

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, May 28, 2024
Virtually

EAC members present – S. Bach, W. Vitale, C. Curran-Myers

Others present – S. Smith, B. Ayers-Fisher, C. Miller, S. Wangolo

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

Ms. Sellers and Mr. Thompson connected to the meeting at this time. Ms. Bach stated that a quorum is now present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Mr. Thompson, seconded by Ms. Curran-Myers, to approve the April 23, 2024 meeting summary.

Mr. Vitale noted the need for several corrections:

- The date of the meeting was April 23, 2024 not March;
- The administrative costs of Ms. Lara's work are included in the budget
- The interpreter costs are not included in the budget
- Ms. Slusser has not been retained yet but it is hoped that she will be

Motion was made by Ms. Curran-Myers, seconded by Mr. Vitale, to approve the April meeting summary as corrected. Motion carried unanimously.

NREL (National Renewable Energy Laboratory) PRESENTATION

Ms. Ayers-Fisher noted the need to reschedule the presentation. She stated that a model of typical Reading rowhomes has been created for best practices and to retrofit for energy efficiency and cooling options. She stated that a menu of options will be provided with high, mid-range, and low cost projects. She suggested that the presentation take place via Zoom and that it will take approximately 60 – 90 minutes. She noted the need for the presentation to begin no earlier than 2 pm.

Mr. Cole connected to the meeting at this time.

Mr. Vitale suggested that a Communications Committee meeting day be chosen and for the start time to be adjusted.

Mr. Druckenmiller connected to the meeting at this time.

The presentation was rescheduled to August 7 at 2 pm.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND STAFF UPDATES

Ms. Ayers-Fisher provided the following upcoming events:

- Saturday, June 1 from 9 am – 3 pm – Berks Nature Fishing Day at Stonecliffe – volunteers needed
- Saturday, June 8 – Good Medicine event at Riverfront Park (cleanup at 9 am, event from 11 am – 3 pm)

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned if the EAC should table at this event. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that they should. She stated that “Take It Outdoors” will be providing kayaks for the event.

Ms. Sellers questioned if the City was paying a fee to “Take It Outdoors” since they are now a non-profit organization. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that there is no fee. She noted her hope that their services would expand to Reading.

- Saturday, June 15 from 10 am – 4 pm – NAACP Juneteenth celebration at the Elks near Goggleworks – another tabling event
- Wednesday, June 19 – First Wacky Water Wednesday at 3rd & Spruce from 1 – 4 pm

Mr. Thompson stated that Wacky Water Wednesdays are lots of fun. He stated that the kids are amazing and it is a great opportunity to engage with the community. He noted the great job Ms. Slusser did last summer.

Mr. Vitale agreed and stated that Ms. Lara is scheduled to attend the first week.

- Thursday, June 6 from 11:30 am – 1 pm - Berks Nature Municipal Officials Luncheon at Berks Nature

This event will roll out a new municipal tool to assist with the valuation of green spaces. The tool will also be the focus of this fall's State of the Environment breakfast. Pre-registration for the luncheon is required.

Ms. Bach and Mr. Thompson stated that they will attend the NAACP Juneteenth Celebration.

Mr. Thompson noted that the Climate Initiative event was excellent.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that this is a national organization working to bring accredited climate education materials to middle and high schools. The April 29 event was a "train the trainer" at Nolde Forest with 35 educators in attendance. Another session will be held in the fall. She stated that the Climate Initiative Director of Education is a Reading graduate.

Mr. Thompson stated that she is the daughter of Pierre Cooper, who served on the Reading School Board in the past. He expressed the belief that the training was very well done. He recommended that other EAC members attend if they are able. He stated that great information was shared along with ways to get people involved. He thanked Ms. Curran-Myers for giving him her seat.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the importance of educators attending these trainings. She suggested that only one member of the EAC attend each session to allow space for educators to attend.

Ms. Sellers questioned when the next session would be held. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that a date has not yet been chosen but that it will be in the fall.

Mr. Thompson stated that he sat with a Reading teacher. He noted that she believed that recycling collected in Reading was taken to the landfill. He stated that she learned that day that recycling collected in Reading is recycled.

Ms. Curran-Myers expressed the belief that many people believe that recycling is not recycled due to the publicity given to China's new policy to stop accepting it.

Mr. Thompson stated that this topic was also discussed at the NAACP CAP presentation. He stated that there is an urban legend that Reading's recycling isn't recycled. He stated that Ms. Ayers-Fisher did a great job explaining Reading's recycling program and educating people about what Reading is doing.

Ms. Sellers stated that the recycling process falls apart at the recycling center. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that this may be the case in other locations but not in Reading.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that a small percentage of items are removed from the process because they are not recyclable.

Mr. Vitale questioned other Berks municipalities. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that most Berks municipalities use either Cogle or Berks and the items are truly recycled.

Mr. Wangolo disconnected from the meeting at this time.

Mr. Vitale noted the problem with packaging. He noted the need for policy changes and consumers to change their buying habits.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the use of single use plastics is in discussion in the Policy Committee.

Mr. Thompson stated that many municipalities have already banned single use plastic bags. He noted the need to move this forward to make it the new norm.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the need for a multi-municipal effort. She stated that US EPA is convening meetings to draft a model ordinance. She stated that a ban must address all single use plastics and not only bags.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher agreed and noted the need for standards.

Ms. Sellers questioned if this could be a County issue. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it cannot due to PA law.

Mr. Thompson expressed the belief that most residents don't shop in Reading anymore. He agreed that other municipalities must also participate.

OLD BUSINESS

- **Signage / Mapping**

Ms. Bach questioned the timeline to complete this project.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the need for Dean Marketing to provide a sign maker and for the City to determine how they can assist with the sign making process.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that revisions are complete.

Ms. Bach questioned if revised mockups were provided. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she will follow up with Dean Marketing.

- **Annual Council Report**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she will finish the report.

- **Berks County EAC Mixer**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the mixer has not yet been scheduled.

- **Berks Nature Public Meetings**

Ms. Bach noted her hope for an update on these meetings at the June 6 event.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that 30 meetings have been held.

Ms. Bach questioned if a translator would be available for meetings held in Reading. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she has been given the name of an organization to inquire with. Mr. Vitale stated that a name has also been provided by Mr. Orozco.

- **Goggleworks Rain Barrel Workshop**

No update.

NEW BUSINESS

- **Beekeeping Zoning Amendment**

Ms. Smith stated that she circulated the latest draft to the Policy Committee for comments and has not received any response. She stated that she will circulate it again.

Ms. Bach noted the need to finalize the amendment at the June meeting.

Ms. Sellers disconnected from the meeting at this time.

- **Wacky Water Wednesday Planning**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that Ms. Smith has provided the schedule as part of the meeting packet.

Mr. Vitale stated that the Communication Committee will coordinate attendance.

Mr. Thompson stated that it can be difficult to attend since they are held during the workday. He stated that it is worth attending. He stated that the City crew does a great job. He stated that it is an excellent opportunity to hear feedback from residents about their concerns. He encouraged all to attend.

Mr. Vitale expressed the belief that engaging with other young people puts them at ease.

Mr. Thompson and Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Ms. Lara was very engaging at Earth Day. They expressed the belief that she will be a great asset.

PROJECT UPDATES

- **Communication Committee**

Mr. Vitale stated that the contract with Ms. Lara is being finalized.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that two small revisions are needed per the City's legal office.

Ms. Bach questioned if the EAC was paying Ms. Lara \$5,000. Mr. Vitale stated that \$5,000 will be paid in 2024 and additional funds will be paid in 2025.

Mr. Vitale stated that the EAC is working with Barrio Alegria and expressed the belief that this model works well. He stated that Ms. Lara will work with the EAC and with Ms. Ayers-Fisher as a consultant. He stated that Ms. Lara's focus will be outreach and engagement by attending events, going door to door, etc.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that Ms. Lara attend the Juneteenth, Good Medicine, and other summer events.

Mr. Vitale agreed and stated that Ms. Lara will also schedule her own events and work online.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Ms. Lara has journalist and presenter experience and that she will be working in Spanish.

Mr. Vitale stated that the next Communication Committee meeting will focus on finalizing each of the Sustainable Six. He stated that they will be posted on the City's website and printed. They will also be used to update City staff. He

explained that Ms. Slusser reworked the Power Point presentation (PPT) to be more streamlined and much more visual. He stated that any EAC member can use the PPT to make presentations.

Mr. Vitale stated that Ms. Slusser's contract ends in mid-June. He noted his hope that she will be utilized in the future on a per project basis. He stated that he feels good about all the work being accomplished.

Mr. Vitale explained that a City employee is interested in serving on the Communications Committee.

Mr. Thompson questioned if this is a conflict. Ms. Smith stated that it may be. She stated that a request for advisory opinion has been sent to the Charter Board. She stated that she does not want to put the employee into a situation that is a Charter violation.

Mr. Vitale stated that if the opinion is that the employee cannot serve, he will appeal it. He stated that he has served on many City boards in the past that included City employees.

Ms. Bach questioned the timeline for the advisory opinion. Ms. Smith stated that the Board generally responds within 30 days. She stated that she has confirmation that the request has been received.

Mr. Vitale stated that the employee is pursuing a PhD in environmental issues.

Mr. Thompson suggested that a summary of the NAACP presentation be made.

Mr. Vitale stated that Ms. Ayers-Fisher did a great job. He stated that approximately 30 people were in attendance and they were engaged. He stated that they asked great questions.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the short 15 minute presentation became an hour. She stated that she also explained the Sustainability office and what the office oversees. She stated that she explained the CAP priorities and expressed the belief that the attendees are very excited.

Mr. Thompson stated that the owner of Franklyn's was in attendance and noted the need to spread this message. He stated that he explained that that is exactly

what the group is doing. He stated that he encouraged all in attendance to also spread the message.

Mr. Vitale stated that there may be a follow up meeting. He stated that this presentation will serve as a good model moving forward. He stated that the presentation lasted 45 minutes.

Mr. Thompson stated that the Reading School District Diversity Officer was also in attendance and is very excited.

Mr. Druckenmiller disconnected from the meeting at this time.

There was a brief discussion about environmental education.

Mr. Vitale expressed the belief that people are paying attention to environmental issues. He stated that the number of wildfires and the hot spring weather were topics of concern.

Mr. Thompson noted the importance of including other Berks municipalities in this work. He noted the large voice that NAACP has locally, statewide, and nationally. He expressed the belief that they can help advance an environmental agenda.

Mr. Vitale stated that he was not previously aware of their support.

- **Policy Committee**

No report.

- **Green Infrastructure Committee**

Ms. Bach stated that the next meeting is scheduled for June 3 at noon.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the rain gardens at Baer Park and 6th & Amity Playground are complete. She stated that the pollinator garden at City Park is also complete.

Ms. Bach questioned if there are photos of these locations. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she will try to do better at taking photos. She stated that she will share them with the group.

Mr. Thompson noted the need for photos. He stated that it is important to post photos to social media so the community can see the work being done.

Ms. Bach suggested that an intern take photos and upload them. Ms. Ayers-Fisher agreed.

Members noted the photos that they have that can be shared.

Ms. Bach noted the need to do this consistently.

Ms. Bach stated that Schuylkill Action Network would love to tour City green infrastructure sites. She requested that this topic be added to the next meeting agenda for discussion.

- **Urban Agriculture**

Ms. Smith stated that Mr. Druckenmiller shared in the chat before disconnecting that the garden at Northwest Middle School is complete and the garden on N Front St is nearly complete.

Ms. Smith stated that the next meeting is tomorrow afternoon.

Ms. Bach stated that Ms. Smith also shared information about Barnopoly and she encouraged all to participate.

- **EPA Exide Cleanup Update**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the assessment strategy is moving forward. She stated that EPA will be attending City events to provide soil testing and that there will be more updates this summer.

- **Technical Assistance from the Water Center at UPenn**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that a meeting will be held in June to begin the story map project. She stated that she is meeting with Drexel this week to develop additional materials.

- **MP3 Environmental Committee**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she was interviewed by Natural Lands, the consultant retained to prepare a Trails & Forest Feasibility Study for Mt. Penn. She stated that their recommendations should be released shortly and she will share them with the group.

- **Active Transportation Plan**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the Plan is being updated to comply with federal regulations. She stated that she will provide the updated Plan to the group. She stated that the City is working on several grant applications to begin implementation of some of the recommendations.

- **Energy Efficiency Project**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the lighting and HVAC assessments are complete. She stated that the building envelope will be assessed next. She stated that internal meetings will take place in June and another presentation will be made to City Council to provide the scope of work and work plan.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this pertains to the Public Works Building. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it is all City buildings.

Mr. Vitale questioned if solar is being explored for the Public Works Building. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she hopes to install two solar canopies over parking areas – one at the Public Works building and one on Cedar St at the City Hall parking area. She stated that they will produce energy and provide shade to the vehicles below. She stated that the canopy at Public Works will provide 2/3 of the required energy and that increases to over 100% if solar panels are also added to the roof. She stated that the projects are currently in the engineering phase. She stated that the panels will protect vehicles from both heat and snow events.

Mr. Vitale stated that the canopies will help to reduce the heat island effect.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that canopies are possible at other surface lots as well. She stated that they are popular in the snow belt and the southwest.

Mr. Vitale explained that the solar canopy project started as a Penn State student project. He noted the need to ensure that there are no other issues with the roof before panels are installed.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the roof at Public Works is a good candidate but not the roof at City Hall.

- **Code Review**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that a City consultant is reviewing some of the Codes. Ms. Ayers-Fisher agreed.

Mr. Vitale stated that he is glad to hear that this is moving forward.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher noted the need for the Policy Committee to focus on the shade tree issue next.

Ms. Bach stated that there is funding available from the US Forest Service to work on tree issues.

NEXT MEETING

Ms. Smith stated that she will not be at the June meeting. She noted the need for another person to keep notes. She stated that she is willing to type the notes.

Ms. Curran-Myers volunteered to keep notes.

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, June 25 at noon at the Riverfront Park pavilion - weather permitting. Members are asked to bring a chair.

The meeting adjourned at 1:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk