

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, March 28, 2023
Virtually

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

Others present – S. Smith, B. Ayers-Fisher, R. Bradley, S. Bachman, S. Harrity, K. McCoy

CALL TO ORDER

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

Ms. Sellers connected to the meeting at this time.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Mr. Beane, seconded by Ms. Sellers, to approve the February 28, 2023 meeting summary as written. Motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Smith thanked Ms. Bach for catching the incorrect date. She stated that the meeting summary has been corrected.

WWTP ENERGY AUDIT RESULTS

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that eight municipalities participated in the two year cohort which included staff training and peer to peer interactions. The cohort was supervised by the PA DEP Energy Office.

Ms. Sullivan connected to the meeting at this time.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher reviewed a Power Point presentation. She stated that Reading was the largest municipality and operated the largest plant of all the participants. She stated that the audit was completed at no cost to the City and that Reading's plant scored 63 out of 100. She stated that this means that Reading's plant operates more efficiently than 63% of other plants and it was the highest score in the cohort.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher explained that achieving a score of 75 or higher will earn an energy star rating for the City. She stated that the plant produces 4,300 tons of greenhouse gas annually, which is the same as the output from approximately 929 gas powered vehicles. She stated that the oldest equipment in the plant dates to 2018 so there is no need for equipment replacement at this time. However, the audit results will determine the replacement of components in the future. She stated that the LED lighting will be completed and new thermostats will be installed.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher invited the group to tour the plant this summer now that construction is complete. She stated that the plant upgrade helped to reach these goals.

Mr. Vitale questioned how the plant score would be improved to 75. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that some improvements will be made and that she hoped to reach this goal in 2024.

Mr. Vitale questioned if there was a linear relationship between the cost of a project and the lessening of the carbon footprint. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that there is a relationship but that it is not an apples to apples comparison. She stated that the City is working to reduce the KWHs needed to run the plant and will be adjusting the hours that certain processes occur. She stated that the methane efficiency also needs to be adjusted as the plant does have some flaring.

Mr. Vitale questioned if this information will be communicated with the community using the 4,300 ton to 929 vehicle comparison. He questioned if past emissions can be calculated to show an improvement. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the City does not have past emissions data because the new plant uses a totally new system. She stated that 2021 will be the City's base year to determine future improvements.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned if previous energy use at the plant can be determined. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that this data tracking did not begin until 2018 and again stated that the plant operations are now very different. She stated that the old system used tricklers. She noted the need to improve water quality and use less energy as the plant's ultimate goals.

Mr. Vitale questioned if the greenhouse gas emissions can be measured for City Hall and the Public Works building. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that data has not yet

be compiled for specific buildings. She stated that the WWTP is the City's highest energy user.

Mr. Vitale stated that this is good information for the community to know. He questioned the status of the City's consent decree. Ms. Smith stated that it is her understanding that the City is currently negotiating with the Department of Justice to determine if the consent decree can be lifted or modified.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the need for the community to understand that the City completed the project and that taxpayers and ratepayers are getting their monies worth.

STAFF UPDATES

Mr. Harrity reminded all about the upcoming Great American Clean-Up event and Earth Day on April 22. He stated that he will begin working with PA DEP to locate those who are illegally dumping tires and with Crime Alert Berks for signage and rewards for reporting illegal dumpers.

Mr. Bradley stated that there has been good feedback for the Great American Clean-Up and he is currently recruiting volunteers. He stated that the City has received three bids from companies that will clean the areas below the lookouts.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the EAC will have a table at Earth Day and noted the need for volunteers to attend.

BCTV PROGRAM

Mr. Bradley stated that he met with Mr. Beane and Mr. Furdyna and that the program will begin in April and will be held monthly. He requested that EAC members participate in the first two shows.

Mr. Beane suggested that these shows focus on the EAC and its mission and provide an overview of current projects.

Mr. Bradley stated that shows are now pre-recorded and can be done via Zoom or in the studio. He stated that BCTV will record either way. He expressed the belief that there is much environmental content to discuss.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested reviewing the Climate Action Plan as part of the outreach and education process.

Mr. Bradley requested that an in-depth review occur on a future program.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned when shows would be taped. Mr. Beane stated that he has a taping schedule and will circulate it to members.

Mr. Vitale stated that there is an online portal to schedule tapings. He stated that the slots are for one hour on the hour. He stated that multiple shows can be taped at one time by reserving several slots in a row. He stated that there is no editing and that shows are broadcast as if they are live.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned if BCTV can share pictures, graphs, Power Point presentations, etc. Mr. Beane stated that they can as long as they are provided to BCTV in advance.

Mr. Vitale stated that BCTV is very flexible but does require that tapings not be hybrid – everyone must either all be Zoom or all be in person.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she will participate in the overview. She questioned if Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz was still the EAC Council liaison. Ms. Smith stated that she is but that she is not seeking re-election. She stated that Council will reorganize in February 2024 and a new liaison will be appointed. Mr. Bradley stated that he will invite Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz to participate.

Mr. Vitale suggested that if three people will be participating that the program be a full hour. He stated that the time passes quickly.

Mr. Cole suggested involving the interns and suggested that they could use some of the information on the show for social media posts. All members agreed.

Mr. Beane suggested submitting a new program logo.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed and suggested that the program should also be renamed.

Mr. Beane agreed noting that the EAC is seeking a new audience.

Ms. Sullivan agreed that this content can be used for social media posts. She stated that hosting events will help grow the EAC's audience. She also noted the need to be clear that the public can attend events. She stated that many don't realize that

they can participate. She noted the need for everyone to work together to bring about change. She stated that outreach can begin at Earth Day to engage neighborhoods. She stated that many times people learn about events after the fact.

Mr. Cole agreed about learning about events after the fact. He stated that there are events that he would attend if he knew about them.

Mr. Vitale noted the need to change the way the community communicates with itself. He stated that there can no longer be reliance on the newspaper and questioned the best way to reach people.

Ms. Sellers suggested working with young people to determine where they get their news.

Ms. Sullivan suggested posting events at local churches.

Mr. Vitale suggested continuing this conversation at the next Communication Committee meeting.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed that new ideas are needed.

PROJECT UPDATES

- Communications Committee

Mr. Vitale stated that the Committee will also discuss a new name for the BCTV program. He stated that he is looking for the next generation to participate in the community. He stated that a new brochure has been created and will be distributed at Earth Day. He stated that there will also be posters and that volunteers are needed between noon and 6 pm.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she will circulate an email to members to coordinate volunteers for Earth Day.

Mr. Vitale stated that the interns are working together on social media posts and that Mr. McCoy will be creating two short videos. He stated that he and Ms. Curran-Myers are drafting Sustainable Six language to use for social media posts and educational materials. He stated that the list of green inventory projects in the City is longer than he anticipated and that he is prioritizing those projects to include on the map.

Ms. Curran-Myers requested that Ms. Sellers provide information about each type of green infrastructure. Ms. Sellers stated that she will provide information.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested moving forward and making any necessary changes later. Ms. Sellers agreed and suggested adding photographs at a later time.

Mr. Vitale stated that the Committee is also discussing cultural communication and training. He stated that the EAC will participate in the Recreation Commission's Wacky Water Wednesdays to meet residents where they are.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the cultural communication is part of the EAC's DEI and sensitivity training. She stated that she recommends moving forward and using Ms. Sullivan's contact as the trainer.

Mr. Beane questioned if the goal of this training is to address how to communicate messages to the community. Mr. Vitale stated that this is a possible outcome. He stated that this training would be available to all EAC members but not a requirement. He stated that the cost of the program is not known at this time.

Mr. Beane expressed the belief that this will benefit the EAC. Mr. Vitale noted the need to address inclusion issues.

Ms. Bach expressed the belief that this is a great idea and will benefit members. She stated that there are deep-rooted issues with environmental justice.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that young people think differently and have different communication styles. She also noted the need to address Latinx cultural differences. She stated that after this training is complete the Climate Action Plan conversations can begin.

Mr. Cole agreed that the EAC needs an expanded outreach and that this is an important issue. He also noted the need for materials to be available in English and Spanish.

Mr. Vitale stated that the full program is six one hour sessions. He suggested starting with one session and evaluating continuation. He noted the need to understand the cost. The suggested facilitator will be Hasani Hudson.

Mr. Vitale moved, seconded by Mr. Thompson, to schedule one session with a cost not to exceed \$500. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. McCoy disconnected from the meeting at this time.

STAFF UPDATES (CONTINUED)

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

Ms. Ayers-Fisher provided the following dates:

- April 11 - PA DEP to present the State Climate Action Plan at Berks Nature
- April 19 - Free Leadership & Sustainability Conference at Alvernia
- April 22 - Earth Day
- April 29 – PA Land Conference in Reading. She stated invited members to attend the Plenary Breakfast.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that Reading is a member of the Water Alliance to address water equity. She stated that work will kick-off on May 9 and requested an EAC member participate in the work group. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she will participate.

Mr. Vitale questioned details about the business roundtable. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it will occur on April 6 and she will send the registration link.

Mr. Vitale questioned if a member of the EAC should attend. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that attendance is optional. She stated that the focus will be on energy efficiency resources.

NEW BUSINESS

- Update EAC Webpage

Ms. Curran-Myers asked all members to review the EAC webpage before the April meeting. She noted the need for information to be easy to find and suggested reorganizing information.

Using the chat function, Ms. Smith stated that the bulk of the webpage must remain the same to stay within the City's framework for consistency but that the categories and information can be reorganized.

NEXT MEETING

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

The meeting adjourned at 1:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk