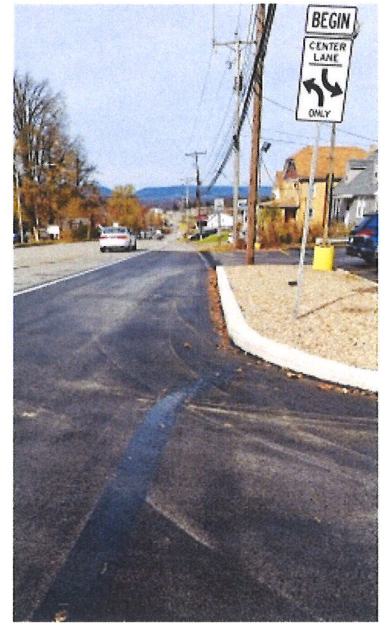
In a related matter, PennDOT was contacted in regards to the unsightly weeds in the center of the roundabout that also created sight distance issues. PennDOT advised the Borough to address the matter as it seems fit. The top photo to the right depicts conditions on 9/20/23 and the bottom photo shows the appearance after mowing by Borough Public Works employees. A long-term approach to this matter is under consideration.



## Other Related Small Projects

Subsequent to final inspections of the wide-ranging Roundabout Project, several minor issues arose and have been addressed. The original curb radius constructed at the Scalp Avenue/Stanley Drive intersection created water overflow issues/icing across Scalp Avenue. The Borough requested PennDOT to review and revise the matter as required. The curb radius was adjusted and the shoulder sloped to facilitate the flow of stormwater towards a downstream inlet. The photo to the right illustrates the adjustments. This will be monitored during heavy precipitation and melting events in 2024.

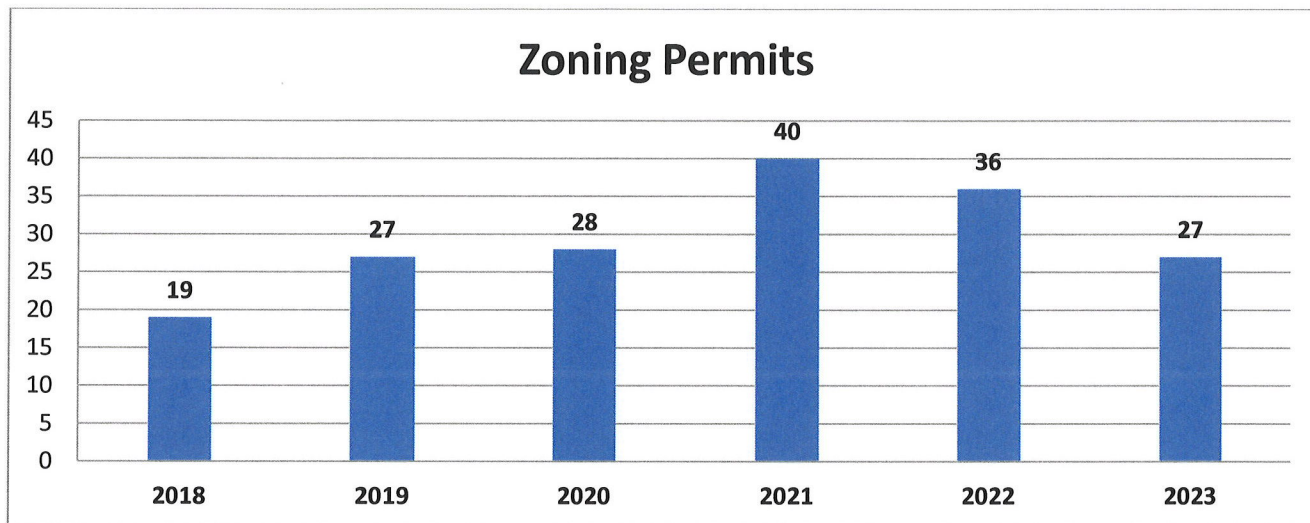
In addition, again at the Borough's request PennDOT approved several other small adjustments, including turning arrows for left turns onto Mills Street and Old Scalp Road, and a new inlet near the intersection of Lulay and Bedford Streets, to alleviate an icing issue on a section of the new sidewalk.



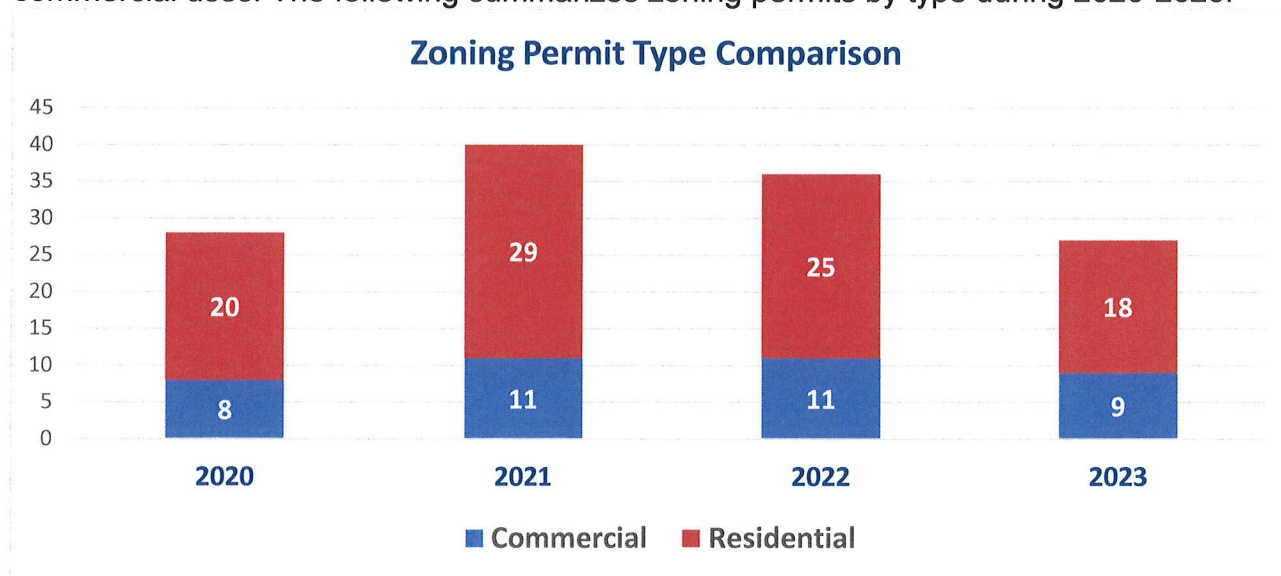
## Zoning and Codes

### Zoning Permits

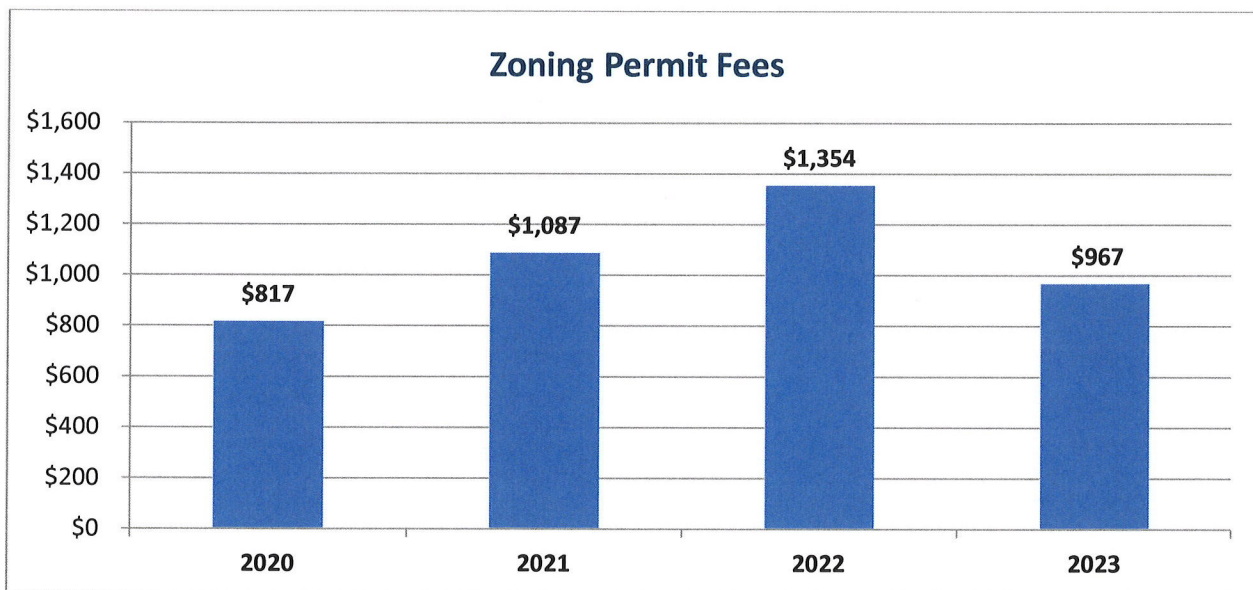
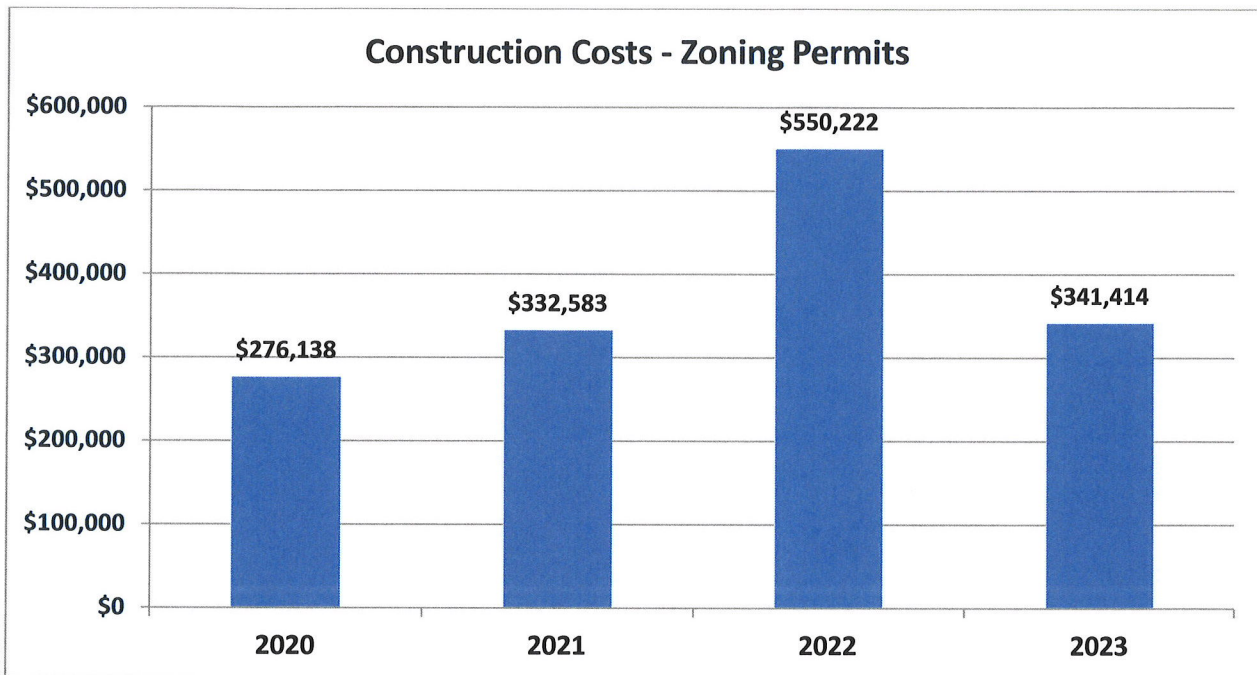
Permit applications are reviewed to assure compliance with zoning and other applicable Borough Ordinances. An inspection and photographic record of major projects are first made by the Zoning Officer. In addition, permit applications for commercial projects are reviewed with the Geistown Borough Planning Commission (GBPC) for advisory comments prior to permit issuance by the Zoning Officer. Certain projects are then referred to PMCA for issuance of UCC Building Permits (i.e., excludes fences, sheds and other small projects). A total of twenty-seven (27) Zoning Permits were issued during 2023, a 25% decrease from 2022. The graphic below places this total in a comparative format for the 2018-23 period.



Eighteen (17) or 67% of the permits were for residential and nine (10) or 33% were for commercial uses. The following summarizes zoning permits by type during 2020-2023.



During 2023 the 27 Zoning Permits covered construction projects totaling \$341,414 and bringing in \$967 in fees. These are summarized on the graphics below in a comparative format for 2020-2023.



Zoning Permit fees are based on construction costs, with a minimum fee of \$25 for the first \$1,000 and an additional \$1/\$1,000 thereafter.

The following summarizes the details of Zoning Permit activity for 2023:

- **Total Permits Issued** – **27**
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter – 3
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter – 10
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter – 10
  - 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter – 4
- **Commercial Permits** – **9**
  - Signs – 8
  - Fence/Wall – 0
  - Exterior – 1
- **Residential Permits** – **18**
  - Fence – 4
  - Pool/Hot Tub – 0
  - Garage – 1
  - Deck/Porch – 8
  - Shed – 2
  - Solar Array – 1
  - Other – 2
- **Referred to PMCA for Building Permits – 7 [26% of total Zoning Permits]**
  - Commercial – 3
  - Residential – 4

Most permit activity is during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> quarters, with 74% of them issued between April 1st and September 30<sup>th</sup>. Most commercial permits involved signage rather than other construction activities, while decks/porches and fences comprise the vast majority of residential projects. In addition, even though the Borough does not issue demolition permits, we are consulted on requirements by property owners. We sign off on demolition permits prior to issuance by PMCA (via Land Use Permit Checklist process) under the UCC and advise the County Tax Assessment Office of the demolition. We monitored two (2) demolitions during 2022 (109 Bentwood [house] and 220 Beechwood [garage]).

#### Zoning Hearing Board

Requests for Variances, Special Exceptions, and Appeals from Determination of the Zoning Officer must be heard by the Zoning Hearing Board (ZHB). However, the Zoning Officer handles the administrative side of matters referred to the ZHB, such as providing information to applicants, processing applications for a ZHB Hearing, coordinating with the ZHB Solicitor's Office, reviewing the applications with GBPC for advisory comment, physically posting the subject property, and attending and offering testimony at the ZHB Hearing. During 2023 three (3) ZHB hearings were held and one (1) enforcement matter occurred, as described below:

- Front setback Variance and Special Exception: Digital sign in R-2 District – ZHB Hearing 2/21/23 – Variance (1 foot) and Special Exception (Digital sign in R District) approved – Zoning Permit approved 6/23/23 – compliance verified during construction 8/16/23; question/slight revision reviewed, investigated and approved 11/17/23
- Side yard variance for addition; Private residence – ZHB Hearing 5/18/23 – Variance (7 feet) approved/no Zoning Permit application received as of 12/26/2023; routine monitoring occurring

- Side yard variance for detached garage; Private residence – ZHB Hearing 6/15/23 – Variance (9 feet) approved/no Zoning Permit application received as of 12/26/2023; routine monitoring occurring
- There was a follow-up on an approved Special Exception Request for Digital Sign in R-2 District - . ZHB approved at a Hearing on 11/17/21, and Zoning Permit 2022-16 issued 6/17/22. Several complaints were received on a sign operating at daytime illumination after change in time in Autumn; violations documented and communicated with applicant - Compliance verified

### Zoning Consultation, Rezoning and Enforcement

Fortunately we deal more with consultation than enforcement, although several enforcement efforts have been carried out, as summarized below:

- Multiple Zoning Issues associated with a proposed commercial reuse of a property on Bedford Street included in 2/22/22 Notice. While several issues have been resolved, access and parking issues have not been resolved. Property changed hands in November 2023 – review with new owner; No Zoning Permits have been issued.
- Zoning notices resolved in following instances:
  - 3 Building without permits – 2 rescinded due to nature of work/ 1 Zoning Permit application received/approved
  - 3 signs in ROW – 2 removed/1 pending
  - 1 sign in residential district – resolved sign removed

Application for the rezoning portion of 631 Lamberd Avenue to Commercial (Fire Hall) was received and processed – review with Geistown Borough Planning Commission (GBPC), Zoning Ordinance/PA Municipalities Planning Code requirements completed – advertising/posting/Public Hearing/Final GBPC Report – Council approved on 1/10/24

Zoning consultation is a more routine occurrence with residents, business owners, real estate agents and people considering a home or business in the Borough. While these are too numerous to specify, they have involved telephone calls, emails, letters, personal meetings, and in some cases field investigations typically on the following:

- Signage requirements
- Verification of the zoning district for specific properties
- Construction, placement and setback requirements for fences, decks and swimming pools
- Siting of additions to principal structure, garages, and sheds on specific properties in relation to zoning regulations
- Developmental process (i.e., Zoning, SALDO, etc.) required for specific properties as requested by proper owners or prospective developers
- Review of ZHB procedures for potential projects
- Consultation and review of demolition requirements

### Zoning Certificates

New businesses submit an application to the Zoning Officer outlining the type of business involved, parking spaces provided, and signage required. The application is reviewed with the GBPC to ascertain compliance with the Zoning requirements – specifically land use, parking and signage requirements. During 2023, six (6) certificates were reviewed and issued, three (3) of which were also referred to PMCA due to the need for a UCC Occupancy Permit. By comparison five (5) Zoning Certificates were issued in 2022, twelve (12) in 2021 and five (5) in 2020.

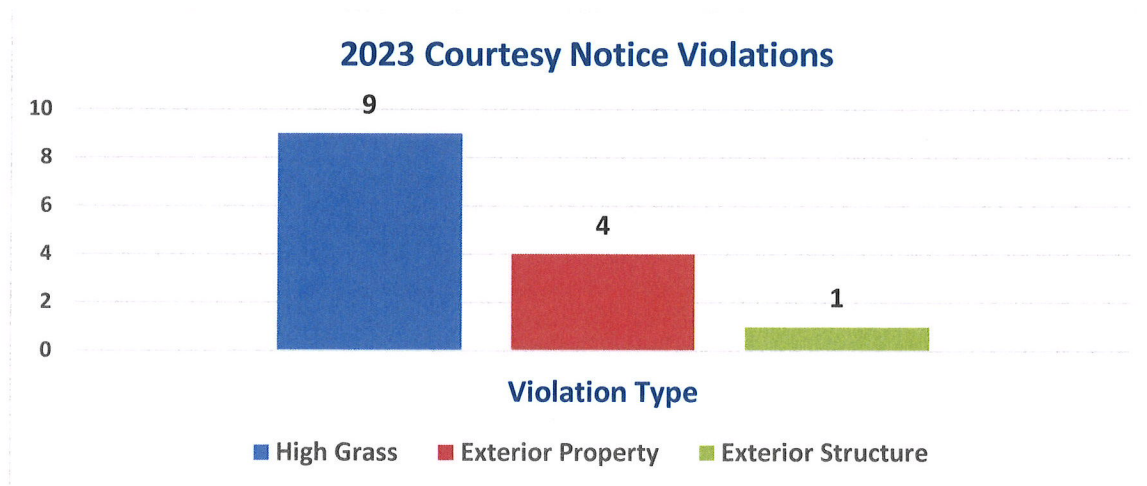
### Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO)

Three (3) minor subdivisions (1 merging lot into two existing lots/2 merging 2 lots into 1 lot) were submitted, reviewed by the GBPC and approved by Council during 2023. One of the latter involved an inter-municipal agreement since it involved a former lot in Richland Township. The 2 lot mergers into 1 lot were both for the eventual construction of a detached garage.

### Property Maintenance Code

The Borough enforces the BOCA International Property Maintenance Code, enacted by Ordinances #442 and #459, which provides basic standards regarding exterior property and exterior structure conditions, usually in response to complaints by residents and/or Public Works employees, or revealed during routine inspections by the Zoning/Codes Officer. While a number of complaints investigated resulted in no violations being documented, the following summarizes those involving the issuance of *Courtesy Notices* or more formal *Violation Notices*. The issuance of a *Courtesy Notice* is a less formalistic way (and less time consuming and less costly at a staff level) to notify residents of minor property issues (i.e., mostly high grass) before resorting to the more formal *Violation Notice*. If a *Courtesy Notice* does not resolve in compliance the more formal *Violation Notice* is sent out. A total of twelve (12) *Courtesy Notices* have been sent out during 2023, well below the 32 sent out in 2022. They are summarized below in narrative and graphic forms below:

- **Total Courtesy Notices Issued**
  - 12 Notices
  - 10 separate properties
  - 4 Notices (33%) issued between June 1<sup>st</sup> and August 31<sup>st</sup>
- **Types of Violations/per Property (multiple types for 2 addresses)**
  - 9 involved grass and weeds
  - 4 involved exterior property issues (i.e. garbage, debris, etc.)
  - 1 involved exterior structure issues
- **Resolution**
  - 11 have been resolved
  - 1 is unresolved
- **In Process – No Notices as of 12/31/22**



Four (4) more formal *Violation Notices* have been issued – one for weeds/high grass and three (3) for weeds and high grass and exterior conditions, one of which is pending due to an apparent abandonment of property. This appears to be a continuing issue in 2024.

#### Geistown Borough Planning Commission (GBPC)

There were eleven (11) GBPC meetings held during 2023. GBPC reviewed three (3) minor subdivision applications and referred recommended approval to Borough Council. GBPC also reviewed and made comments on the three (3) applications before the ZHB. Finally, GBPC reviewed and provided recommendations on the proposed rezoning involving 631 Lamberd Avenue (Fire Hall property).

#### Obstructions in ROWs

During 2023 a number of issues and/or complaints regarding potential obstructions in Borough ROWs were investigated:

- 6 Basketball Backboards – 5 resolved/1 in-process
- 4 Other Obstruction Complaints Received – 1 resolved/3 no violations

#### Other

In accordance with authorization by Council, and requirements related to record retention, the tedious task of reviewing Building/Zoning Permit files between the 1980's and 2014 continues as time/workload permits. Commercial Permits must be retained indefinitely, and residential permits retained for five (5) years, as per relevant state mandates. During 2023 appropriate files between 2010-12 were purged. Appropriate authorized residential permits are being shredded while commercial permits are kept in a labeled Borough file cabinet.