

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, June 25, 2024
Riverfront Park

EAC Members: S. Crothers Bach, Chairperson; B. Vitale, C. Curran-Myers, D. Beane, J. Cole

City Staff: B. Ayers-Fisher, R. Bradley

I. Opening Matters

- The chair welcomed members and staff and visitors and called the meeting to order at 12pm. B. Vitale attended virtually.
- No requests for public comment were made.
- Ms. Crothers Bach noted a quorum was present. She asked if everyone had an opportunity to review the minutes and whether we had comments or changes.
- Mr. Beane made a Motion to Approve the Minutes. Ms. Curran Myers seconded. Minutes were approved as filed.

II. Upcoming Meetings, Events and Staff Updates

- Ryan Bradley reported that the BCTV program for June had featured Courtney Shober from the County Agriculture Department who explained the recent merger of the Urban Agriculture Task Force with B.A.R.N and the upcoming farm and garden tour. Mr. Bradley introduced some of the Summer Interns who will have finished work at the NW Middle School this week. In August the interns will work on the South Side of 6th Street in collaboration with GOV International. He noted that residential cleanup days are coming. Ms. Crothers Bach inquired about Franklin Pocket Park and the members planned to schedule a cleanup day soon.
- Bethany Ayers-Fisher reported that the position for education and outreach in Public Works had been changed to a full-time position and would be posted by next week. Members expressed appreciation of this important expansion of staffing for community outreach, which will assist in many environmental and sustainability initiatives.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher also reported that midterm updates were finalized for the Energy Performance Contract with Schneider Electric. A construction contract is anticipated by the end of August for the \$15 Million project which will be funded by CIP, ARPA, and DOE funds, tax credits and rebates, and will return a \$10 Million benefit over 15 years. In addition to significant alternative energy installations at City Hall and Public Works, the project includes significant deferred maintenance and energy efficiency upgrades to field houses and public infrastructure.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher noted the upcoming E.J Dives Family Fun Day on July 13 at 2pm, and “Enjoy Outdoors Safely” day with Berks Nature at Nolde Forest on July 27 from 1pm – 4pm.

Old Business

- Signage/Mapping Proposal, Funding- Ms. Ayers- Fisher reported she and Ms. Curran-Myers would be meeting with Dean Graphics on Friday to finalize the basic design for the signs to be installed, now that the graphics have been completed for the 8 types of green infrastructure installed or planned for the City. Ms. Ayers Fisher noted that the 2025 Budget request for Public Works includes signage for the new pollinator garden in City Park and Native Plant installations in several parks.
- EAC Mixer -Mr. Beane reported that an EAC “mixer” is still being planned with Berks Nature. A second seminar on the “Business of Environmental Services” will be held on September 25. Several EAC members attended the first seminar which explained use of a new app that can assist decision-makers to evaluate the value of the environmental services provided a community by different properties.
- Ms. Crothers Bach reported that Berks Nature is continuing its “conversations” with the public at 3 meetings in Reading in August. The opportunities to share concerns and ideas will take place at Mi Casa Su Casa at noon, Tech Centro at 3pm, and the NE Library at 5pm.

New Business

- 2025 Budget Request: Ms. Crothers Bach noted that \$18,000 was budgeted for 2024 and \$5000 had been spent to date. The remaining \$13,000 is budgeted for signage, graphics and interns in the second half of the year. For 2025 members agreed to submit a request for \$2000 in addition to cover costs to maintain and invite neighbors to the Franklin Pocket Park which the EAC adopted. Other expenses were estimated to remain similar for additional signage on green infrastructure throughout the City, website and educational information development, publication and distribution, and interns or fellows to work with the EAC on outreach in 2025.
- Beekeeping Zoning Amendment- Mr. Beane reported that the Policy Subcommittee met to finalize the ordinance, based on a model ordinance for PA, and had an issue regarding enforcement responsibilities that required further research. Ms. Curran-Myers was undertaking the research and would report in July, with hopes to bring it to the EAC for approval in August.
- PFAS Update – Mr. Beane reported the update on forever chemicals continues to be developed and will be ready in the fall.

Project updates

- Communications Committee Update – Mr. Vitale reported the Communications Committee has been meeting every 2 weeks to complete work with our 2024 fellow, Jasmine Slusser who has advanced our on-line presence and produced educational materials such as the Sustainable Six brochure, the workshop Power Points on the Climate Action and Sustainability Plans for Reading, and text and graphics for handouts and signage. A workshop was held at the NAACP meeting in May, presented by Bethany Ayers-Fisher and Stephan Thompson using these materials. We were invited to return and continue the conversation.

The Communications Committee has partnered with Barrio Alegria to find a Spanish speaking community outreach fellow to work with the EAC on engaging the public in sustainability conversations. A contract is going through the process for the candidate Luisa Cara.

- Policy Committee Update: Mr. Beane reported that in addition to the Beekeeping Ordinance, the Policy Committee is working with the Shade Tree Commission and the Arborist to determine best practices in PA municipalities to increase urban tree canopy and maintain and nurture street trees to reduce the heat island impact, clean the air and provide shade, comfort and beauty. The Committee is also collaborating with Art and Louise Grim and others to move forward with a proposal to reduce or eliminate single use plastic in the City and County.
- Green Infrastructure Committee: Ms. Crothers Bach reported that the GIS meets every 2 months at present and will meet on August 5. They continue to work on the green infrastructure mapping and signage initiatives as a priority.
- Rain Gardens: Ms. Ayers Fisher reported that the installation at Baer Park is complete. She suggested and members discussed the need to write an educational piece on the benefits of green infrastructure over gray infrastructure economically as well as providing multiple community benefits.
- NREL Project- Ms. Ayers Fisher reported the draft model assessment to optimize energy efficiency in residences like those we have in Reading is going out for peer review and should be ready at the end of the summer.
- Climate Resiliency and Sustainability Plan – Ms. Ayers Fisher reported that the draft materials were sent to the City Planner who will provide feedback.

Long Term Projects

- Environmental Justice Issues: Mr. Cole noted that the dirt bike problem has become very controversial and we should try to think of solutions that provide safe and appropriate biking opportunities.

Ms. Crothers Bach accepted a motion to adjourn the meeting at 1:35 and reminded the members that the next meeting will be at Mineral Spring Park on August 13.