

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, January 27, 2026
Zoom
Noon

EAC members present – D. Beane, S. Thompson, W. Vitale, A. Meas, C. Curran-Myers

Others present – S. Smith, S. Bachman, B. Ayers-Fisher, C. Miller

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that there is movement to create best management practices (BMP) for the application of road salt. She stated that this would help to protect ground water and streams. She noted the need to reduce the amount of salt used or to install a desalination plant.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Maryland has created a BMP manual and two years later their salt usage has been reduced by 50%. She stated that Maryland now spends less on winter salt. She added that New Hampshire has also created a BMP and added immunity from liability for road salt applicators.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the House has passed legislation requiring PennDOT and DEP to work together to develop a BMP for PA. She stated that this is a good opportunity for the City to begin researching the issue. She stated that two Republicans in the House supported this Bill so there is hope that it will pass the Senate. She noted the need to focus on both the pollutants and cost reductions.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Ms. Lara is already working on information about salting sidewalks. She suggested that the topic be expanded. She stated that if brine is applied first, there is less of a need for salt but noted the need to purchase new equipment.

Mr. Beane stated that he will share this information with Berks Nature. He expressed the belief that this topic will fit well into their program topics.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this was discussed at the latest Schuylkill Action Network meeting and stated that research is being done through the Stoud Research Center. She stated that only volunteer data is currently available and that this is a very local issue. She suggested that the local Watershed Stewards collect data to help pinpoint which Berks municipalities could make

improvements.

Mr. Vitale noted the need to advocate for the BMP and the need for Reading to set a positive example.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is trying to educate staff and residents about applying salt and reminded all that it is only effective to 15 degrees. She stated that Reading had 115 tons of salt delivered to prepare for this last storm. She stated that the appearance of the application of salt makes people feel safer.

Mr. Vitale suggested primarily focusing on the reduced costs. He noted the need to determine how to change the way people think.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the Council rep is attending this meeting. She noted the need to educate elected officials and department directors and managers.

Mr. Beane stated that he uses salt on his sidewalk but coal ashes on his porch and walkways. He stated that the ashes also provide great traction.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that clay kitty litter is also very effective.

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Thompson called the meeting to order at 12:22 pm. He apologized for joining late and noted that a quorum was present.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Ms. Curran-Myers, seconded by Mr. Beane, to approve the November 25, 2025 meeting summary as written. Motion carried unanimously.

REORGANIZATION

Motion was made by Ms. Curran-Myers, seconded by Mr. Beane, to retain Mr. Thompson as chair. Mr. Thompson agreed to continue as chair.

Mr. Beane noted the need to choose a new vice chair. He expressed the belief that this would be a great opportunity for Ms. Meas. He stated that the vice chair

is the chair's backup as needed. He stated that he found the experience very rewarding and encouraged her to consider serving as vice chair. He stated that if she is comfortable, she can consider serving as chair in 2027.

Ms. Meas agreed to serve as vice chair and agreed that it is a great opportunity.

Motion was made by Mr. Beane, seconded by Ms. Curran-Myers, to nominate Ms. Meas as vice chair. Mr. Thompson and Ms. Meas were elected unanimously.

Mr. Thompson noted that this is rewarding work.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND STAFF UPDATES

- Seeds of Change Community Garden Prep Days at the Greenhouse
Saturdays: Jan. 31 (1-3pm), March 7 (10-noon), March 21 (10-noon)
Monday: Feb. 16 (10-noon) President's Day
Thursdays (4-6pm): Feb. 5, Feb. 26, March 12, March 26, April 2, April 9, April 16, April 23, April 30
- Berks Nature Seed Swap – January 31 10 am
- Conestoga Landfill Tour – February 23 at 2 pm
- EAC Meeting – February 24 at noon via Zoom
- Berks Nature Municipal Network Luncheon on Single Use Plastic Bans – February 25 at 11:30 am
- Great American Cleanup- April 18 8am-noon Ryan Bradley-ryan.bradley@readingpa.gov
Earth Day Berks- April 18 11:30am-6pm City Park
earthdayberks@gmail.com or www.earthdayberks.org
- Camel Project Chalkpalooza- June 6 10am-2pm
pamgockley@thecamelpoint.org
- Good Medicine- June 13 11am-3pm Riverfront Park
- EJ Dives Family Fun Day- July 18 1pm-4pm

- Riverzilla- August 8 Riverfront Park

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that Berks Nature is holding a seed swap on January 31 at 10 am, weather permitting.

Ms. Meas questioned whether children were welcome to attend the Seeds of Change events. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that children are welcome to attend as long as they are supervised.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that a GESA update was recently provided to Council. She stated that good feedback was provided. She stated that the Zoning variances will be requested at the February Zoning Hearing Board meeting. She stated that setback variances are needed because both of the parking lots are non-conforming.

Ms. Smith stated that she sent the Zoning Hearing Board meeting agenda and Zoom link this morning.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that Keep PA Beautiful is holding its annual conference in Reading in 2026. She stated that planning is beginning.

Mr. Thompson questioned if the 2026 EAC Conference would be held in Reading. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she has no update on this conference. She stated that both events would be held in October.

Mr. Thompson questioned the theme of the 2026 Earth Day. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the theme is "Our People Our Power."

Mr. Bachman stated that he was able to visit and interact with the Tulpehocken Creek interactive map. He expressed the belief that it would be a great educational piece and that it would be great to have a similar map for the Reading area. He stated that Bernhart's Creek and the Rose Valley Creek are not included on the map. He stated that it is a great tool.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the map will be at Earth Day and Riverzilla.

Mr. Bachman stated that he has been plowing Sunday and Monday. He noted that many residents are throwing snow back into the streets.

Ms. Curran-Myers complimented Public Works for a job well done.

Mr. Vitale questioned the last time the City called a snow emergency. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it was in January 2020.

Mr. Vitale expressed the belief that people are not accustomed to these conditions. He stated that some Reading blocks have no place to pile large amounts of snow.

Mr. Bachman stated that Public Works is moving snow off of some blocks as they are able.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned if sewer problems have increased due to the severe cold temperatures. Mr. Bachman stated that he has not seen an increase at this time. He stated that Public Works is currently running on 24 hour operations.

Mr. Thompson voiced his appreciation of Public Works.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that there have been many sleepovers and that Mr. Zeiber has not been home yet.

Mr. Bachman stated that the Mayor and reporters from Berks Weekly did ride alongs on the plows.

Mr. Vitale questioned the availability of free parking. Ms. Smith stated that it is available until Thursday evening and is being used. She stated that City Hall employees were instructed to park in the Reed & Court garage because so many residents are using the Poplar and Walnut garage.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted that many northern municipalities use alternate side parking to clear snow curb to curb. Ms. Smith suggested that Reading could use the same schedule as the street sweepers.

OLD BUSINESS

- **Signage / Mapping**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the specs are being finalized.

- **Sidewalk Improvements**

No update.

NEW BUSINESS

- **Single Use Plastic Ban**

Mr. Beane stated that he has confirmed that single use plastics will be the topic of the February 25 Berks Nature municipal networking session. He stated that Andy Fetterman, himself, a representative from Penn Environmental, and Tom Crotty from What's Up Berks will serve as the panel. He stated that he has also worked with the Bar Association to ensure that CLEs are provided for the session to encourage solicitors to attend. He expressed the belief that the session will be very informative and noted his hope that it would kickstart municipal adoption in Berks County. He stated that the Policy Committee has identified issues with the model ordinance that will need to be revised. He stated that there is always good City turnout at these events.

- **2026 EAC Conference**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she will follow up with organizers.

Mr. Thompson stated that after attending the 2025 conference he realized that Reading is light years ahead of many other EACs. He commended the City's work.

Ms. Meas stated that she was pleasantly surprised to learn all that Reading does when she moved to the area.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

- **Communications Committee**

Mr. Vitale stated that tote bags will be ordered as give aways at events. He stated that the style and message have been chosen.

Ms. Ayers- Fisher stated that the text will be part of Article I of the PA Constitution.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the PA Supreme Court has upheld this language and held that additional legislation is not necessary to protect the environment. She stated that the language indicates that the environment is held in trust for future generations by the municipalities and the State.

Mr. Thompson stated that this is a great reminder.

Mr. Vitale stated that the bags will be used as a tool to begin conversations. He noted his hope that people would reuse the bags.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that it also works well with the single use plastics ban. She expressed the belief that it is very timely.

Mr. Vitale stated that field trips to a recycling center and Nolde Forest are being planned.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that a trip to Conestoga landfill is planned for February 23 at 2 pm.

Mr. Vitale stated that Ms. Lara has produced several videos and the outreach surveys have been updated. He stated that there was a great showing at the seed starting event. He requested suggestions from members where Ms. Lara can make additional presentations.

- **Policy Committee**

See Single Use Plastic Ban above.

- **Green Infrastructure Committee**

Ms. Curran-Myers thanked Ms. Smith for updating the agenda. She noted the need for additional members. She stated that 2026 topics were identified including ordinance updates to incentivize green infrastructure. She expressed the belief that this will help increase the number of projects. She noted her hope that Penn State will review Reading's ordinances and make recommendations. She stated that she is also working with Mr. Kissinger on yard waste dumping signage and a brochure.

Mr. Thompson questioned if there is a fine for illegally dumping yard waste. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the fine varies from \$100 - \$500.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that enforcement should come after education. She stated that the yard waste that she sees is not from commercial businesses but is mainly residential. She stated that the invasives are forcing out the native plants in the forests.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that this happens where residents have easy access to parks and preserves.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the Committee will also stay involved with the greenhouse and urban ag.

Mr. Thompson suggested that Ms. Meas join this committee. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she is a member.

Ms. Curran-Myers reminded all that committee members do not need to be City residents.

Mr. Beane stated that his and Ms. Curran-Myers's terms have expired and new members are encouraged. He stated that they intend to stay involved and continue their work. He stated that this would provide three open EAC seats.

Ms. Smith stated that Ms. Addeo has applied for membership and is moving through the review process.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed with Mr. Beane. She stated that members are authorized to remain until they are replaced.

PROJECT UPDATES

- **Beekeeping Zoning Amendment**

Ms. Smith stated that she has spoken to the Planning Manager. He stated that he would package this amendment with others as they move forward through the review process.

- **Use of ebikes**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is watching what other municipalities are doing. She stated that speed is beginning to be enforced.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this is related to Vision Zero. She suggested that this topic may interest Ms. Sellers.

Mr. Thompson stated that he has seen fewer ebikes during the cold weather.

Ms. Meas questioned if signage is required. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that rules and ordinances are needed.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher suggested that Ms. Smith distribute the Vision Zero Plan again. She stated that there has been no response to the City's federal grant application

so it is applying for State funding. She stated that an efficient system to clear the snow from bike lanes is needed.

Mr. Thompson stated that many ebikes are ridden on the sidewalks.

- **Rain Barrel Workshop**

No update.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the Green Infrastructure Committee was discussing a different type of workshop since rain barrels were done in the past.

Ms. Smith stated that downspout garden workshops were discussed. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this would be done in coordination with Public Works while downspout gardens are installed at fieldhouses.

- **Schuylkill River Trail Gateway Bridge**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that an email had circulated about a public meeting to gather community ideas about the design of the Schuylkill River Trail Gateway Bridge. She stated that the meeting will be held this Thursday, January 29 at 5:30 pm at the WCR Center, 140 N 5th St. She invited all to attend.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher explained that this bridge is near the RACC campus.

Mr. Vitale questioned if Schuylkill River Greenways has a concept for the bridge. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that this is the first meeting. She stated that Schuylkill River Greenways wants design ideas from the community. Ms. Curran-Myers agreed and stated that WCR Center and Barrio were chosen to host the meeting because they do community engagement well.

Mr. Vitale expressed the belief that this is a great idea. He noted the need to see the bridge as an empty canvas.

Mr. Thompson noted how most municipalities with a riverfront take advantage of river activities and amenities. He expressed the belief that Reading is missing many opportunities at its riverfront. He noted the need for additional events in the area and recalled the success of Scenic River Days.

Mr. Vitale stated that Scenic River Days lost its major corporate sponsor. He described how Arizona and New Mexico bridges are opportunities for art. He questioned the budget for the Gateway bridge. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that

funding would come from Schuylkill River Greenways' trail fund. She stated that they are also considering other partners.

Mr. Miller and Ms. Ayers-Fisher disconnected from the meeting at this time.

- **Urban Ag**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that there are many partners. She stated that the group is working to create a network to organize gardeners and volunteers to schedule as needed. She stated that Master Gardeners are required to volunteer and noted her hope that they would become active in the group. She stated that a farm / garden tour is being planned for 2026.

Mr. Beane stated that Master Gardener staff recognize that Reading is underserved and are making an effort to expand their reach. He stated that they are looking for opportunities in Reading.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted her hope that there would be collaboration and coordination with Urban Ag and the Master Gardeners.

Mr. Thompson stated that many people on Facebook comment that there is no place in Reading to garden. He stated that he always provides garden opportunities. He stated that people don't know what opportunities are available and then make negative comments.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the urban ag group has created a spreadsheet of community gardens and green spaces, along with contact information. She suggested that the spreadsheet be updated and shared. She thanked Ms. Melendez for her work on this project.

Mr. Beane stated that in the past most people had gardens in the fronts and backs of their homes. He noted the need to increase home gardening.

OTHER MATTERS

None

NEXT MEETING

The next EAC meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 24, 2026 at noon via Zoom.

The meeting adjourned at 1:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk