

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, February 27, 2024
Virtually

EAC members present –D. Beane, S. Bach, S. Thompson

Others present – S. Smith, B. Ayers-Fisher, R. Bradley

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Bach called the meeting to order at 12:02 pm. She noted that a quorum was not present.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

Mr. Vitale and Ms. Sellers connected to the meeting at this time. Ms. Smith noted that a quorum is now present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Mr. Beane, seconded by Mr. Vitale, to approve the January 23, 2024 meeting summary as written. Motion carried unanimously.

STAFF UPDATES

Mr. Bradley stated that a cleanup has been scheduled on Penn, Cherry, and Court Sts between 2nd and 11th St on March 30. He stated that curb painting will also occur and that this event is sponsored by Rep. Guzman and Mayor Moran.

Ms. Curran-Myers and Mr. Bachman connected to the meeting at this time.

Mr. Bradley stated that the Great American Cleanup is scheduled for April 20 and that he is taping a BCTV program on the removal of dams this afternoon. He reported that Reading Rising Park is clean.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the importance of the dam removal projects and stated that it has been an EAC priority for at least nine years. She stated that this is a very timely topic.

Ms. Sullivan connected to the meeting at this time.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher provided the following events:

- Keep Reading Beautiful meeting on March 8 at noon
- EPA Community Meeting regarding Exide on March 13 at 6 pm at Muhlenberg Middle School
- Climate Action Plan “Train the Trainer” on March 14 at 5 pm at Public Works
- Legacy City Neighborhood Strategic Planning sessions on March 11 and 28 at 6 pm at Tec Centro and April 13 at 11 am and the main branch Reading Public Library
- Seed Saving Workshop on March 16 at Tom Masano
- Lucky’s Lane (339 S 7th St) garden cleanup March 16 at 2 pm
- Earth Day celebration April 20 in City Park
- 13th & Green Elementary School Carnival on May 13
- Berks Nature luncheon for County EACs on June 6

Mr. Cole connected to the meeting at this time.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she has feedback on the Solid Waste ad – 93% of viewers watch the entire ad and there have been 80,000 views to date. She stated that the next ad will feature the Great American Cleanup and Earth Day and the final ad will feature recycle / trash sorting and special collections.

Ms. Sellers questioned where the ad is running. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it is running on Comcast and some streaming services. She stated that the ad is also running on BCTV at no cost.

Mr. Beane questioned if March 18 is the date of the rescheduled landfill tour. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is still working on this and will confirm the new date.

Mr. Vitale stated that this is a full calendar of events.

Mr. Bachman stated that he had no updates at this time.

OLD BUSINESS

- **Signage**

Ms. Sellers questioned if a permit is needed to install the signage at Mimmo’s. Ms. Smith stated that the sign will need to get Zoning approval and stated that the permit application is available on the City’s website.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that part of the contract with Dean Marketing is their assistance with finding local vendors to determine the materials needed and to create the sign. She stated that she will follow up for a progress update.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the rest of the graphics are being drafted now and that the process should go more quickly since the first sign is complete.

Ms. Sellers stated that she has not yet begun her work on the BMP spreadsheet.

- **Rain Garden Installations**

No update.

- **Brownfields Database**

Ms. Smith stated that the City has hired a new Planning Manager so her work will begin from scratch.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she and Chris Geltz will be attending the Brownfields Conference. She stated that this will kickoff work between the City and EPA to get Phase One studies completed on City brownfields sites.

- **2024 Great American Cleanup and Earth Day**

Ms. Bach questioned if there is a registration form on the City's website. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the webmaster is currently working on the form. She stated that there have been IT issues since last Friday.

Mr. Bradley agreed that the webmaster is working on the form. He stated that there are four organizations, including the Reading JROTC, that have committed.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the EAC registered as a group in the past. Ms. Bach agreed with this approach. She requested that members email her with their availability to participate in the Cleanup and Earth Day and she will schedule shifts.

Mr. Bradley stated that he will provide the Cleanup flyer to the group.

Ms. Bach stated that there has been good publicity about the events.

Mr. Thompson questioned if there would be a tree planting included in the events this year. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that this is in the planning stages. She stated

that she is working with Mr. Kissinger and the hope is to plant native fruit bearing shrubs in the former rose garden area.

- **Innovation Corridor – Green Spaces**

No report.

- **Technical Assistance from the Water Center at UPenn and the University of Maryland Environmental Finance Center**

Ms. Bach stated that she has met with Ms. Showers and Ms. Ayers-Fisher about potential projects. She stated that the MS4 Steering Committee will also be approached.

- **Annual Council Report**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she is currently drafting the report. She stated that she will distribute the report next week for member comments.

Mr. Vitale questioned if the report would be the basis of the EAC presentation to Council. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that it would not. She stated that the report is required annually but is not Climate Action Plan (CAP) related. She stated that this report expands on the EAC's definition and mission to provide additional information to the new Council members. She stated that her research took longer than she anticipated and she thanked Ms. Smith for her assistance. She stated that this report will highlight the EAC's work and list its priorities.

Ms. Bach stated that the next in person report to Council will be in 2025.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Council now receives in person reports from all the City boards, authorities, and commissions monthly which takes approximately three years to cycle. She thanked Mr. Beane for starting the in person reports.

Mr. Vitale stated that the Communication Committee will be making a presentation to Council in April or May about the CAP.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that there will be some overlap from the written report to the presentation.

NEW BUSINESS

- **Letter Urging City to Address Environmental Educator Position**

Mr. Vitale noted the need for the City to amend the Environmental Educator Position by moving it from part-time to full-time and paying a living wage. He stated that there have been problems finding a qualified person to fill the position. He stated that he has drafted the letter and has spoken with Mr. Zeiber, who supports sending the letter to the Managing Director. He noted the need for the EAC to approve sending the letter. He stated that the letter outlines why this position matters and that it is required by the State. He noted that this position should play a larger role as part of the team.

Ms. Curran-Myers moved, seconded by Ms. Sellers, to send the letter to the Managing Director and City Council to recommend the amendment of the position.

Ms. Curran-Myers reminded all that the EAC has sent similar recommendation letters in the past. She stated that the EAC is responsible for advising the City about environmental matters.

Mr. Vitale expressed the belief that even if this position is full-time, additional staff members are needed.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed. She stated that the EAC appreciates that the City is understaffed.

Motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Smith stated that she will put the letter on EAC letterhead and send it to the Managing Director and Council.

- **Disposition of “Intersectional Environmentalist” Books**

Ms. Smith stated that when this book was used for a book club event, she purchased three copies for EAC members to borrow. She stated that the books remain in her office and she questioned how the EAC would like her to repurpose them.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that they be given away as prizes at Earth Day. All agreed.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the need to determine how they would be given away.

PROJECT UPDATES

- **Communication Committee**

Mr. Vitale stated that a climate training for teachers will be held on April 29. He stated that a CAP presentation will be made at the NAACP meeting on April 15 at 6 pm. He stated that the presentation will be 30 minutes at 1251 N. Front St. He noted his hope for a good discussion.

Mr. Thompson stated that he requested specific topics to focus on before the presentation so that the EAC can be better prepared to discuss specific issues.

Mr. Vitale stated that Ms. Slusser is updating the Power Point presentation to a 30 minute and 60 minute version. He stated that she has also completed a brochure highlighting the EAC and is working with the webmaster to update the EAC web page. He stated that the webmaster will be attending the next committee meeting.

Ms. Sellers questioned if she could upload her BMP spreadsheet. Ms. Smith stated that all content is uploaded by the webmaster.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the current links and documents on the page will be reorganized and new information will be added.

Mr. Vitale stated that Ms. Slusser is moving projects forward.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is working on an NREL C2C grant to retrofit new energy systems into existing housing stock. She stated that five different types of properties will be used as models. She stated that there will be significant funding available in 2025 for heating and cooling projects in PA and the models will be used for recommendations. She stated that NREL will be making a presentation to the EAC in May.

Ms. Smith stated that the May meeting was scheduled to be in person. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it will need to be held via Zoom.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that Drexel students are working on a brochure describing available programs. She stated that Wyomissing is interested in starting an EAC

and two residents are attending this meeting. She stated that an EAC mixer is being planning for the summer to bring all the EACs in Berks County together.

Ms. Sellers questioned the number of EAC's in Berks County. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it is 12 – 14 and many are in rural communities.

Mr. Beane stated that he will assist with planning the mixer. He stated that similar gatherings were hosted by Berks Nature in the past.

Ms. Sellers suggested sharing the City's signage with the other EACs.

Mr. Vitale stated that there are many ways to collaborate.

Ms. Sellers stated that she will also assist with planning the mixer.

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

Mr. Vitale stated that five of the Sustainable Six have been drafted and will become brochures and be placed on the web page. He stated that they are very comprehensive.

Mr. Vitale stated that he has met with Barrio Alegria and Centro Hispano about working together for an outreach intern. He stated that a lunch and learn will be presented to the staff at Centro Hispano.

- **Policy Committee**

Mr. Beane stated that the focus has been on Beekeeping. He stated that this requires a Zoning amendment which will be reviewed at the next meeting.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the need to continue working on the Shade Tree issue.

- **Green Infrastructure Committee**

Ms. Bach stated that the Committee's topics have been discussed throughout the meeting.

- **Urban Agriculture**

Ms. Smith stated that she has no update.

Mr. Cole stated that he will be attending the meeting tomorrow. He stated that Ms. Smith has recruited for members of the Shade Tree Commission through the Urban Ag group.

- **Invasive Plants / Noxious Weeds Education**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she has no update but that plans need to be made to hold sessions in the spring. She noted the need to coordinate signage with MP3 and Public Works about dumping organic waste in parks and preserve areas.

- **Storm Water / MS4 Issues**

Mr. Bachman stated that crews have been busy repairing catch basins. He requested that members inform him if they see a basin in need of repair.

Ms. Sellers questioned trash removal at inlets. Mr. Bachman stated that Mr. Bradley schedules these cleanups. He stated that the street sweeping program assists by keeping some litter out of the system. He stated that basins are cleaned by request.

Ms. Sellers stated that this is an important BMP. Mr. Bachman agreed but stated that the City has 3,800 catch basins. He stated that they are addressed as crews are able but that each one cannot be done in a timely manner.

Ms. Sellers stated that she often sees debris in the Schuylkill River and she presumes that it comes from the City. Mr. Bachman described how cleanups are done and conditions are back the next day. He noted the need for resident education.

Ms. Sellers questioned how the EAC can assist with education. Mr. Bachman stated that flyers and stickers are distributed at events.

Mr. Thompson suggested covering this issue at the NAACP event. He noted the need to raise awareness.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this is the focus of the first ad. She stated that residents complain and feel that's the City's job to do when everyone should be cleaning up litter.

Mr. Vitale suggested discussing this at a Communications Committee meeting to be proactive.

Ms. Smith, using the chat feature, expressed the belief that residents who have catch basins abutting their properties should clean this litter regularly to prevent it from entering the system.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed with Ms. Smith and stated that people need to care for the places they live. She expressed the belief that cleaning the catch basins is also part of the Adopt-a-Block program.

Ms. Sellers suggested having students clean the catch basins near schools.

Mr. Thompson noted the need for residents to set a good example for one another.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed but stated that most people will complain to the City and think that this is someone else's job to do.

Ms. Bach noted the need to continue addressing this issue at tabling events to educate residents and raise their awareness.

Mr. Vitale noted that people are looking for ways to make a difference in the environment and this is a simple one. He stated that he will add this topic to the Communications Committee agenda.

- **City-owned Dams**

Ms. Smith stated that the City is moving forward with work on Egelman's Lower Dam. She stated that she forwarded the flyer about the EPA community meeting regarding Bernhart's and Exide earlier today.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned progress at the removal of Bushong Dam. Ms. Smith stated that this is being worked on but that she is unsure where it is in process.

OTHER MATTERS

Mr. Vitale stated that he recently spoke with Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz who asked him to tell the EAC she said hi and that she is interested in serving on a committee.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that she serve on the Policy Committee. Mr. Beane agreed.

Mr. Vitale stated that Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz is passionate about the environment and has much experience.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that Ms. Bach contact Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz to discuss this.

Ms. Sellers noted the importance of good policy.

Mr. Cole disconnected from the meeting at this time.

Ms. Sellers thanked Ms. Bach for conducting an efficient meeting and keeping everyone on time. All agreed.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 26 at noon via Zoom.

The meeting adjourned at 1:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk