

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, February 25, 2025
Virtually

EAC members present – D. Beane, W. Vitale, S. Thompson, A. Sellers, J. Cole

Others present – S. Smith, B. Ayers-Fisher, D. Osgood, S. Bachman, S. Harrity, M. Wardecker

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Thompson called the meeting to order at 12:03 pm. He noted that a quorum was present.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Mr. Vitale, seconded by Ms. Sellers, to approve the meeting summary for January 28, 2025 as written. Motion carried unanimously.

SCHNEIDER ELECTRIC PRESENTATION

Mr. Wardecker shared his screen and reviewed a Power Point presentation. He stated that this GESA project will help the City be in position to transition to 100% clean energy by 2050. He stated that he has great interactions with the City.

Using the chat feature, Ms. Smith questioned if the current federal funding pause would affect the project. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the \$6 million of ARPA funding has already been received as has the Energy Efficiency Block Grant funding. She expressed the belief that this funding cannot be taken back but that the City is closely monitoring the funding pause. She stated that the tax credits are also secure. She stated that she has applied for low-income community funding which will result in another possible \$300,000 (approximate).

Mr. Wardecker commended Ms. Ayers-Fisher for applying for the low-income community funding. He stated that this funding is not included in the financial plan because it is a competitive grant.

Ms. Sellers noted her concern about a new federal rule to reduce the infrared range in LED lighting. She stated that the new lighting levels will cause metabolic physical changes. She stated that LED lighting will include more blue lighting. She noted her support for energy saving options but suggested that the savings should not be at the cost of physical health.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher requested that Ms. Sellers send her this new information. She stated that she has no knowledge of this. Ms. Sellers stated that she will provide the information. She stated that the rule has not yet passed.

Mr. Vitale questioned if the rule would remove infrared lighting. Ms. Sellers stated that it would not but it would be bluer light and would increase the lumens per watt.

Mr. Vitale questioned if the rule was being proposed by the Department of Energy (DoE). Ms. Sellers stated that she believes it is proposed by the DoE and expressed the belief that there would no longer be warm lighting.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher expressed the belief that the lumens would remain the same as the current range.

Mr. Wardecker stated that he was also not aware of this new rule.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that staff comfort is also a big driver of this project.

Mr. Vitale stated that LED lighting allows the installer to program the lighting in a range of warm to cold. He expressed the belief that this is an advantage of LED lighting. He stated that it results in better visibility and can be tuned to specific tasks. He stated that he would also like to read this new rule.

Mr. Thompson stated that a quick Google search explained that the new lighting will disrupt melatonin levels at intense exposures and will disrupt sleep patterns.

Ms. Sellers noted her concern that LED streetlights shine into people's homes and will be disruptive.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that all new lighting is directed down to avoid light shining into people's homes. She stated that she is also working with Met-Ed to replace its current lighting with new LED downward facing lighting over the next several years.

Mr. Wardecker stated that he has designed several sports fields with LED lighting. He agreed that the lighting is directional and focuses on the field and not out into the neighborhood.

Mr. Thompson questioned the work that will be done on Skyline Dr. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that light poles will be installed that have solar panels and batteries. Mr. Wardecker explained that the batteries will be installed in the base of the pole so that they are easier to maintain. He stated that similar lighting is used in Erie along the Lake Erie waterfront and in their streetlights.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that PennDOT is also installing them along the Turnpike.

Mr. Vitale questioned if the batteries are strong enough to store energy on overcast days. Mr. Wardecker stated that the battery size was chosen to ensure that there is light on overcast days and during the winter months with the shortest days and longest nights.

Ms. Sellers stated that the new DoE rule increases efficiency from 45 lumens per watt to 120+ lumens per watt using blue light.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the work at the fieldhouses also includes the installation of air conditioning. She stated that this will allow the fieldhouses to be used year-round and will reduce energy costs. She stated that every project must save the City at least 20% or it wasn't included. She stated that the use of oil is also being eliminated except at Baer Park where the furnace is newer and will be used as a backup as needed. She stated that the HVAC systems will be remote controlled to control the temperature when the fieldhouse is in use and when it is not.

Mr. Wardecker stated that the projects move energy sources to electric when able and stated that electricity will be the primary source at all locations. He stated that this new HVAC system will allow increased use by the community, will improve air quality, reduce humidity, and mitigate CO risks.

Mr. Vitale requested more details about the solar installations. Mr. Wardecker stated that the projects will result in 2.8 megawatts. He stated that solar panels will be installed on the City Hall roof and as canopies over the Cedar St parking area and the Public Works parking areas. He stated that 99% of the City's energy usage will be produced with these panels and there will be a total cost offset.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that community solar is not yet available in PA but that the extra energy can be metered within two miles. She stated that overall energy efficiency will also increase and that data is not included in the cost savings calculations. She expressed the belief that the solar panels will create more than 100% of the City's usage and that the energy created at City Hall and Public Works can be transferred to other City properties.

Mr. Vitale stated that 4,000 solar panels will be installed. Ms. Ayers-Fisher agreed.

Mr. Vitale expressed the belief that without ARPA funding this project would not have moved forward. Ms. Ayers-Fisher agreed that the project would not be on this scale.

Mr. Vitale noted the need to accomplish the project as it is intended. Mr. Wardecker agreed and stated that this is a large investment that will be utilized for a long time.

Mr. Vitale agreed that this is an investment in the City's future and expressed the belief that it is a win-win situation.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the GESA legislation was enacted by the federal government in 2004 and allows government agencies to do energy projects in specific ways.

Mr. Wardecker thanked all for the discussion and stated that there were great questions. He stated that construction will begin soon. All thanked Mr. Wardecker for his presentation.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND STAFF UPDATES

- **Bernhart's Park / EPA Exide Cleanup**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that a community meeting was recently held and that the project is now formally in the assessment phase. She stated that the City has submitted its required paperwork. She stated that she is working with the superfund team to appear on a BCTV program to educate the general public. She stated that there are 1,500 properties affected and all must allow access to their property to continue the assessment and remediation. She stated that so far all funding is moving forward.

Mr. Beane stated that EPA is working to create a community advisory group (CAG). He stated that these groups are common and allow the community to have a voice in the remediation process. He stated that the recent meeting had a low turnout but that there is interest in forming a CAG. He stated that the EAC is hoping to be a part of the CAG since the City is a property owner. He stated that he and Ms. Curran-Myers are interested in serving along with Ms. Ayers-Fisher. He stated that the formation of the group will take several months and that the CAG is not run by EPA but by the group itself.

Mr. Beane stated that EPA is currently sampling the soil and groundwater within one mile of the former Exide site. He expressed the belief that this process would take 1 – 2 years.

Mr. Thompson noted that EPA has had its funding cut by 60%.

Mr. Beane stated that EPA has already received full funding for the assessment phase. He noted that EPA was concerned about federal funding cuts and has pre-paid its contractor for this work. He stated that the project is not at risk at this point but that the reporting and cleanup strategies are not yet funded.

- **Earth Day**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the Great American Cleanup and Earth Day will be held on April 26 at City Park. She stated that the EPA team will attend. She stated that sign-ups are available and social media posts are coming.

Mr. Harrity disconnected from the meeting at this time.

- **Schuylkill Watershed Congress**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the Schuylkill Watershed Congress will be meeting on March 29 at Alvernia. She stated that this is a one-day conference to discuss Schuylkill Watershed issues and expressed the belief that it will be a great program. She stated that she will provide a link to additional information with Ms. Smith to share. She stated that this is a great event for those who are new to water science. She stated that Public Works is an event sponsor.

Mr. Thompson encouraged all members to attend events. He expressed the belief that this shows that the EAC is working and not only talking.

- **Blood Lead Screening Event**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that this event was held last Saturday with three families attending. She stated that there was one referral for additional testing. She stated that this family will also be referred into the City's lead hazard removal program. She stated that screenings will also be available at Earth Day.

OLD BUSINESS

- **Beekeeping**

Mr. Beane stated that the revised draft will be reviewed by the Planning Commission at their meeting this evening. He stated that he will attend to answer any questions.

Mr. Cole stated that he will also attend. He questioned when the ordinance would be considered by City Council. Ms. Smith stated that Zoning staff is working on several amendments and that this one may be bundled with others. She stated that she did not have a specific timeframe.

- **Signage / Mapping**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the story map project is on pause while a new student is located to continue the work. She stated that she will discuss this with the Green Infrastructure Committee at their meeting next week. She stated that signage also needs to be discussed at the committee meeting.

Ms. Sellers questioned permit requirements. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that most of the signage will be on City property. She stated that there will be no fees but that the paperwork must be submitted.

- **2024 Annual Report to City Council**

Ms. Smith stated that she sent a list of EAC projects to Ms. Bach noting the need for follow-up.

Mr. Thompson stated that he is willing to assist as needed.

- **Goggleworks Rain Barrel Workshop**

No update.

- **Use of Ebikes**

Mr. Cole noted the need for in-depth discussion of possible solutions. He stated that a roundtable was considered so that the EAC can facilitate and determine the scope of the issue. He expressed the belief that there are many interesting

possibilities. He noted his preference to involve all stakeholders from the beginning of the process. He stated that this topic will go beyond bikes and include all forms of small electric means of transportation. He stated that some people are uncomfortable with some vehicles including dirt bikes and ATVs but that they have become part of the City's culture. He noted the need to determine the stakeholders and assemble the group.

Ms. Sellers questioned if Mr. Cole had researched other municipality's solutions. Mr. Cole stated that he recalled that some municipalities allow dirt bikes and ATVs on their streets during specific hours or while on their way to a track. He stated that he will begin researching possible solutions.

Mr. Beane expressed the belief that this topic is environmental and not environmental. He suggested that the EAC may have an educational role. He stated that Council has been working to address dirt bikes and ATVs for several years and suggested that discussion with the EAC's Council liaison should be the first step.

Dr. Osgood disconnected from the meeting at this time.

Ms. Smith agreed that Council support will be needed for this initiative to move forward. She stated that the group should not invest time and energy into the initiative if Council does not support it.

Mr. Thompson also agreed that this is the best place to begin.

Mr. Vitale suggested speaking with Mr. Miller and the Police Chief. He noted the need for an initiative champion to move this forward as City staff has many other duties and responsibilities. He suggested that Mr. Cole speak with Mr. Miller and allow Mr. Miller to guide the EAC. He stated that this discussion may lead to a roundtable discussion. He agreed with Ms. Sellers that research should be done to determine other municipality's solutions.

Mr. Thompson stated that dirt bikes and ATVs are a major issue. He also agreed with Ms. Seller's suggestion to research possible solutions.

Mr. Vitale expressed the belief that micro transportation option use will continue to grow.

Ms. Sellers expressed the belief that this initiative should be part of the City's Complete Streets policy. She noted the need to include the Planning Commission in the initial discussions and stated that the City is currently working on a Safe Streets for All policy.

Mr. Cole stated that he would be glad to initiate discussions with Mr. Miller and requested Ms. Smith's assistance in setting up this meeting. He stated that he will begin researching solutions and will outline his discussion points. He stated that he welcomes comments from other members before his meeting with Mr. Miller.

Mr. Vitale also noted the need to define the types of vehicles that would be permitted. He expressed the belief that all types are currently used interchangeably but that they really are not the same.

Mr. Thompson thanked Mr. Cole for taking the lead on this initiative.

Mr. Cole suggested that members provide names of others who should be invited to the roundtable via email.

Mr. Vitale suggested including BAMBA.

Ms. Sellers suggested including the County Planning department.

NEW BUSINESS

None

PROJECT UPDATES

- **Communication Committee**

Mr. Vitale stated that Ms. Lara has produced several topical videos and written several articles. He stated that they were well done and quickly speak to the issues in a non-academic way. He expressed the belief that working with Barrio has been great and that Ms. Lara articulates the issues and connects with people.

Mr. Vitale stated that Ms. Lara attended an event last weekend with approximately 100 people and he is looking forward to her report. He stated that the first quarterly report has been submitted.

Mr. Vitale reminded all about the Green Building Alliance (GBA) event this Thursday at 1 pm.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher explained that the GBA is a non-profit organization that focuses on assisting municipalities, businesses, and non-profits to become more energy efficient. She stated that the City has received funding for a three year program in Reading to help develop climate resiliency. She stated that the session will be via Zoom and stated that this is a way to scale the work being done by the City into the larger community. She stated that GBA will provide organizations with technical support.

Mr. Vitale questioned if large businesses and non-profit organizations were invited. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that they were invited. She stated that this is the first of many opportunities to get engaged.

Mr. Vitale questioned the number of people registered to attend. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she did not have that information.

Mr. Vitale noted the need to pre-register to attend.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that a field coordinator is needed for the program and she requested that EAC members help recruit to fill the position.

Mr. Vitale stated that the Sustainable Six documents are being revised. He stated that the documents will be added to the EAC's webpage and will be printed. He stated that they will serve as guidance to implement the Climate Action Plan.

- **Policy Committee**

Mr. Beane stated that a networking event was held at Berks Nature regarding street trees. He stated that Ms. Lazar from PA DCNR made a presentation geared toward municipalities without tree regulations. He noted his concern with Reading's ordinance since many properties are no longer owner occupied and trees are not being maintained. He noted the need to revise Reading's ordinance and to learn from other municipalities.

Mr. Beane suggested that the City's ordinance shift toward City maintenance of street trees but noted that there would be a high cost. He stated that the presentation led to good conversations and that Ms. Lazar is willing to meet with Reading as is Mr. Hartley.

Mr. Beane stated that the Committee met with Mr. Kissinger and was surprised to learn that enforcement of tree maintenance is no longer a large issue. He stated that Mr. Kissinger has several suggested amendments and that this issue may be able to be completed without the assistance of Ms. Lazar.

Mr. Beane stated that it was suggested that Reading review Lancaster's tree regulations. He stated that a link to those regulations was shared by Ms. Smith. He stated that he and Ms. Curran-Myers can assist with drafting the amendment.

Using the chat feature, Ms. Smith stated that Reading's and Lancaster's regulations are very similar.

Mr. Beane stated that the next Berks Nature networking event will be held in June and will feature single use plastics bans. He noted the need for municipal cooperation to have a larger impact and to not duplicate work.

Ms. Sellers questioned if Wyomissing attended the tree event. Mr. Beane stated that they did but that using Lancaster would be better since the municipalities are similar. He stated that Wyomissing is smaller and not as dense as Reading.

Mr. Vitale questioned if Mr. Kissinger elaborated. Mr. Beane stated that enforcement is better and that Mr. Kissinger has spent time educating MDJs about the property owner's responsibilities and requirements. He stated that Mr. Kissinger spends a lot of time on administrative duties which could decrease if the City takes responsibility of the street trees. He expressed that he continues to feel that the City should move in that direction. He noted his understanding of the financial challenges. He also noted the need to educate realtors about property owners' responsibilities with the trees.

Ms. Sellers expressed the belief that education can go away if the City maintains the trees.

Mr. Beane stated that trees are being lost and cannot be replaced at the same location due to utility restrictions.

Mr. Cole stated that this is also problematic. He noted the need to consider a hierarchy of tree substitutes.

Mr. Beane stated that Mr. Kissinger will include the hierarchy in his recommendations. He stated that smaller trees will cause problems with the street sweepers.

Mr. Cole stated that there will be different situations. He suggested that the hierarchy be determined during replacement review.

Ms. Sellers noted the amount of water that trees absorb and their cooling effect.

Mr. Beane stated that he was surprised to learn the amount of water absorbed by the tree canopy, in addition to the roots.

Ms. Sellers stated that Wyomissing requires trees to be replaced with large trees.

Using the chat feature, Ms. Smith stated that Reading and Wyomissing streets are very different.

Mr. Cole stated that he was disturbed to learn of all the damage that UGI is doing to the street trees. He again noted the need for alternatives.

Mr. Vitale agreed that it would be difficult to plant trees on some Reading streets. He also noted the need to be mindful of trees and plants that can survive in the urban environment.

Mr. Vitale noted the need for education and questioned whether the Shade Tree Commission has a brochure. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that they do but that it needs to be updated. She noted the need for consistent branding. She stated that street trees help the City with stormwater management and there should be a requirement to replace a tree even if it is in a different location. She stated that the City was laid out long before there were vehicles and stated that Philadelphia is dealing with similar issues. She noted her agreement with Mr. Beane that a new funding source is needed for a long-term solution.

Mr. Thompson reminded all about the time.

Mr. Vitale suggested discussing the brochure at the Communications Committee meeting.

Ms. Sellers disconnected from the meeting at this time.

- **Storm Water / MS4**

Mr. Bachman stated that the focus has been on snow removal and keeping inlets and outflows open. He stated that he recently learned of a situation with a tree behind Gregg Ave that he is investigating. He stated that he is still looking for locations for signage in Reading about the Wyomissing Creek watershed. He stated that a location near Berks Catholic was suggested.

- **Fluoride in Drinking Water**

Mr. Beane stated that there will be no report until after the updated EPA studies are completed.

- **Energy Efficiency Project**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that lighting is currently being replaced on the third floor of City Hall. She stated that a “Flip the Switch” ceremony will be held after the lights are replaced in Council chambers.

- **NREL Project**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that applications are currently being accepted and she plans to apply.

- **Urban Agriculture**

Ms. Smith reminded all about the need for volunteers to read in elementary schools for Ag Literacy Week.

- **Solid Waste / Recycling**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the next PSA is on recycling do’s and don’t’s and will debut on cable and streaming tomorrow.

- **City-owned Dams**

Ms. Smith stated that work is progressing on the removal of Bushong Dam.

- **Code Review Committee**

Mr. Vitale stated that this work will begin after the City adopts the updated building codes.

- **Zero Waste Plan**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that this is not currently a priority as she has been focused on other projects.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 25, 2025 at noon via Zoom.

The meeting adjourned at 1:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk