

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, April 22, 2025
Virtually

EAC members present – D. Beane, S. Thompson, C. Curran-Myers, A. Sellers

Others present – S. Smith, B. Ayers-Fisher, S. Bachman, S. Harrity

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Thompson called the meeting to order at 12:05 pm. He noted that a quorum was present.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Mr. Beane, seconded by Ms. Sellers, to approve the February 25, 2025 and March 25, 2025 meeting summaries as written. Motion carried unanimously.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND STAFF UPDATES

Ms. Ayers-Fisher provided the following upcoming events:

- April 23 – Reading Conservation Corps and PA Outdoor Corps will be working at the Buttonwood Garden from 9 – 11 am
- April 25 – Green Building Alliance (GBA) Energy Efficiency 101 at Alvernia Upland Center for municipalities, school districts, businesses, and nonprofit organizations
- April 26 – Great American Cleanup and Earth Day

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that 500 people have signed up for the Great American Cleanup. The Great American Cleanup begins at 8 am and supplies will be picked up across from the tennis / basketball courts. Set up for Earth Day begins at 10 am. The tree planting, a red oak, and proclamation will be held at 11:30 am and the event is noon – 6 pm rain or shine.

- South American Grandmothers Day – Saturday, May 10 from 10 am – 2 pm at the Northeast Branch Reading Public Library – recycling theme
- Chalkapalooza sponsored by Keep Reading Beautiful and the Camel Project – Saturday, May 10 from 10 am – 2 pm at Northeast Middle

School

Mr. Thompson stated that the Recreation Commission has announced that they will be holding Wacky Water Wednesdays again this summer. He stated that these are fun events and the EAC's attendance is worthwhile.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed and encouraged all to attend. She stated that the events are enjoyable and are a great opportunity to interact directly with the community.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that a "Flip the Switch" celebration will be held at the May 12 City Council meeting after the City Hall lighting project is complete.

Ms. Smith reminded all about the Schuylkill Action Network bus tour on May 2. She encouraged all to register to attend.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it will be a short tour and will highlight the City's stormwater infrastructure and how Reading is using green infrastructure to enhance its stormwater system.

OLD BUSINESS

- **Beekeeping**

Ms. Smith stated that she has no update.

- **Signage / Mapping**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she has no update.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that quotes have been received and a local company has been chosen to provide the signage. She stated that the signage will not be installed in time for the Schuylkill Action Network bus tour but that she will have samples available at that event. She stated that the signage is expected to be installed by the end of this summer.

Mr. Thompson questioned where the signs would be installed. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she does not recall all of them but stated that they will be installed at 6th & Amity Playground, Baer Park, and Angelica Park. Ms. Smith added that one will be installed at Mimmo's.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the signage will have great graphics.

- **2024 Annual Report to City Council**

Ms. Smith stated that she and Ms. Bach have drafted the report. She stated that she will circulate it for comment. *(Note: the report is scheduled to be presented to City Council this summer.)*

Mr. Thompson thanked Ms. Bach for her assistance.

- **Use of Ebikes**

No report.

NEW BUSINESS

None

PROJECT UPDATES

- **Communication Committee**

Mr. Thompson stated that Ms. Lara is doing a great job. He stated that she is surveying attendees at events and getting good feedback. He expressed the belief that she is well worth the expense. He stated that she has also produced several videos for social media.

Mr. Thompson noted Mr. Mitchell's work in elementary schools and Ms. Takacs's work on the Sustainable Six documents.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the Sustainable Six documents are in their final edits and that Ms. Lara will be attending Earth Day.

Mr. Thompson stated that this committee meets every two weeks.

- **Policy Committee**

Mr. Beane stated that the committee has received Mr. Kissinger's recommendations on the Shade Tree amendment and will be meeting on May 16.

- **Green Infrastructure Committee**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she has no report.

Ms. Smith questioned if she should schedule a meeting on May 5. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she should schedule the meeting.

- **Goggleworks Rain Garden Workshop**

Mr. Bachman stated that he has no update.

- **Rain Garden Installations**

Mr. Bachman stated that he will speak with Mr. Anspach about these installations. He noted that there are outfall issues near the Wyomissing Creek and near Berks Catholic stadium. He stated that a new employee has been hired which should allow him to focus more closely on stormwater issues.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the rain gardens and the pond at City Park will be monitored and maintained with the assistance of the Conservation Corps. She stated that additional native plants would be added.

- **GESA Energy Efficiency Project**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the lighting in City Hall is 85% completed and that exterior lighting is scheduled to begin next week. She stated that once City Hall is completed, work will shift to the Public Works building and then to the fieldhouses. She stated that the HVAC project is currently being reviewed for permits and should begin in May. She stated that the geotech for the solar canopies is completed and work at City Hall is expected to begin in August. She stated that City Hall is expected to take 14 weeks to complete and Public Works is expected to take 16 weeks to complete.

Ms. Smith questioned if cars would need to be parked elsewhere during the canopy construction. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that they will need to be elsewhere.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the Skyline Dr solar lighting will be installed in August after the hill climb. She stated that it has been fantastic working with Schneider Electric.

- **EPA Exide Cleanup Update**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she has no update.

Mr. Beane stated that assessment has begun.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the issues she encountered on the EPA website. She stated that it has become difficult to find information.

Mr. Beane stated that the assessment work was pre-paid due to federal funding concerns. He stated that Superfund funding may not be decreased.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this is good news but that working with the EPA website has become very time consuming.

- **NREL Project**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is meeting with the team today to discuss a project to address cold weather modeling, similar to the project with warm weather modeling. She noted her hope that she will be working with the same team.

- **Climate Resiliency and Sustainability Plan**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the Communication Committee is updating the Sustainable Six language but that she has no other update.

- **Urban Agriculture**

Ms. Smith stated that the next meeting is next week.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that many of the people involved in this group are also involved with Schuylkill Action Network.

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

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that this refers to the story map. She stated that she will be requesting another summer intern to continue the work but that the base layer is complete.

Mr. Thompson questioned if there would be one intern from each University. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it will be one intern as the schools work together.

- **Invasive Plants / Noxious Weeds Education**

Ms. Curran-Myers noted her hope of having a walk and a brochure. She stated that she noted her hope to hold the walk in June after the plants have bloomed.

Mr. Thompson questioned if this would be a bus tour. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that it would be a walk to show invasive species spread along Oak Lane at the preserve area. She stated that it would be a 10 – 15 easy walk in the preserve.

Ms. Sellers questioned if EAC funding could be used to rent a machine to remove invasives. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that a machine would not be enough. She noted the need to use goats. She suggested that six goats penned around the invasives will make progress.

Ms. Sellers stated that the goats may also increase awareness. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that Berks Nature will be experimenting with goats on their properties this summer.

Using the chat feature, Ms. Smith reminded all about the prohibition of farm animals in Reading.

Mr. Thompson questioned how long it would take six goats to remove the invasives. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this is unknown but that there would be a better idea about this after Berks Nature's experiment.

Mr. Thompson stated that neighbors may not appreciate the goats. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the neighbors caused the problem by spreading the invasives.

Mr. Beane stated that he manually dug out the invasives on his property that spread from his neighbor. He stated that it was 3 – 4 years of hard work but that it is now paying off.

There was a brief conversation about how goats could help with education, what they may cost, signage to describe the project, and media coverage.

- **MP3 Environmental Committee**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the chair recently resigned but that cleanups continue. She stated that this is a small group but a group that works hard.

- **Storm Water / MS4 Issues**

Mr. Bachman stated that there have been many rain events and he has been fielding complaints. He stated that the hot / cold temperature swings are causing sinkholes and heavy rains and winds have brought down trees.

Mr. Thompson noted the tree that came down near Berks Catholic. Mr. Bachman stated that this tree would have been handled by Mr. Kissinger. He stated that he continues to clear debris from inlets to avoid flooding.

Mr. Thompson noted his appreciation of Mr. Bachman's work.

Mr. Bachman stated that he has also been addressing sanitary issues. He stated that the system gets ongoing cleaning. He noted the recent main break in the 200 block of N 3rd St.

- **Solid Waste / Recycling**

Mr. Harrity stated that the DEP 902 grant funding was used to purchase a new leaf machine which will be received by the fall of 2025. He stated that the funding was also used to purchase 1,200 new recycling carts. He stated that 365 new carts have been delivered to those on the waiting list and 300 more will be delivered shortly.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this is great news and noted how easy the carts are to use.

- **BCTV Program**

Mr. Thompson questioned if Mr. Bradley is still producing programming on the EAC's behalf. Mr. Harrity stated that he is but that he took a break for several months.

Mr. Thompson questioned if Mr. Bradley would be attending Earth Day. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that he would attend after he completes the Great American Cleanup.

- **City-Owned Dams**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the work to deconstruct the Bushong Dam is currently out for bid. She stated that work staging has begun and that bog turtles were found. She stated that this will change the work plan but that deconstruction should begin shortly.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned if riparian repair was also part of this project. She noted the need for natural reconstruction and described the original plan for this area to connect it to other local park areas.

Mr. Harrity disconnected from the meeting at this time.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that deconstruction is phase one. She stated that she will request an update from Mr. Krall as he is the lead on the project.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Mr. Lloyd from Berks Nature may be able to assist with funding possibilities for the riparian repairs.

OTHER MATTERS

- **Berks County Community Foundation Community Forums**

Ms. Curran-Myers explained that Berks Alliance has dissolved but that Mr. Myers is continuing the Community Forums at the Community Foundation. She stated that an upcoming forum will feature the Schneider Electric project and will recruit businesses to participate in the Green Building Alliance program. She explained that the forums are held once or twice per month and cover a wide variety of timely topics.

- **Single Use Plastics**

Mr. Thompson questioned if follow up had occurred from the meeting at Franklyn's. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is working with a professor from Penn State on the single use plastics issue. She stated that she will be able to get back to her projects after Earth Day.

LONG TERM PROJECTS

- **Fluoride in Drinking Water**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this is now a federal issue as the US Secretary of Health and Human Services is requesting states to remove fluoride in drinking water. She stated that there may be judicial guidance on the issue and that US EPA is reviewing new information.

Mr. Thompson stated that this is similar to the Secretary's stance on vaccinations.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that a recent study has concluded that fluoride, even slightly above acceptable levels, can reduce children's IQ by several points, especially in male children. She stated that other studies have not shown this and the situation will need to be continually monitored.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 27, 2025 at noon at 6th & Amity Playground.

Mr. Thompson questioned if the meeting would be held at this location rain or shine. Ms. Smith stated that there is a pavilion. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that in the case of torrential rains, the meeting should be held via Zoom.

The meeting adjourned at 1:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk