

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, March 23, 2021
Virtually

EAC members present –D. Beane, A. Sellers, C. Curran-Myers, S. Case, B. Vitale

Staff present – S. Smith, B. Ayers-Fisher, N. Crimm, S. Bachman, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, D. Talarico, B. McMahon, R. Johnson, B. Gensemer

CALL TO ORDER

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

Ms. Crimm joined the meeting at this time.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Ms. Curran-Myers, seconded by Mr. Beane, to approve the February 23, 2021 meeting summary as written. Motion carried unanimously.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Beane provided a brief background of the EAC.

Mr. Haag arrived at this time.

Ms. Curran-Myers explained that there are professionals on the EAC but that they often consult with other professionals to ensure that there is a deep understanding of the issues and to network with others. She stated that much of the work of the EAC is actually performed by others.

Mr. Case questioned the current status of applications that have been submitted. Ms. Smith stated that they are currently being reviewed by the Mayor. She explained the Charter residency or business interest requirement.

Mr. Case explained that anyone can be a member of a subcommittee

EAC members introduced themselves.

Mr. McMahon stated that he is a City resident and also is the current owner of the Medical Arts Building. He stated that he was a founding member of Entech Engineering and is currently working with the City to conduct energy audits. He stated that he is a civil engineer with an MBA in economics. He thanked the EAC for allowing him to attend.

CITY BROWNFIELD SITES AND REQUIREMENT TO HOOK-UP TO PUBLIC WATER SYSTEM

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she and Mr. Beane spoke with Ms. Millman from the Greater Reading Chamber and Mr. Fetterman from Liberty Environmental. She stated that they are hoping the EAC will work with the City to endorse a new use aquifer for Reading. She stated that this will assist with Act 2 requirements for redevelopment projects.

Mr. Beane stated that this waiver designation will streamline the Act 2 requirements for groundwater impacts. He stated that if contamination is found the waiver or relief of liability is lengthy and can take up to two years. He stated that each review is site specific. He stated that remediation of contamination can include a cap for soil. He stated that for groundwater studies must be completed to ensure that the water won't migrate to a stream or well over a 30 year period. He stated that most developers won't take possession of a property without a waiver.

Mr. Beane explained that a waiver can be put in place for Reading because of their use of public water and the lengthy review process by DEP is not needed. He stated that this will streamline the redevelopment process and will benefit the City.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that a survey must be completed and that the EAC will be a partner. She stated that Liberty Environmental will perform the actual survey work. The survey must locate all wells at risk of exposure. She gave an example ensuring that none of the community gardens use well water. She stated that the Chamber and Liberty will be paying for the survey. She noted the need for the EAC to work with City officials to explain the need and benefit of the waiver. She stated that she will invite Ms. Millman and Mr. Fetterman to the next meeting for additional discussion and questions. She stated that Lancaster City has done the survey and provides the waiver.

Mr. Case questioned what needs to be done to move to the next step. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the EAC needs to determine if this topic is worthy of further discussion. Mr. Beane agreed and stated that no formal action is needed at this time since the topic is still being investigated.

Mr. Case requested that Ms. Smith keep this topic on the April agenda for a presentation and additional discussion.

Ms. Sellers questioned if the waiver would preclude collecting rain water for gardens. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that it would not because only ground water is affected.

READING HOUSING AUTHORITY PRESENTATION

Mr. Talarico stated that the Housing Authority Administration building expansion has been an interesting project. He stated that it is a joint project between the City, the Housing Authority (RHA) and the 18th Wonder.

Mr. Talarico described storm water problems in this area that have existed since 1952. He stated that the islands and trail project, handicapped ramp installation, and intersection revision is progressing. He stated that the RHA will be expanding the Administration building. He stated that the current green space will be where the project expansion will be located.

Mr. Talarico stated that he was concerned about the areas with storm water issues from the beginning of this project. He stated that he looked at several options to cure the runoff issue and that he recently made a presentation about the project to City Council.

Ms. Smith screen shared the plan drawing.

Mr. Talarico explained that the grey shaded areas will be the new employee / visitor parking area. He stated that the improvements will help to connect the bike trails. The parking lot will include 44 parking spaces and include retaining walls. He stated that there is an extensive infiltration bed planned for under the parking lot to help reducing flooding in the area.

Mr. Talarico stated that he will be appearing at the Planning Commission meeting this evening. He added that in addition to moving employee and visitor parking

off City streets, the project adds another 10 curbside parking spaces. He stated that the expansion will provide spaces for meetings and trainings.

Mr. Case questioned the construction timeline. Mr. Talarico stated that the project went out for bid last week. He noted his hope that the bid would be awarded in May and the work begin in June. He noted his hope for completion by February '22.

Mr. Case suggested that the project be considered for EAC signage for the infiltration bed.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that Council asked many questions about the project. She stated that Council has approved Doug Lamb Construction for the intersection revision. She stated that this work is a major City investment.

Ms. Sellers questioned if the City is adding parking. Mr. Talarico stated that the parking is being added by RHA.

Ms. Sellers questioned the infiltration rate for the infiltration bed. Mr. Talarico stated that he does not have that information but that the contractors do.

Ms. Sellers questioned Act 2 issues with infiltration and mitigation of contaminants. Mr. Talarico stated that there are no environmental issues with the project. Mr. Beane stated that infiltration is okay if there are no wells for drinking water. Ms. Curran-Myers agreed with Mr. Beane.

Mr. Vitale questioned who designed the project. Mr. Talarico stated that it is Kautter and Kelly and Stackhouse Bensicker.

Mr. McMahon stated that he is a member of the Board of Berks Catholic. He offered to assist in any way. Mr. Talarico thanked Mr. McMahon and stated that he has been working closely with the school.

Mr. Talarico stated that the expansion will not be LEED certified but that it will be very efficient. He stated that 75% of the construction waste will be recycled and that an old underground fuel tank has also been removed.

Mr. Case thanked Mr. Talarico for his efforts.

Mr. Talarico stated that he is willing to work with the EAC to install signage on the project.

HIGHLIGHT CITY SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that interviews have begun for the Sustainability Manager position and Clean City Coordinator. She stated that the Clean City Coordinator will now be responsible for downtown cleanliness, community clean-ups and community engagement. She noted her hope that these positions would be filled before the EAC's April meeting. She thanked the EAC for its support of these positions.

Mr. Case stated that there is much new funding available to address infrastructure issues. He stated that energy upgrades and green infrastructure projects to assist low income families transition to renewable energy are also available at low cost. He stated that the original energy bill did not pass but that a piece of the bill is finding its way into new proposed legislation. He noted the need to ensure that Reading is ready with projects when these funds become available.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the City is aware of this new funding. She stated that the Administration will be presenting its plan to City Council. She warned that many times the funds have strings attached. She noted the need for a review of the funding guidelines. She stated that she will provide an update once more details are known.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Rep. Houlihan's website includes information on the reinstatement of earmarks. She stated that these projects need to be shovel ready. She suggested that the EAC help get projects to legislators for consideration. She warned that in addition to being shovel ready the projects will have a short completion timeline.

Mr. Talarico stated that the RHA has two projects out for bid that may qualify – the Oakbrook trail and the storm water mitigation. He expressed the belief that the RHA is ready.

Ms. Sellers stated that she sent a link to all for a funding opportunity but that the due date is tomorrow. She stated that it was a very short ten day application window.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that there are two different grant application cycles.

Mr. Haag stated that RACC is working on a project with CARES 2 funding. He stated that any HVAC work must now include COVID relief measures. He agreed that projects need to meet the needs of the funding.

Ms. Sellers questioned if Rep. Houlihan represents Reading. All noted that she does. *(Note: Rep. Houlihan has a District office in Reading City Hall.)*

SIGNAGE, MAPPING

Ms. Sellers stated that three signs will be installed in 2021 – tree trench, porous basketball court, and rain garden.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the Green Infrastructure Committee discussed either Mimmo's or Amanda Stoudt Elementary for the tree trench, the City Park Bandshell for a wetland, Stonecliff or Berks History Center for a rain garden, 11th & Pike Playground for the basketball court, and the green roof on the DoubleTree. She suggested that the DoubleTree may pay for their sign installation.

Mr. Vitale stated that he has not been able to make contact with anyone about Amanda Stoudt. He suggested that the Berks History Center may also fund their own sign installation.

Ms. Sellers stated that she would like to work with the RHA to put a sign up for the infiltration bed. She stated that not many people understand how they work.

Mr. Case questioned when action needs to be taken to allocate funds. Ms. Curran-Myers noted her hope that action would be taken today.

Ms. Sellers noted her hope that once a few signs are installed that more signs will be installed by others.

Ms. Curran-Myers moved, seconded by Ms. Sellers, to authorize the creation and installation of three signs with a cost of up to \$6,000 allowing the Green Infrastructure Subcommittee to make the final determination of location.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this project will take more than half the EAC's 2021 budget.

Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Johnson stated that in regard to the Brownfields Act 2 issue there are several active industrial wells in the City. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the Chamber is aware of them and that they will not be an issue.

Mr. Johnson agreed in regard to the RHA project that Mr. Talarico began with environmental goals.

Mr. Johnson suggested installing a rain garden and signage at 3rd & Spruce.

INVASIVE PLANTS / NOXIOUS WEEDS

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that much work had been done but it was lost on her computer. She stated that she must redo it.

URBAN AGRICULTURE

Ms. Curran-Myers thanked Ms. Smith for her work on this project. She stated that the Conservation District has applied for grants to develop gardens / urban ag opportunities in Reading. She stated that there are 44 possible vacant lots but that the work on the lots will not begin until summer '22.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Ms. Sihelnik has applied to become a member of the USDA Urban Ag Committee. She stated that this will be an exciting way to boost this opportunity.

Ms. Smith stated that she is working with the Task Force on the new community garden at Oakbrook. She stated that they are interested in installing rain barrels at the garden and that the Conservation District has access to barrels. She questioned if the EAC is interested in assisting with the installation and holding a workshop for Oakbrook residents. Mr. Beane and Ms. Curran-Myers stated that they will assist.

Mr. Talarico stated that he will assist with access to the garden area if needed.

Ms. Sellers described crimping weeds as part of no till farming. She stated that this improves soil health.

VIRTUAL EARTH DAY

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that virtual Earth Day will be April 22 – 25. She stated that information can be found at EarthDayBerks.org or the Earth Day Facebook

page. She stated that the Committee will be highlighting community members who are making a difference. She noted her hope that in-person Earth Day can be held in City Park on June 13.

Mr. Johnson left the meeting at this time.

Ms. Smith stated that the EAC submitted an application for a booth at Earth Day 2020. She questioned if another application needs to be submitted. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it does not.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the area of City Park used for the event will be expanded to increase social distancing. She stated that masks will be required.

COMMUNITY CLEAN-UPS

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that 22 clean-ups are scheduled. She noted her hope that 100 clean-ups will take place this year.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the Great American Clean-Up will be held on April 24 with multiple sites. She stated that there will be ten sites to pick up equipment to reduce crowd size. She stated that the City will provide the equipment and staff will be available. She noted her hope that sponsors will provide snacks. She stated that sign-ups begin next week.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz expressed the belief that residents are not engaged. She noted the need to get residents that use City parks and playgrounds involved in the clean-ups.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher agreed. She noted her hope that Olivet will be involved at the Pendora and the Clinton St locations.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested engaging Fairview Christian School for Neversink Playground.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she has applied for a grant through Rep. Houlihan for \$7,500 to purchase during clean-up equipment. She requested the EAC send a letter of support.

Motion was made by Ms. Curran-Myers, seconded by Mr. Case, to endorse this project with a letter of support. Motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she will prepare the letter.

Mr. Talarico left the meeting at this time.

Ms. Sellers noted the need for a draw for young people and suggested a band. Ms. Smith stated that this was done in the past but that COVID will not limit crowd size. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that this is not in her budget but that a sponsor may provide it.

PAGODA ENERGY PROJECT

Mr. Case stated that a local company had excess RECs but that company has now expanded and is purchasing additional RECs for their use. He stated that if the Pagoda Foundation is interested he will contact others.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for a reality check. She stated that there is major infrastructure work that is needed including the large retaining wall. She suggested delaying this project until the building is secure. She expressed the belief that as built the Pagoda was never meant to exist this long. She stated that climate change is affecting its stability and noted the need to not put the cart before the horse.

Mr. Case agreed and stated that this project will be removed from the EAC's agenda until the Foundation is ready to proceed.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz thanked the EAC for being an ally to the Pagoda.

2021 BUDGET

Mr. Case suggested deferring this discussion until the impact of the signage project is known.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the need for the Climate Resiliency Plan to also receive funding.

TRAILS

Ms. Sellers stated that there have been no recent meetings. She stated that there is work to connect the 18th ward to the Schuylkill River Trail.

Mr. Haag left the meeting at this time.

Mr. Murray joined the meeting at this time.

LEAD ABATEMENT COALITION

Mr. Murray explained that he was at a Coalition meeting that ran long and is why he did not join the meeting sooner.

PFA's

Mr. Murray stated that there is no change but that it is being more closely examined. He stated that Berks's levels are low.

Mr. Murray stated that the regulations for lead and copper are being examined and may become stricter.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Ms. Curran-Myers asked Ms. Smith to begin planning the next meeting.

NEXT MEETING

The next regular meeting of the Environmental Advisory Council will be held virtually on Tuesday, April 27 at noon.

The meeting adjourned at 1:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk