

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, January 24, 2023
Virtually

EAC members present – B. Vitale, S. Bach, C. Curran-Myers, J. Cole, S. Thompson

Others present – S. Smith, S. Bachman, B. Ayers-Fisher, A. Rivera, S. Harrity, J. Slusser, C. Sullivan, L. McMackin, B. Robinson

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Curran-Myers called the meeting to order at 12:04 pm. She noted that a quorum was present.

All those present introduced themselves.

Ms. Sellers connected to the meeting at this time.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that there are two corrections that need to be made to the meeting summary from November 22. She stated that on page 3, the first paragraph should refer to “Phase 1” and “Phase 2” rather than “Act 1” and “Act 2”. She stated that on page 3, the second paragraph should refer to PA DEP rather than EPA.

Motion was made by Ms. Sellers, seconded by Mr. Vitale, to approve the November 22, 2022 meeting summary as corrected and the December 27, 2022 meeting summary as written. Motion carried unanimously.

UPCOMING MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Ms. Ayers-Fisher announced the following upcoming events:

- Earth Day and the Great American Clean-Up will be held on April 22 at City Park

PRESENTATION – GREENHOUSE GAS INVENTORY

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the City has entered a second cohort with PA DEP and Penn State to develop a local climate action plan and to update the City's greenhouse gas emissions. She stated that the City's first cohort occurred in 2014 and this second cohort will update the initial data collected and help to complete Reading's Climate Action Plan. She stated that this second cohort was also able to determine where to get better data in the future.

Ms. McMackin and Ms. Sullivan reviewed a Power Point presentation.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned how the current greenhouse gas (GHG) data compared to the data from 2014. Ms. McMackin stated that the group tried to compare the data but they could not. She explained that the calculations were done differently in 2014 and was not helpful with a comparison.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned if any of the other data was comparable. Ms. McMackin stated that the rest of the data was comparable and shows the following reductions in emissions:

- 0.06% at the waste water treatment plant
- 6.35% in the industrial energy use
- 3.68% in the residential energy use
- 1.14% in solid waste uses

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the need to use the same calculation models in the future to have better comparisons so that progress can be tracked. Ms. McMackin agreed and stated that the cohort has recorded their calculation methods to assist with future calculations.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this report is very helpful and thanked the group for their work. Ms. Sullivan noted her hope that future calculations would be more helpful for comparative purposes.

Ms. Robinson agreed with Ms. Curran-Myers's hope for apples to apples comparisons. She noted the need for actionable benchmarks. She stated that the data collection method in 2014 was the best available at the time but that improvements have been made. She stated that Google tracks people's driving habits and can be used to calculate emissions. She stated that Penn State would be happy to assist the City again in the future.

Peter Buck connected to the meeting at this time.

Mr. Vitale thanked the group for their clear and concise report. He expressed the belief that industrial energy emissions appear to be outsized and questioned if that is the largest GHG emission issue. Ms. McMackin stated that this data comes directly from PA DEP and she is pretty certain that the information is correct. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that this information is reported directly from utilities.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed that the 2014 data showed that the industrial energy emissions were lower. Mr. Vitale noted the need to revisit this information as it may change the focus of the Communications Committee's work.

Mr. Vitale questioned how the transportation data was calculated. He stated that the West Shore bypass is not fully in the City and that travelers cross municipal borders. Ms. McMackin stated that the cohort focused on the City. She stated that it would be interesting to calculate Berks County's transportation data and compare it to Reading's. She expressed the belief that any steps taken in the transportation area will make improvements.

Ms. Sellers noted the need for a study to show how transportation in the City affects the County's data and then to calculate how multi-model transportation options could affect the data. Ms. McMackin stated that this study would be more specialized.

Mr. Buck stated that some municipalities prepare metropolitan transportation plans. He stated that Penn State could do further studies but that these studies would not indicate how to reduce carbon emissions. He stated that this could be a project for spring semester students but that he will need additional guidance from the City.

Ms. Sellers questioned the program's funding source and if the studies were always done by students. Mr. Buck stated that the program is funded through Penn State University and partners students with governments. He stated that Penn State also pays for membership to the groups which collect and share the data. He stated that administrators are trained by the PA DEP Energy Office.

Ms. Sellers questioned if the program can grant federal funds. Mr. Buck stated that it cannot grant funds to others but can assist with how to access funding and to plan projects.

Ms. Sellers stated that traffic and parking studies have been done for Reading. She noted the need for a comprehensive traffic plan which may show the best locations

for charging stations, which streets should be one way, which streets should be two way, where the best locations to add parking would be, etc. She expressed the belief that the City's RFPs for engineering services are not broad-based enough.

Mr. Buck stated that his discussions with Ms. Ayers-Fisher will determine future projects.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that the EAC's comments be included in the Climate Action Plan and that future study scopes could also be included where appropriate. She noted the need to support the City but to also explain if reconsiderations are needed.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the City is also applying for technical assistance from the Dept. of Transportation.

Ms. Sellers stated that the students did a great job. She stated that this data will be used and suggested that students continue to be utilized so that the City can get more projects completed.

Mr. Vitale questioned which school at Penn State participated. Ms. Robinson and Ms. McMackin stated that they are in the College of Mineral Sciences. Mr. Buck stated that he is part of the Sustainability Institute and focuses on sustainability policy.

Mr. Vitale noted the need to work on implementation of solar co-operatives and how to better produce energy. He expressed the belief that it may be helpful to meet separately to discuss this possibility. He noted the regulatory issues solar co-ops have in PA. Mr. Buck explained that the issues in PA are not regulatory but rather are legislative hurdles because the bills continue to be killed in committee. He explained that solar co-ops pool several property owners together and scale solar power for their usage. He stated that this is an area that he can assist with. He stated that he can create ways for Reading to see how this would work and how it would affect energy usage.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the City's Active Transportation Plan will also address some transportation issues. She stated that while not the focus of the Plan, it may also help to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. She stated that additional grants are being sought and stated that BARTA is currently examining their routes and how they can reduce GHG emissions. She stated that the future use of the train will also reduce GHG emissions.

Ms. Sellers suggested closing some streets to vehicles and making all Reading streets two way. She noted the need for all to reduce their energy usage. She stated that the students did a stellar job.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher noted the need to recognize that the energy reductions have occurred even as the City's population grows. She expressed the belief that Reading is heading in the right direction.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the need for perspective when reviewing the data. She stated that the waste water treatment plan (WWTP) is the City's biggest energy user. She stated that the City has been working to reduce the energy used at the WWTP. She stated that the City can use themselves as an example to other industries to show that energy can be reduced without compromising performance.

Mr. Buck agreed with Ms. Curran-Myers. He stated that Reading can also compare itself with its sister cities.

Ms. Sellers noted her surprise in the amount of GHG emissions by the industrial sector.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher noted the need to ensure that industry has access to technical assistance and financial tools to make changes.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed and stated that technical assistance is important. She noted the progress that can be made through weatherization projects and updates in HVAC operations. She expressed the belief that if Reading can assist with measuring energy use that it will assist with companies working to reduce their carbon footprint.

Ms. Sellers questioned how to get additional studies by students. Ms. Robinson stated that she will work with Ms. Ayers-Fisher on future projects. She stated that many students need internships and capstone projects. Mr. Buck stated that he will work with Ms. Ayers-Fisher on priorities.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she has good relationships with the colleges. She stated that her next priority will be working on implementing the City's Zero Waste Plan.

Ms. Curran-Myers thanked the students for their report. She stated that the data will help improve community engagement and to assist the City in completing its Climate Action Plan.

Mr. Buck, Ms. Robinson, and Ms. McMackin disconnected from the meeting at this time.

STAFF UPDATES

Mr. Harrity stated that most of the City residents' private trash hauler contracts will expire in 2023 and that this will bring the City closer to a single hauler system.

REORGANIZATION

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned if Mr. Vitale would consider serving as chair. Mr. Vitale noted his focus on the Communications Committee and stated that he would be unable to do both.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the Communications Committee is a priority in 2023.

Ms. Smith suggested deferring this topic until the February meeting when Mr. Beane is available.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she is willing to continue as a co-chair.

Using the chat feature, Ms. Bach questioned what the chair position entails. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the chair runs the meetings, holds a leadership role, and speaks on behalf of the EAC.

Ms. Bach stated that she is still adjusting to her new position but that she will consider serving as chair or co-chair. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she will discuss this with Ms. Bach before the February meeting.

BERNHART'S PARK COMMUNITY MEETING

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that there was an article in Sunday's Reading Eagle about the Exide superfund. She stated that the Berks County Commissioners have hired a consultant to review the lead situation and that there are objections to the current lead levels. She stated that EPA has reduced the lead standards and that the unremediated island and steep slope areas are now more accessible since the lake has been de-watered. She expressed the belief that the park should be

remediated to less than 650 parts per million per the new EPA standards for residential areas. She suggested that the EAC work with the County. She stated that the EAC originally submitted objections to the remediation level of the park and those objections should remain on the record. She suggested sending a letter to the Commissioners. She stated that she will draft the letter.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that Reading owns this property but that it is located in Muhlenberg Township. Ms. Curran-Myers agreed that this is a multi-municipal situation.

RAIN GARDENS

Mr. Bachman stated that he has no update. He stated that the project was delayed but has restarted. He noted the need to move forward to assist with MS4 issues in the Wyomissing Creek Watershed.

Mr. Bachman stated that the waste lines in the 500 block of Buttonwood St have been reconnected but that the project is incomplete. He stated that RAWA is completing their work and then City can finish up.

Mr. Bachman requested that when members see overflowing catch basins that they report the location to him so that they can be cleaned. He stated that there are a total of 3,800 catch basins in the City.

Ms. Sellers questioned if community groups could clean the catch basins. Mr. Harrity stated that the Climate Corps was cleaning them in the summer and fall.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned if they could be cleaned by those participating in the Adopt-A-Block program. Mr. Harrity stated that they are but that many more people are needed.

SIGNAGE PROJECT

No report.

PLASTIC BAG BAN

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that there have been personnel changes but once the transition is complete, this project will restart.

BROWNFIELDS DATABASE

Ms. Ayers-Fisher noted the need to schedule a training session. She stated that she is training the Planning Commission on February 21. The group chose February 17 at 11 am.

Ms. Slusser disconnected from the meeting at this time.

Ms. Sellers stated that there is a meeting of the Schuylkill Action Network on January 26.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the State of the City address will be given on Thursday, January 26 at 11 am at the Miller Center.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that BARTA is holding a public meeting on Wednesday, January 25 at 5:30 pm at the Schmidt Center.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she has been invited to participate on a committee that will focus on funding environmental projects at the Berks County Community Foundation. She stated that the committee will establish grant priorities.

SCHUYLKILL RIVER CONTAMINATION

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she has not yet drafted the letter to Rev. Morrison.

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

Mr. Vitale stated that the committee met with Ms. Slusser and Mr. McCoy. An additional meeting has been scheduled for Friday, January 27 at 11:30 am so that work can begin.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Vitale questioned the project at City Park. Ms. Smith explained that the playground area is being expanded and a water feature is being added. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it will be an all abilities area.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 28 at noon via Zoom.

The meeting adjourned at 1:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by

Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk