

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, March 26, 2024
Virtually

EAC members present –D. Beane, S. Bach, S. Thompson, W. Vitale, J. Cole, C. Curran-Myers

Others present – S. Smith, S. Wangolo, C. Miller, S. Bachman, C. Sullivan

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Bach called the meeting to order at 12:01 pm. She noted that a quorum was present.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

Ms. Sellers and Ms. Zabala connected to the meeting at this time.

Ms. Smith stated that the City has hired a new Planner. Mr. Wangolo introduced himself and stated that he joined the City in February.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Ms. Curran-Myers, seconded by Mr. Beane, to approve the February 27, 2024 meeting summary.

Mr. Vitale stated that he has two corrections to the summary:

- On page 6, paragraph seven under Communication Committee – Mr. Vitale stated that rather than “five different types of properties” it should read “five row homes”
- On page 7, last paragraph under Communications Committee – Mr. Vitale stated that the lunch and learn has not yet been scheduled.

Motion to approve the meeting summary as corrected carried unanimously.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Mr. Bachman stated that Ms. Zabala is in attendance today to discuss holding a rain barrel workshop. He stated that originally this was a project for the Master Watershed Stewards but is incomplete. He stated that the barrels would be placed at 3rd & Walnut Sts. He stated that barrels and kits are available but that the workshop has not been scheduled.

Mr. Beane stated that rain barrel workshops were done in the past in partnership with the Berks County Conservation District (BCCD). He stated that the workshop had a brief Power Point presentation and then barrels were built. He stated that the workshops were very well attended and he is willing to assist with this workshop.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the workshop also summarized the City's rain barrel ordinance and reiterated that rain barrels are permitted City-wide if the basic standards are followed. She stated that she is also willing to assist with the workshop.

Ms. Sellers noted the need for rain barrels to have a good place to discharge excess water. She noted the need to prevent creating areas of stagnant water. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this information is included in the workshop presentation.

Ms. Zabala noted her hope to hold the workshop in May. She stated that the weather will be better. Ms. Curran-Myers agreed and stated that many people are working to set up their gardens at that time.

Mr. Beane stated that BCCD donated the barrels and the kits in the past.

Ms. Sellers questioned the purpose of the workshop. Mr. Bachman stated that the purpose is to teach residents how to use rain barrels and to have them build one for home use.

Ms. Sellers questioned if people could bring their own barrel. Mr. Bachman stated that this is okay as long as the kit works on their type of barrel. He stated that the kits are designed for plastic barrels.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she has three rain barrels at the Albright garden. She agreed that kits are made for plastic barrels.

Ms. Bach stated that Ms. Zabala has the full support of the EAC and that members will participate and assist. She stated that this is exciting and noted the need to choose a date.

Ms. Sellers questioned how the workshop would be advertised. Ms. Bach stated that a flyer can be distributed on social media. Ms. Zabala stated that Goggleworks has a marketing team that will advertise the event.

Ms. Zabala suggested holding the workshop on a Friday evening. She stated that she will provide a date. Members agreed to a Friday evening.

STAFF UPDATES

Mr. Bachman stated that there have been no major rain events. He stated that the crew has been repairing damaged catch basins.

Ms. Zabala disconnected from the meeting at this time.

Ms. Bach questioned if a tree planting will be part of the Earth Day event. Mr. Bachman stated that he has no update on this issue.

Ms. Bach requested that all members email her their availability for both the Great American Clean Up and Earth Day and she will prepare a schedule. She stated that she will register the EAC for the events.

Mr. Bachman stated that there is also a cleanup event on Saturday, March 30 from 9 am – noon at 6th & Penn Sts. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she has registered for this event.

Ms. Smith reminded all to follow the City on Facebook to remain updated about events. Mr. Cole stated that the City also posts events on Instagram.

OLD BUSINESS

- **Signage**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Dean Marketing has provided drafts of all of the types of signage. She noted the need to review the drafts to determine if changes are needed. She stated that she has also provided the text needed for the website to begin the mapping project.

Ms. Sullivan stated that she has updated the spreadsheet of map locations. She stated that she will share this with the group.

Ms. Bach noted the need to provide comments on the signage to Ms. Curran-Myers.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she will follow up with Dean Marketing.

Ms. Sellers suggested that the Green Infrastructure Committee review the signage as a group at their meeting on Monday. The group agreed.

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

Ms. Bach stated that these groups are now working directly with Ms. Ayers-Fisher.

- **Annual Council Report**

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

- **Berks County EAC Mixer**

Mr. Beane stated that Berks Nature will convene a meet and greet in the late spring. He stated that the EAC has had several email inquiries from other Berks EAC members looking for guidance. He stated that information has been shared. He stated that he will provide information as the mixer develops.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Kutztown's EAC is also interested in the mixer. She stated that this is exciting.

Ms. Bach questioned if the date was June 6. Mr. Beane stated that this is a separate event being held by Berks Nature. He stated that the meet & greet will be less formal.

NEW BUSINESS

- **Berks Nature Public Meetings**

Ms. Bach stated that Berks Nature is holding a series of public meetings to receive community input. She suggested that members attend if they are able.

Mr. Vitale noted his concern that besides the meetings being held at Berks Nature, none of the other meetings will take place in Reading.

Ms. Bach questioned if she should contact Berks Nature about this concern.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that Ms. Bach contact Berks Nature. She stated that she has also been troubled for some time. She stated that the preschool photos show all wealthy white children. She noted the need for Berks Nature to get

serious about DEI and suggested that the EAC assist. She noted the need for Berks Nature to expand to new users.

Mr. Vitale agreed with Ms. Curran-Myers and suggested that this would make the entire community better.

Ms. Sellers stated that City schools participate in many Berks Nature events.

Ms. Bach noted the need to expand this participation to community events.

Mr. Vitale suggested that Ms. Bach suggest that Berks Nature go to where the people are. He credited Berks Nature for scheduling this extensive list of meetings.

Ms. Curran-Myers expressed the belief that attending these meetings could be intimidating. She stated that visiting Berks Nature makes one believe that they are entering Alveria's campus. She stated that she is a fan of much of the work of Berks Nature and that they do things very well.

Ms. Bach noted her agreement that Berks Nature needs to go where the people are.

Mr. Vitale explained that he served on the board of Berks Nature in the past. He stated that City representatives dwindled and when he left the board he was the last City resident. He noted the need for Berks Nature to pay more attention to the built environment. He expressed the belief that EAC comments have value and that all must work together to combat climate change.

Ms. Bach stated that she will contact Ms. Murphy.

- **EPA Exide Cleanup Update**

Mr. Beane stated that he attended the meeting but that it was not well attended. He explained that EPA has added the one mile radius around Exide to the national priorities list. He stated that EPA hopes to award a contract to begin sampling this summer so that sampling can begin this fall. The sampling will take approximately three years to complete.

Mr. Beane stated that EPA will draft a remedial plan and then remediation will begin. He stated that full remediation should take approximately five years. Bernhart Park will be sampled and EPA will work with the City directly to develop a remediation plan for the park. He stated that Ms. Ayers-Fisher also attended the meeting.

Mr. Beane stated that he will continue to follow the situation. He stated that EPA is working with PA Department of Health to consider blood testing in the future. He expressed the belief that the process is off to a good start. He stated that EPA will readdress their past work since safe lead levels have been reduced.

Ms. Curran-Myers reminded all that the EAC provided formal comments. She stated that the EAC also requested that sampling occur downstream due to flooding issues and the possible migration of contaminants. She expressed the belief that some contaminants may have traveled beyond the one mile radius.

Mr. Bachman stated that there are many issues where the creek goes underground in Northmont. He described the large sinkhole behind Delta Ave. He stated that the piping where the creek goes underground must be cleaned often and is a flooding hotspot.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the need for these issues to be part of the scope of the remediation. She also noted the need to create a community advisory group.

Mr. Beane stated that a community advisory group was discussed at the meeting. He stated that what the function of the group is and how to form the group was reviewed. He stated that EPA will assist and stated that volunteers will be giving a lot of time to this project. He stated that the group will need to review reports and information and hear concerns and feedback from the community. He stated that there is a link on the EPA website to volunteer to serve.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she plans to volunteer. She stated that EPA will assign a technical consultant to the group to help explain the reporting results. She stated that she speaks and understands this process.

Mr. Beane expressed the belief that it would be helpful to have Ms. Curran-Myers involved. He stated that several community members questioned when Bernhart's Dam would be rebuilt. He stated that this will not be part of the process. He stated that Ms. Ayers-Fisher explained this but that the community does not want to hear that.

Ms. Bach stated that this is an important issue and noted the need for the EAC to support the process.

Ms. Sellers requested an explanation of PA Act 2. Mr. Beane stated that Act 2 does not apply to this cleanup. He stated that Act 2 is a PA program where property owners can elect to clean contamination off their property. He stated that there are many cleanup standards. He stated that an interested developer of the Exide facility is working through the Act 2 process and that EPA is assisting to perform emergency stabilization. He stated that Act 2 and the superfund programs are separate.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Act 2 is a land recycling program and that the two programs are connected. She explained that superfund sites have liability issues and the properties were never reused – rather businesses were built on green fields. She stated that the Act 2 process releases some liability issues after the cleanup is completed.

Ms. Sellers questioned why Exide is not responsible for cleaning up this pollution. Mr. Beane stated that they are responsible but have declared bankruptcy and closed operations. He stated that during this process a trust fund was created but that the trust didn't contain enough funding to complete the cleanups. He stated that EPA may pursue funding recovery but that is not part of the cleanup process.

Ms. Sellers questioned who owns the Exide property. Mr. Beane stated that it is currently owned by the trust.

PROJECT UPDATES

- **Communication Committee**

Mr. Vitale stated that Ms. Ayers-Fisher continues to provide Climate Action Plan (CAP) presentations. He stated that Ms. Slusser has updated the Power Point presentation and a training / review was held. He stated that the intent is to have Committee members make additional CAP presentations. He stated that two people from Barrio also attended the training session and one speaks Spanish as her primary language. He stated that good questions were asked and outreach opportunities were discussed. He stated that a proposal will be drafted for outreach work to make presentations to Spanish speaking audiences. He stated that Mr. Thompson will be making a presentation to NAACP on April 15.

Mr. Vitale stated that the EAC's webpage is being updated. He stated that the webmaster will make the updates as the content is provided. He stated that UPenn students will be working with the Green Infrastructure location spreadsheet to get

the locations pinned to a map on the website. He stated that the map base will be Google Maps.

Mr. Cole disconnected from the meeting at this time.

Mr. Vitale stated that Ms. Sullivan has created a scavenger hunt for an Earth Day activity and Ms. Slusser is doing great work.

Mr. Thompson stated that he is meeting with Ms. Ayers-Fisher about the presentation on April 15. He stated that he has asked the group to provide environmental issues that they are concerned about so that the presentation can be more focused. He stated that the Power Point is flexible and can be tailored to specific audiences. He stated that website links are also included if people want additional information. He stated that Ms. Ayers-Fisher will also be attending the session.

Mr. Vitale stated that he also plans to attend. He stated that Ms. Slusser has provided a short video that could be used to introduce the topic. He stated that it is a seven minute Ted Talk describing how to talk about climate change. He stated that he will share the link.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the presentation has many slides that can be chosen. She stated that this is exciting work.

Mr. Thompson stated that the presentations will be interactive. Ms. Curran-Myers agreed and noted the need to listen and get community feedback.

Ms. Bach noted her appreciation of the work of the members of this committee.

- **Policy Committee**

Mr. Beane stated that a final draft of the Zoning amendment is being prepared and the next steps are the formal review process. He stated that once this project is completed focus will return to the Shade Tree issue.

Mr. Beane stated that he has spoken with Mr. Lloyd from Berks Nature about the tree issue. He stated that Mr. Lloyd has put him in contact with a representative from DCNR to coordinate a meeting with other nearby municipalities to discuss street tree maintenance issues. He expressed the belief that making the property owner responsible is no longer the best model for Reading. He stated that the Committee will hear the other municipalities' experiences and guidance before

amendments are recommended. He stated that Mr. Lloyd and Mr. Kissinger will also be active in the process. He stated that he expects this meeting to be scheduled within the next few weeks.

Ms. Bach thanked the committee for their work.

Ms. Sellers requested a good example of street tree work in another municipality. Mr. Beane stated that DCNR has recommended speaking with Wyomissing. He stated that Mr. Lloyd has determined that Reading has a 10,000 tree deficit.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed with the deficit and stated that this is just to get Reading back to the standard number of trees.

Ms. Bach stated that there is grant funding available from the US Forest Service for urban tree canopy work. She stated that she will review this further.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the PA Department of Ag is also moving forward. She reminded all that BARN is merging with the Urban Ag Task Force and this is an ideal time to work on street trees.

- **Green Infrastructure Committee**

Ms. Bach stated that the Committee is meeting on Monday, April 1 at noon.

- **Code Review Committee**

Mr. Vitale stated that Ms. Ayers-Fisher is pursuing a grant to update the City Codes relative to sustainability.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Hailstone is currently working with PA DEP on the CAP program. She stated that Hailstone will recommend model language. She noted the need for the City to improve its resiliency. She expressed the belief that this approach is better than an EAC review.

Ms. Sellers questioned the process. Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that Ms. Ayers-Fisher provide an update at the next meeting.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 23 at noon via Zoom.

The meeting adjourned at 1:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk