Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, June 22, 2021
Virtually

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

Others present – S. Smith, S. Bachman, T. Wheeler, N. Judge

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Beane called the meeting to order at 12:00 pm. He noted that a quorum was present.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Ms. Curran-Myers, seconded by Ms. Sellers, to approve the March 23, 2021 and April 27, 2021 meeting summaries as written. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Haag, Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz, and Mr. Gensemer joined the meeting at this time.

RESIGNATION OF SCOT CASE

Mr. Beane stated that Mr. Case remains local and noted his hope that Mr. Case would assist the EAC in the future as needed. He stated that he will continue as vice chair and would conduct the meetings until reorganization in January. He expressed the belief that this board has moved beyond his talents to chair and that other talents are needed to make the EAC successful. He stated that he does not wish to serve as chair in 2022.

Motion was made by Ms. Sellers, seconded by Mr. Vitale to accept the resignation of Mr. Case with regrets. Motion carried unanimously.

NEW MEMBERS NEEDED

Mr. Beane noted the need for three new members. Ms. Smith stated that the applications that have been submitted are being reviewed by the Mayor and she has no new information to share.

Mr. Vitale stated that he has spoken about this with Mr. Denbowski. He noted the need to have younger and more diverse membership. Mr. Denbowski stated that he would coordinate a social media recruitment campaign. (*Note: Mr. Crespo originally recruited in September 2020 and will rerun the ad.)*

Mr. Beane stated that he and Mr. Case addressed the need for new members when they presented the EAC's report to City Council. He stated that the EAC needs Council and the Administration to help with recruiting. He stated that increasing the number of members of the EAC was discussed but this is not allowed due to the number of members being set by State statute.

Mr. Vitale expressed the belief that a concerted effort is needed. He noted the need to broaden the skill sets of applicants and the need for a member with moderator / chair skills. He expressed the belief that this Administration has good contacts with the wider community.

Ms. Sellers stated that the EAC has great scientific and legal representatives. She expressed the belief that a member with community outreach skills would be a good addition.

Mr. Beane stated that since the passing of Mr. Molteni that voice is no longer being heard. He stated that there are now three vacancies and noted the need for applicants.

Ms. Sellers suggested that a representative from the construction industry would also be a good addition.

Mr. Beane reminded all that those who have applied but are not selected as members can assist by serving on a subcommittee and can remain a partner to the EAC.

Mr. McMahon joined the meeting at this time.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed with Ms. Sellers's suggestions for skillsets of new members. She noted the need to focus on the skillsets that the applicants will bring.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUMMIT

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned if this has been scheduled. Mr. Vitale stated that Mr. Denbowski has assigned this project to Mr. Rugis. He stated that he will follow up with Mr. Denbowski if it is not scheduled before the end of June.

EARTH DAY

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she represented the EAC at Earth Day. She stated that she prepared a handmade sign. She suggested that the EAC participate in more community events. She stated that many people were interested in the work of the EAC and wanted to learn about them. She noted the need to finalize the logo and have a banner created.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Mr. Case attended and she shared a space with Ms. Judge. She stated that the event was well organized and managed. She stated that there were many fun things to do. She stated that the event was not well attended and some struggled to travel the distance between vendors due to COVID spacing requirements. She stated that she had many interactions with the public and with other vendors and suggested that some of the vendors become partners on EAC projects. She stated that those who attended seemed pleased with the event and were eager to learn.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Beane stated that the EAC has a long history of members who are employed by Liberty Environmental. He thanked Mr. Wheeler for his willingness to continue that partnership and expressed the belief that Liberty is a great local resource.

Mr. Wheeler stated that he has been with Liberty for two years and was previously the EHS person at Yuasa. He stated that Mr. Cinelli requested that he work with the EAC. He stated that he works in the environmental compliance field but has access to many others as resources are needed.

Ms. Sellers questioned if Mr. Wheeler worked on permitting. Mr. Wheeler stated that he works on sampling and permitting for air quality and water and waste water issues.

Ms. Sellers questioned if Mr. Wheeler was familiar with the Berks County Water Sewer Association (BCSWA). Mr. Wheeler stated that he has heard of them but is not very familiar with them at this time.

Ms. Sellers stated that BCSWA is heavily involved in permitting and suggested that Mr. Wheeler become more familiar with them.

CITY SUSTAINABILITY MANAGER

Ms. Judge introduced herself and provided a brief background. She stated that she will work to build on what Mr. Lugo has started and to resume work on the Climate Action and Resiliency Plan. She stated that the draft Plan is being updated and will be shared with the EAC shortly.

Ms. Judge explained that the Plan builds on the DEP plan and includes other sustainability issues. She stated that a stakeholder mapping session was recently held to identify both internal and external stakeholders and that there is quite an extensive list. She requested that EAC members brainstorm external stakeholders that can be included. She stated that this is exciting work and she will share more details in a few weeks.

Mr. Beane reminded Ms. Judge that EAC members are a resource for her and stated that there is significant technical expertise on the Board. Ms. Judge thanked Mr. Beane and stated that she will need the EAC's assistance.

Ms. Sellers expressed the belief that setting policy is very important to move projects forward. Ms. Judge stated that policy is being discussed by the work group. She agreed that good policy is needed to support the Plan.

Ms. Sellers stated that the Smart Growth Alliance is working with the County to determine how to best utilize CARES and ARP funds. She stated that there are many possible joint projects and suggested that an EAC member serve on one of the committees that is being formed.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted City Council's concern with how decisions will be made to use the funding received by the City. She agreed that there are many eligible projects and noted the need for coordination. She stated that the use of the funds must be strategic. She stated that Council is considering a meeting with the Commissioners to collaborate on projects. She noted the need for the EAC to make suggestions on the use of funds. She stated that right now it is unknown how the Administration will determine the use of the funding.

Ms. Sellers expressed the belief that the County wants to work together with other municipalities and agreed with the need for a coordinated effort.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she is encouraged to hear this news. She questioned if this was in regards to all projects or only those related to the environment and sustainability. Ms. Sellers stated that many times projects have sustainable and environmental components. She stated that this was discussed at the last Smart Growth Alliance meeting.

Ms. Curran-Myers reminded all that the City will also be receiving funding to address lead exposure. She noted the need to highlight that important issue.

Ms. Sellers expressed the belief that the County will be strategic with its funding.

Mr. Vitale stated that the School District is also receiving additional funding. He noted the need to encourage the District to use their funding on sustainable projects including facility maintenance. He reminded all that there are restrictions on the use of the funding. He suggested that the District be a stakeholder in the updated Plan process.

Ms. Sellers stated that her school district will be using their funding on HVAC and indoor air quality projects.

Ms. Curran-Myers reminded all that her husband is a member of the School Board. She stated that HVAC and weatherization projects are environmental and sustainability projects and the Board should be reminded of the importance of these types of projects.

Ms. Sellers stated that the County committees are very broad-based. She stated that they have already received many applications for potential projects.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need to follow the funding restrictions. She stated that this cannot become a spending free-for-all.

Mr. Vitale stated that three Zoom sessions were held with stakeholders on the draft Plan as the pandemic hit in early 2020. He noted the need for the District to be included as a stakeholder. Ms. Judge stated that they are included.

Mr. Vitale noted his hope that they would participate.

Mr. Beane expressed the belief that sustainability has been institutionalized by the City and that good progress has been made. He noted the need to continue moving forward.

SIGNAGE, MAPPING

Ms. Sellers stated that a logo is needed before this project can move forward. She stated that three locations and projects have been chosen. She stated that she knows a graphic artist that can work on the logo and will charge $500.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the EAC agreed to work with Ms. Ayers-Fisher on the logo and the firm that already works with the City. She stated that Ms. Ayers-Fisher had been focusing on the Earth Day events but that her time will now free up. She stated that she does not support starting over a third time. She noted the need to stay focused and allow people time to work on projects. She expressed the belief that starting over a third time will cause additional delays. She stated that she will follow up with Ms. Ayers-Fisher and give her a deadline.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned where the City rain gardens would be located. Ms. Smith stated that she provided the maps via email and described their locations.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned which location Ms. Smith would recommend installing the signage. Ms. Smith stated that the garden locations will have different users – one is adjacent to an existing community garden and the other is located near the Stonecliff skate park and the Schuylkill River Trail.

Ms. Sellers expressed the belief that putting the signage next to the community garden may be preaching to the choir.

Mr. Vitale stated that this may not necessarily be true as many people do not understand what a rain garden is. He suggested that signage be installed at both locations.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed with the suggestion to install signage at both locations.

Mr. Vitale suggested that members review the maps provided by Ms. Smith and provide feedback via email.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested installing signage at the Stonecliff location before installing signage at the community garden. She requested other members provide their feedback.

Mr. Beane noted his hope that formal action about signage installation can occur at the August meeting.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she will provide a summary of the project via email and she will follow up with Ms. Ayers-Fisher.

Mr. Vitale suggested circulating logo designs via email so that it can also be ratified at the August meeting.

Ms. Sellers reminded all that after the logo is ratified that additional time will be needed to prepare and install the signage.

Ms. Smith stated that she will follow up with the Law office regarding any necessary waivers or permits that will be needed.

INVASIVE PLANTS / NOXIOUS WEEDS

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she needs to meet with Ms. Kelleher and Mr. Kissinger before she can move this project forward. She stated that she would also like to arrange a tour of the Preserve to explain what is happening with invasive plants.

Mr. Beane stated that he is looking forward to the tour.

URBAN AGRICULTURE

Ms. Smith stated that the ribbon cutting for the new Oakbrook Community Garden was held on Friday, June 18.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she spoke with Ms. Sihelnik about this garden and Ms. Sihelnik expressed her thanks to the EAC for their assistance with the project. She stated that this garden will be a great asset to the community.

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

Mr. Beane questioned what follow up is needed on this topic. Ms. Smith stated that this topic was discussed at the meeting she was unable to attend.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Ms. Millman was going to provide additional information that has not yet been received.

Mr. Beane stated that he will follow up with Ms. Millman.

ANDREW MOLTENI MEMORIAL TREE

Ms. Smith stated that an Exclamation London Planetree / Sycamore has been planted at Egelman's Park along Hill Rd in Mr. Molteni's honor.

Mr. Beane questioned if a plaque has been installed. Ms. Smith noted the need for a plaque to be reviewed by the City's Memorial Review Committee. She also noted the need for planning on the type of plaque.

Mr. Beane suggested that the EAC meet at the tree and honor Mr. Molteni's passing.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested holding the August meeting at Egelman's Park and including a brief memorial at the tree.

Ms. Sellers noted the need for a marker at the tree. Mr. Vitale agreed.

Ms. Curran-Myers also agreed and requested that Ms. Smith send the memorial requirements to the group. She stated that the EAC can budget for the memorial as necessary.

Mr. Beane expressed the belief that it is great news that the project has moved forward.

SMART GROWTH ALLIANCE

Ms. Sellers stated that the Alliance is now being headed by David Hunter, Executive Director of the Berks County Planning Commission. She stated that real estate issues are currently being discussed. She stated that she attends meetings regularly and will provide updates.

Ms. Smith was asked to add this to the updates section of the agenda.

ENERGY STAR

Ms. Judge stated that the City has joined a program through the Dept of Energy on a cohort for the WWTP on energy efficiency. She stated that the City will receive a free energy assessment and training will be provided to create energy efficiencies at the WWTP and to create an energy efficiency manual. She stated that the City will provide five years of data for the program.

Ms. Curran-Myers requested that Ms. Judge share updates on the program when milestones are achieved. Ms. Judge stated that she will provide updates. She stated that the program kick-off is in July.

ELECTRIC VEHICLE (EV) CHARGING STATIONS

Ms. Sellers questioned how to pursue this issue in Reading.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this was a project noted as a strategic goal. She stated that the project was suggested by Mr. Lugo as a near term project. She expressed the belief that installations are included as part of the draft Plan.

Ms. Sellers suggested contacting Mr. Case to see if federal funding is available.

Mr. Haag stated that he spoke with Mr. Lugo about this in the past. He noted the need for the City to prioritize projects and understand their impacts. He stated that the City has much deferred maintenance and old equipment that needs to be addressed. He stated that there are also operating cost impacts to be considered. He noted the need to understand where to start and how to get the biggest bang for the buck.

Ms. Sellers noted her personal work to be 100% sustainable and stated that she is planning to purchase the new electric Ford F-150 pick-up truck when it is available. She noted the need for charging stations to make the vehicle use convenient.

Mr. Haag stated that PA is also dealing with the EV issue. He suggested that stations be installed for high visibility and to demonstrate a leadership position. He stated that PA is discussing installing EV stations along I-81.

Mr. Vitale expressed the belief that installing EV stations can be seductive. He noted the need to work within priorities set by the City.

Ms. Judge stated that she is studying this issue and noted the need for a material assessment and impact in order to prioritize. She expressed the belief that there are millions of projects that could be done and agreed that the City must get the biggest bag for its buck.

Mr. Vitale stated that there are three charging stations in the DoubleTree garage. He suggested working with the Parking Authority and that the Parking Authority should also be included as a stakeholder in the Plan process.

BCTV PROGRAM

Mr. Beane stated that Ms. Judge will be his guest on the July program. He stated that she will be introduced to the community and will discuss initiatives that she is currently working on.

MS4

Mr. Bachman stated that he recently inspected 615 S 16 ½ St for storm water issues. He stated that this is required for the new sports court installation and stated that several storm drains have been installed.

Ms. Sellers questioned if outfalls are tested. Mr. Bachman stated that outfalls are inspected but not tested.

Ms. Sellers questioned if the City has received its permit from DEP. Mr. Bachman stated that the permit was recently received.

Ms. Sellers questioned the number of outfalls. Mr. Bachman stated that he is currently working with Cedarville Engineering on that question. He stated that the City has a list of outfalls but that more have been discovered.

Ms. Sellers questioned when the outfalls are inspected. Mr. Bachman stated that it is 48 hours after rainfall.

Ms. Sellers noted the need for baseline information. She questioned when the information would be updated after improvements have been made. Mr. Bachman stated that this process has not yet begun.

CITY-OWNED DAMS

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned the status of the removal of Bushong Dam. Mr. Gensemer stated that he has no update.

Ms. Curran-Myers reminded all that this dam was set to be removed but has not and it has gone through several Administrative transitions. She stated that she is frequently questioned about the delays by the public. Mr. Bachman stated that the project is on hold. He stated that he will follow up with Mr. Krall in Public Works.

LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Beane questioned this agenda topic. Ms. Smith explained that a list was being compiled of EAC-related groups and which EAC member attends those meetings so that updates can be provided during EAC meetings.

Mr. Beane stated that he will speak with Mr. Case about this project. He requested that Ms. Smith amend the agenda and assign responsibility to him.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this was done in the past and was useful to have. She stated that it prevents overlap of who attends meetings to be respectful of everyone's time and is an easy way to keep everyone updated.

NEXT MEETING

Mr. Beane explained that the EAC does not meet in July and the next meeting will be held on August 10 at noon at Egelman's Park. Ms. Smith stated that she will re-advertise the meeting and make the necessary arrangements.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Mr. Beane questioned how to handle the executive session. Ms. Smith stated that all those in attendance who are not appointed members of the EAC should be removed from the meeting, unless invited to remain by the Chair. She stated that she would also stop the recording.

Mr. Beane requested that Ms. Smith and Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz remain in the meeting. All other attendees were removed.

The EAC entered executive session at 1:22 pm in accordance with PA Sunshine Act Section 708 Executive Session (a) 4 regarding potential litigation.

The executive session ended and the meeting adjourned at 1:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC

Deputy City Clerk