

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, February 24, 2026
Zoom
Noon

EAC members present –W. Vitale, A. Meas

Others present – S. Smith, S. Bachman, B. Ayers-Fisher, C. Miller, D. Edwards, N. Addeo, S. Wangolo

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Meas called the meeting to order at 12:07 pm. She stated that a quorum was not present.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

UPCOMING EVENTS AND STAFF UPDATES

- Seeds of Change Community Garden Prep Days at the Greenhouse
Saturdays: March 7 (10-noon), March 21 (10-noon)
Thursdays (4-6pm): Feb. 26, March 12, March 26, April 2, April 9, April 16, April 23, April 30
- Movie Knights with Centro Hispano – tabling inside IMAX at 4:30 pm; movie begins at 5:30 pm; free parking in garage and movie attendance
 - March 26 – Hoppers
 - April 23 – Super Mario Galaxy Movie
 - May 14 – movie TBD
- 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

- 2026 Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful Conference – October 14 & 15
DoubleTree

OLD BUSINESS

- **Signage / Mapping**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that files are being provided to the printer. She noted that the recent snows have caused delays.

- **Sidewalk Improvements**

No update.

Ms. Smith questioned if this topic should be moved to the Updates area of the agenda. Ms. Meas stated that it should be moved.

- **Single Use Plastic Ban**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that this is the topic of the Berks Nature Municipal Networking luncheon. She noted her hope that EAC members are registered to attend. She stated that Mr. Beane, What's Up Berks, and Penn Environmental are on the panel.

Mr. Thompson connected to the meeting at this time.

- **2026 EAC Conference**

No update.

- **2026 Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful Conference**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that this conference will be held on October 14 and 15 at the DoubleTree.

NEW BUSINESS

- **Road Salt BMP**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the Angelica Creek Watershed was tested on February 21. She stated that, as expected, there are increased chloride and salinity concentrations. She noted the need to provide public messaging about how much salt to use in streets and on private property to reduce these levels. She stated that it costs approximately \$92,000 each time the City's salt shed is replenished.

Mr. Thompson stated that this last storm was not as bad as was predicted.

Ms. Smith stated that she recently attended a Penn State Water Cooler Talk about this issue. She noted that the presentation also noted the increased salinity of ground water and that the issue goes beyond road salt application. She stated that she will share the presentation recording.

Mr. Thompson stated that he has seen an increase in insurance claims due to trucks not clearing off the entire vehicle. He suggested that a PSA be done about this issue as well.

Mr. Wangolo stated that those who do not clear the snow off their vehicles can be ticketed. Ms. Smith agreed and stated that this is State law. Mr. Miller stated that it is Christine's Law.

Mr. Vitale questioned the regulations about clearing sidewalks. Ms. Smith stated that this information is provided as part of the Property Maintenance Code. She provided this information via email to the group.

- **Schuylkill River Trail Gateway Bridge**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that Schuylkill River Greenway is looking for ways to reimagine and redesign the bridge. She stated that the next meeting is Thursday, March 5. She stated that the sessions are very fun and interactive.

Ms. Smith stated that there is also a Spotlight Community Forum scheduled for March 19. She stated that she will forward the link about the program and to register.

Mr. Vitale questioned whether the Spotlight would also be interactive. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is unsure. She explained that the bridge is owned by the County and leased to Schuylkill River Greenways.

- **Earth Day Registration**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the RHS Jazz Band will be performing this year. She noted the need for tabling volunteers.

Ms. Smith questioned if she needed to file a registration form. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is unsure if registration is needed but that she will follow up with Ms. Smith.

Mr. Thompson expressed the belief that the more EAC members that participate the better. He noted the need to work in shifts since this is a long event. He stated that it is a great event and there are always many people to meet.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the petting zoo is returning this year along with Red Creek Wildlife. She stated that there will be many things to do and that the EAC is always a huge help.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

- **Communications Committee**

Mr. Vitale stated that English and Spanish articles have been published on winter weather and climate change. He stated that the Committee discussed the Yale Center's Certification Program about Community Communications. The Committee believes this program is valuable but comes with a \$3,000 cost. He stated that the outcome of the Program is a Communications Plan. He noted the need to apply to the program and be accepted.

Mr. Vitale stated that the group continues to table at events and that reusable tote bags have been ordered for giveaway. He stated that a one page statement about environmental rights will be provided in each bag. A tour of Masano is scheduled for March 4 to view their sustainable projects.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that this tour is courtesy of GBA. She stated that participants must register.

Mr. Vitale stated that Ms. Lara has developed seasonal surveys about climate change. He noted the need to determine where the results should be shared for use. He stated that the surveys provide first hand resident concerns. He stated that social media videos continue to be produced and that the Sustainable Six documents are almost completed. He reminded all that the Sustainable Six documents contain talking points, what the City is doing, and what individuals can do.

Mr. Miller stated that he saw the articles in Berks Weekly.

Mr. Vitale questioned if Ms. Lara's article appeared in Spanish. Mr. Miller stated that it had been translated to English but that there was a link to the Spanish version.

Mr. Vitale stated that he will share both articles with the EAC. He noted the need for the community to work together.

- **Policy Committee**

Ms. Smith stated that the Committee focused on revisions to the draft Single Use Plastics Ban ordinance and preparing for tomorrow's luncheon presentation.

- **Green Infrastructure Committee**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher noted the importance of green infrastructure in the City beyond storm water mitigation.

Ms. Smith stated that the meeting focused on reviewing the Vision Zero Plan to determine how the EAC can assist the City to move initiatives forward.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that requested grant funding to implement the Vision Zero Plan was not received. The City is now prioritizing projects that can be implemented at little or no cost.

Mr. Edwards stated that the City is making progress on its Traffic Calming Plan. He stated that the installation of bump outs were recommended in several locations and noted his position that the bump outs should contain rain gardens.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher introduced Mr. Edwards.

Ms. Smith questioned if Mr. Edwards would like to be added to the distro list for the Green Infrastructure Committee. Mr. Edwards stated that he would like to be added.

Mr. Edwards stated that he sees his role as taking visions and implementing them into real projects.

PROJECT UPDATES

- **Beekeeping Zoning Amendment**

Ms. Smith stated that she has no update.

Mr. Wangolo stated that the amendment is being reviewed by the Planning Commission.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she will complete the signage requirement and questioned the deadline. Mr. Wangolo noted a March 20 deadline. He stated that he will also bring this amendment to the new Zoning Work Group for review before introducing it to Council.

- **Use of ebikes**

Ms. Smith stated that Ms. Lara is working on a PSA.

- **Green Building Alliance (GBA)**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that funding submissions are ongoing. She noted the need to identify projects in the planning and development process. She stated that the Masano tour will focus on adaptive reuse of the spaces with sustainability measures. She stated that GBA is working with the Reading School District and on a CPACE project in the private sector that will be located near 3rd & Spruce Sts.

- **GESA Project**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that year two of construction has begun. She stated that some projects have experienced weather delays. She stated that solar motion sensor lighting has been installed at the dog park and will be installed at Schlegel Pool. She stated that these lights will dim when no one is nearby but will brighten as a security tool when people are sensed. She stated that the City Hall basement punch list is being completed and the final survey for the City Hall solar project is underway. She stated that the City Hall solar construction permits will be submitted next week. The Zoning Hearing Board has continued the hearing about the Public Works solar project due to a setback question. She noted her hope that this will be finalized at their March meeting. She stated that the engineering for these projects continues.

Mr. Beane connected to the meeting at this time. A quorum is now present.

- **EPA Exide Cleanup Update**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that assessment data is being collected in residential areas first. She stated that she has no update on sampling at Bernhart's.

Mr. Beane stated that sampling results are being received with most being above 200 parts per million (ppm). He stated that most are above 650 ppm and will receive expedited remediation. He stated that he is unsure when remediation will begin. He stated that there were approximately 150 people in attendance at the last public meeting, showing increased community interest.

- **NREL Project**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she plans to share the results of the heating review at the April Green Infrastructure Committee meeting. She requested that this topic be moved to the Project Update section of the agenda.

- **Climate Resiliency and Sustainability Plan**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is updating the Plan as time allows but that many items are already being implemented.

- **Urban Ag**

Ms. Smith stated that the next Committee meeting is Thursday at noon virtually and that the BARN annual meeting is March 2. She stated that she is unable to attend BARN meetings because they are scheduled on Monday evenings and she must attend City Council meetings.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she will attend the annual meeting.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the greenhouse is open for the Seeds of Change project. She stated that it is 72 degrees inside and is a welcome respite from the cold weather.

Mr. Beane stated that he has received positive comments about this project from the Master Gardeners. He stated that some members remember when the greenhouse was in use in the past.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher noted her hope that the City would further invest in staff to have a greenhouse manager.

Mr. Miller requested that Ms. Ayers-Fisher attend a Centre Park meeting. He stated that Centre Park has a Gardening Committee and they may also wish to use the greenhouse. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is glad to attend a meeting. She noted her hope that Centre Park would become involved at the greenhouse.

- **Invasive Plants / Noxious Weeds Education**

Mr. Beane stated that he and Ms. Curran-Myers have been working on this project for several years. He stated that one tour was done on Oak Lane but there was a low turnout. He noted his hope to bring in assistance from the Master Gardeners.

- **Storm Water / MS4 Issues / City Owned Dams**

Mr. Bachman stated that work on Egelman's Dam has begun. He stated that several outfall inspections need to be done after they can be accessed safely. He stated that the City's annual MS4 report is underway.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher also noted the need to rebuild the Storm Water page of the City's website. She stated that the current links are broken so new links are needed. She requested ideas about other items to post.

OTHER MATTERS

- **Drought Situation**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that Berks is officially in a drought. She stated that RAWA has requested voluntary water use reductions. She noted the need for all to be mindful of their water usage. She stated that the water level in the Schuylkill River is very low.

Mr. Thompson stated that he received a message from RAWA and questioned whether there were any other public announcements. He stated that people do not believe there is a drought because of all the snow still on the ground.

Mr. Bachman stated that the Water & Sewer Association has also made announcements. He stated that the drought situation is also determined by the changing salt line. He stated that this is determined by PA DEP and US EPA.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that Reading is used to having lots of water available but must now be mindful of water usage.

Ms. Smith stated that there was a media release and she saw the story on WFMZ.

- **Comprehensive Plan / Zoning Amendment**

Mr. Wangolo stated that the City did not receive grant funding to draft the Comprehensive Plan. He stated that the Planning Commission is determining how to move forward. He stated that the Transit Oriented Development Zoning Overlay is moving forward for Planning Commission and City Council review. He requested that the EAC review the draft before it is finalized.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Mr. Vitale, seconded by Mr. Beane, to approve the January 27, 2026 meeting summary as written. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Thompson thanked Ms. Meas for conducting the meeting.

NEXT MEETING

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

The meeting adjourned at 1:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, MMC
Deputy City Clerk