

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, January 25, 2022
Virtual

EAC members present –D. Beane, C. Curran-Myers, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, W. Vitale, S. Crothers

Others present – S. Smith, B. Ayers-Fisher, D. Chesson, D. Nazario

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Beane called the meeting to order at 12:01 pm. He noted that a quorum was present.

Ms. Smith introduced Ms. Crothers to the group and stated that she was appointed to the EAC by City Council last evening.

Ms. Crothers stated that she has a degree in environmental studies from Albright. She stated that she is originally from Philadelphia and is currently the Education Director for Schuylkill River Greenways Association.

Mr. Beane stated that the EAC has great opportunities for Ms. Crothers to be involved. He welcomed her to the EAC. All others present provided brief backgrounds and introduced themselves to Ms. Crothers.

Ms. Chesson stated that she is a current RACC student and also works at the Reading Science Center. She stated that she also serves on the YWCA Young Women's Council.

Mr. Nazario stated that he is a writer, speaker and educator. He stated that he is currently serving as an artist-in-residence at a local high school centering on poetry and writing. He stated that he serves on several boards.

Ms. Curran-Myers explained that the Green Infrastructure Committee noted the need for staff to assist with EAC outreach. She noted the need for consistent and ongoing messages that would reach deeper into the community and engage residents. She stated that Ms. Chesson and Mr. Nazario will assist City staff.

Mr. Vitale agreed that Ms. Chesson and Mr. Nazario will coordinate with and support Ms. Ayers-Fisher. He noted his hope that their work would amplify work

being done by City staff.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the EAC has come a long way and has addressed challenging issues.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Vitale moved, seconded by Ms. Curran-Myers, to approve the October 26, 2021 and November 23, 2021 meeting summaries as written. Motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Sellers connected to the meeting at this time.

REORGANIZATION

Mr. Beane stated that the EAC reorganization occurs every January. He noted the need for a chair and a vice chair. He stated that he stepped into the chair position when Mr. Case resigned. He noted that he does not have time to devote to the chair position.

Ms. Sellers apologized for arriving late. She stated that she also does not have time to devote to the chair position. She suggested that Mr. Beane remain chair.

Mr. Beane stated that he is willing to run meetings but he cannot set the EAC's future direction. He stated that he will help when he is able. He commended the work of the EAC's committees to keep moving forward.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that Mr. Vitale serve as chair as she and Ms. Sellers served as chair in the past.

Mr. Vitale stated that he also has limited time. He stated that he would prefer focusing his energy working with Ms. Chesson and Mr. Nazario and Reading for 100. He noted the talents that Mr. Case brought to the group. He suggested setting a new strategic plan in six months and expressed the belief that Mr. Case would assist with that process.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she is willing to serve as chair with Mr. Beane's assistance as vice chair. She stated that good things are happening in Reading and

there is new energy. She stated that she will also continue chairing the Green Infrastructure Committee. She noted her hope that new members would be groomed for leadership in the future.

Mr. Vitale moved, seconded by Ms. Sellers, to appoint Ms. Curran-Myers as chair and Mr. Beane as vice chair for 2022.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz expressed the belief that collaborative leadership and team effort will be forefront in the future. She noted the need for everyone to understand their roles.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed and stated that the EAC already functions this way. She stated that all members provide ideas and leadership and someone always steps up when needed. She agreed that Mr. Vitale should focus his efforts on the work of Ms. Chesson and Mr. Nazario.

Ms. Sellers stated that it will be difficult to replace Mr. Case. She stated that he was a professional facilitator and noted the need for the EAC to continue following the priorities set under his leadership.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she is confident that Mr. Case would return to work with the EAC on another Strategic Plan to update the goals and timelines.

Mr. Beane agreed with Ms. Curran-Myers.

Motion carried unanimously.

DOWNTOWN PLUS PLAN PRESENTATION

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Mr. Myers will make this presentation at the February meeting.

SIGNAGE, MAPPING

Ms. Sellers stated that Ms. Ayers-Fisher is working on the logo.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the MOU that Ms. Sellers signed includes two phone meetings on the signage. She questioned if she would be able to contact the vendor.

Ms. Sellers stated that she has not signed an MOU. She stated that this information was provided to Ms. Ayers-Fisher for the contact information to move the project forward.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that confirmation was provided via email to move the project forward.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the MOU will confirm the cost of the signage.

Ms. Sellers stated that the chair should sign the MOU.

Ms. Curran-Myers provided a brief background on the project for Ms. Crothers, Ms. Chesson and Mr. Nazario. She stated that the Green Infrastructure Committee had a busy December moving this project forward. She stated that the logo is now complete and the EAC is ready to order the signs.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she has been working to remain within the framework of the MOU. She stated that she will begin moving forward.

Ms. Sellers noted the need for feedback on the secondary logo. She stated that this secondary logo is not needed for the signage. She noted the need for the signage to credit Philadelphia Water Department for their gift.

Mr. Beane noted the need for Ms. Ayers-Fisher to send the MOU to Ms. Smith to have Ms. Curran-Myers docu sign it.

INVASIVE PLANTS / NOXIOUS WEEDS

Ms. Smith reported that all three amendments to the Code of Ordinances were unanimously enacted by City Council. She stated that PA has also recently added two new invasive plants to their list.

Mr. Beane noted the need for education now that the amendments have been enacted. He expressed the belief that this is good timing as people prepare their spring plantings. He suggested that a BCTV program focus on this topic.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that workshops were held for rain barrel education. She suggested holding educational workshops and also taking guided tours of Oak Lane and other areas of the preserves that have been affected by invasive species. She stated that the City will also be working to remove invasives as they are able.

Ms. Curran-Myers expressed the belief that it would be helpful if the City could collect yard waste in all neighborhoods on a weekly basis without having to call ahead.

Mr. Beane noted his support of guided tours of Oak Lane. He also suggested having one in Hessian Camp.

Mr. Vitale noted his understanding of the additional time and staff needed for the City to do weekly pickup in all neighborhoods. He suggested that the EAC identify specific blocks to add to weekly pickup that are near neighborhoods that are already picked up weekly or are near large parks and / or community gardens. He questioned who to work with from the City on this project.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that this conversation should be with Mr. Harrity.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she will contact Mr. Harrity, Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Zeiber. She stated that Mr. Kissinger has approached the EAC for assistance in the past and she is comfortable working with these staff members. She noted the need to discuss staff capacity and the possibility of growing this program.

Ms. Crothers questioned if collection must be contained in paper bags. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it must be.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz agreed with the need for weekly pickup in areas near the City's woodlands. She noted that bamboo has begun taking hold on Neversink Mountain. She noted her concern that the preserve will not survive without new trees.

Mr. Vitale agreed and stated that climate change is changing the forest and things are shifting.

Ms. Curran-Myers also agreed and expressed the belief that forests are under a lot of stress. She stated that some diseases are also brought into the preserve by dumping yard waste where it doesn't belong. She stated that birch trees are very unhappy. She stated that she will use her photographs of the Mt Penn Preserve along Oak Lane for the BCTV program and the workshops.

Mr. Beane stated that he will drive through Hessian Camp and take photos also. He stated that Hessian Camp has an active community group that can be engaged on this topic.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she will also photograph Neversink Mountain. She expressed the belief that many people don't believe they are doing harm.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested engaging with Berks Nature since they are a property owner on Neversink Mountain.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the EAC has been working with Mr. Lloyd. She stated that Berks Nature has stopped trying to remove all invasive species at Angelica because there are too many.

Mr. Vitale stated that when the City required paper to be separated from other recyclables there were free paper bags available for residents at City Hall. He suggested that this possibility be explored for yard waste bags. He expressed the belief that this may improve collection but stated that he is unsure how this could be funded.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested finding a partner to donate the bags to advertise their business.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this is a great idea.

Ms. Crothers stated that she would be happy to research possible donations. She agreed that it would be helpful for weekly pickup without having to call ahead. She stated that she did not have this service when she lived in other areas and is grateful that Reading provides it.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher suggested purchasing plain bags and adding the EAC logo.

Mr. Vitale noted the need to keep yard waste out of the trash stream.

Ms. Sellers questioned if seeds would be killed if invasives are composted at home. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that generally home composting does not generate enough heat to kill seeds. She stated that larger commercial composting does because more heat is generated.

Ms. Sellers questioned where Reading's yard waste is taken. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that trees and branches are chipped. She stated that she will check with Mr. Harrity to see where yard waste is taken.

Ms. Sellers stated that Exeter has a drop-off facility that then provides compost to residents for gardening.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she would support a facility to provide wood chips and / or compost to residents in Reading. She expressed the belief that it would create a sense of community.

Ms. Sellers questioned where Reading would put such a facility. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that there are many large abandoned sites in Reading. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that several locations are being explored and would include food waste composting. She stated that she will request a project update from Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Harrity.

Mr. Beane stated that he is working with a suburban municipality on a composting facility. He stated that low level contamination is being capped and that a State grant of \$250,000 has been received and will cover most of the cost of the project.

Mr. Beane stated that this has been a great conversation and requested that this item remain on the agenda.

NEW MEMBERS

Ms. Smith stated that Ms. Noviello has not responded to any emails nor attended any meetings. She stated that Mr. Beane has also attempted to contact her and she has not responded.

Mr. Vitale moved, seconded by Ms. Sellers, to send a letter to Ms. Noviello communicating that she may be removed from membership and recommending City Council remove Ms. Noviello if she does not respond to the letter.

Mr. Beane stated that he will forward his email to Ms. Noviello to Ms. Curran-Myers to draft the letter.

Mr. Vitale questioned if there is a firm number that starts this process. Ms. Smith stated that it is three consecutive meetings without being excused. She stated that Ms. Noviello was appointed in early September and has not responded to date.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that it is now appropriate to send a letter.

Mr. Nazario stated that it is great to have systems in place but suggested addressing situations on a case by case basis. He suggested contacting Ms. Noviello personally to see why she is not engaged.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that both Ms. Smith and Mr. Beane have tried to contact her and she has been unresponsive.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that some people are not comfortable in formal structures. She suggested that there may be other ways for Ms. Noviello to engage. She noted the need not to shame her.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that conversation has not been engaged. She agreed that Ms. Noviello can serve on a Committee or can suggest working on her own project. She stated that she was appointed and there has been no further contact.

Ms. Sellers excused herself from the meeting to attend another meeting. She disconnected at this time.

Mr. Vitale stated that these are valid points but that contact needs to be made. He suggested that the letter include these other options. He questioned if there were others that are interested in serving.

Mr. Nazario stated that he may be able to identify other individuals as he works with the EAC. He noted the need for youth education.

Mr. Vitale stated that the change of the makeup of the EAC may change its focus. He stated that it is worth talking to potential new members.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed and suggested that the new Strategic Planning process occur after new members join. She agreed that the EAC's focus will shift as needed.

PLASTIC BAG BAN

Mr. Beane stated that he has no report.

ACT 2 DATABASE

Mr. Beane stated that this project is on hold until summertime. He stated that a summer intern from Liberty Environmental will be creating the database.

Ms. Curran-Myers provided a brief background on this topic. She stated that it is an environmental justice project. She stated that the database will provide a place for residents to understand where toxic materials are present. She stated that Act 2 relates to Brownfield site cleanups.

Mr. Beane stated that the County has a database but that it may be incomplete. He stated that notice is made to the municipality and not to the County.

CHAT WITH THE EAC

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this project will be explored by Ms. Chesson and Mr. Nazario. She stated that the EAC hopes to open conversation with residents to discuss environmental issues. She stated that this is a step toward greater community engagement and will help develop community relationships.

Mr. Vitale noted the need for the EAC to listen more.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed and suggested this topic be renamed "Listening Sessions".

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz excused herself from the meeting. She disconnected at this time.

Mr. Vitale agreed that this project will be developed with Ms. Chesson and Mr. Nazario. He noted the need for increased community engagement and that both Ms. Chesson and Mr. Nazario understand the EAC's needs.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the need to also develop partnerships.

Mr. Vitale suggested a meeting with himself, Ms. Ayers-Fisher, Ms. Curran-Myers, Ms. Anderson, Ms. Chesson and Mr. Nazario. The meeting was scheduled for February 3 via Zoom.

CLIMATE RESILIENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned if there was an update. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is working on a new name for plan that is easier for the public to interact with.

She stated that she is ready to restart this project and stated that she will be inviting small groups to Zoom meetings to provide updates because some of the goals have already been met. She suggested providing a more detailed update during the next Green Infrastructure Committee meeting.

The next Green Infrastructure Committee meeting was scheduled for February 11 at 11 am via Zoom.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting date is Tuesday, February 22 at noon via Zoom.

The meeting adjourned at 1:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk