

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, August 12, 2025
Zoom
Noon

EAC members present – D. Beane, S. Thompson, W. Vitale, A. Meas, A. Sellers

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

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Thompson called the meeting to order at 12:06 pm. He noted that a quorum was present. The group welcomed new member, Angela Meas, and all introduced themselves.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Mr. Beane, seconded by Mr. Vitale, to approve the April 22 and June 24, 2025 meetings summaries as written. Motion carried unanimously.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND STAFF UPDATES

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the Resilient Reading program run by the Green Building Alliance (GBA) is meeting this afternoon at 2 pm in Council Chambers with a focus on water conservation. She stated that Tanya Melendez has been hired as the local program coordinator.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher provided the following upcoming events:

- Sat, Aug 16 – Party at Pendora Park - 1 – 6 pm – the event will include tours of the field house
- Sat, Sept 13 – 6th Ward Block Party – noon – 5 pm
- Sat, Sept 27 – Cultural Diversity Festival – 12 – 6 pm City Park bandshell area

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that these are tabling opportunities and welcomed the EAC's assistance.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that October will feature tree plantings and stated that Mr. Harrity and Mr. Bradley are planning community cleanups.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that five of seven City Councilors attended Riverzilla and three went out on the water. She stated that there was a great turnout with 60 people kayaking and many riding bikes. She stated that she spoke with riverfront visitors about behavioral expectations and the need to clean up after themselves. She stated that while trying to clean up, hot ashes were placed into a dumpster which started a dumpster fire.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the Shade Tree Ordinance amendment work group has scheduled its final review and that a green building working group is being formed.

OLD BUSINESS

- **Beekeeping**

Ms. Smith stated that once staff works out who will create and provide the signage to permit holders, the amendment can move forward to City Council for consideration.

- **Signage / Mapping**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the mapping project is currently on hold. She stated that she is finalizing price quotes for the signage project and hopes to have the final information to the Purchasing office this week.

Mr. Bachman connected to the meeting at this time.

- **2024 Annual Report to City Council**

Mr. Thompson stated that the report will be provided as drafted by Ms. Smith. He stated that Ms. Curran-Myers will assist with the presentation and that a date is being scheduled.

- **Use of Ebikes**

There was a brief discussion regarding the Ethics violation found against Mr. Cole and the Board of Ethics' recommendation that Mr. Cole should be removed from EAC membership.

Motion was made by Mr. Beane, seconded by Mr. Vitale, to recommend that City Council remove Mr. Cole from the EAC to allow another resident to serve in this capacity. Motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Sellers noted the need to continue moving this initiative forward.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that use of small modes of transportation are included in the Vision Zero Plan. She stated that the City has applied for grant funding and hopes to hear the results in the fall. She stated that this initiative will be included in Plan implementation.

Mr. Thompson reminded all of past discussions and the EAC's hope that a work group would be formed.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher noted the need for a new project champion.

There was a brief discussion regarding dirt bikes and ATVs in the City.

Ms. Sellers noted the need for the EAC to encourage the use of small modes of transportation to reduce fuel consumption but agreed with the need for additional safety.

Mr. Miller noted the need to address scooters and segways and not only ebikes. He stated that technology will continue to move forward and modes of transportation will evolve.

Mr. Thompson noted that these vehicles are often used on sidewalks.

NEW BUSINESS

- **Ratify 2026 EAC Budget Request**

Ms. Smith stated that the initial budget request needed to be submitted in July. She stated that the request was discussed at the Communications Committee meeting and that she submitted the recommended amount of \$24,000 - \$12,000 for the Barrio Fellowship, \$8,000 for educational signage, \$2,000 for graphics design and translation services, and \$2,000 for event expenses and green neighborhood improvements.

Mr. Vitale stated that the same initiatives will move forward with a modest increase for the purchase of event giveaways.

Motion was made by Ms. Sellers, seconded by Mr. Thompson, to ratify the 2026 EAC budget request as submitted. Motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Meas questioned whether the Climate Action Plan is available. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it is in draft form and stated that she will provide it to Ms. Meas. She stated that she is working to update the Plan.

Mr. Thompson recommended that Ms. Meas become part of the Communications Committee.

Mr. Vitale explained that many of these expenses are initiated by the Communications Committee, which is why that Committee prepared the 2026 budget proposal.

- **Restart BCTV Programming**

Ms. Smith stated that the EAC has learned that Mr. Bradley is no longer producing EAC programming.

Mr. Beane stated that there is no specific time to produce programming which makes taping programs more convenient. He noted the need for a facilitator and to recruit guests. He suggested that the next program focus on EAC initiatives and project updates. He expressed the belief that it is important to keep EAC programming and volunteered to plan the next program.

Mr. Thompson agreed with this approach and noted his hope that all EAC members would participate.

Mr. Vitale stated that programs may be taped at any time and that there is an online scheduling form. He stated that the program is aired consistently. He stated that the frequency of programming can be changed but that it should be consistent.

Mr. Beane recommended moving from monthly to quarterly. He expressed the belief that this would result in more meaningful programs.

Mr. Vitale explained that BCTV's format is no longer based on live callers and is now streamed. He agreed with a quarterly program.

Mr. Beane stated that he will follow up with BCTV and schedule the taping for September

PROJECT UPDATES

- **Communications Committee**

Mr. Vitale stated that the EAC 2026 budget request was discussed and stated that the next meeting is being held tomorrow. He stated that Ms. Lara continues her work and is producing an article about the use of the riverfront.

Ms. Sellers disconnected from the meeting at this time.

Mr. Vitale stated that Ms. Lara also continues to produce videos about recycling. He stated that a poster about the Recycling Coach app has been produced and will be distributed to corner stores. He stated that language on the Sustainable Six documents is complete and they are being sent for translation and graphic design. He invited Ms. Meas to join the committee.

Mr. Thompson stated that the Communications Committee gets into the community and is critical to accomplishing EAC goals. He stated that they attend fun events and meet great people. He stated that residents are appreciative of the EAC's work and have a lot to contribute.

- **Policy Committee**

Mr. Beane stated that there have been scheduling issues for the final Shade Tree Ordinance amendment but that the review has been scheduled for September 18. He stated that this amendment does not require zoning review and will move forward to City Council directly.

Mr. Beane stated that the Committee's next project will be single use plastics. He stated that Berks Nature will facilitate this conversation at their fall municipal meeting. He noted the need for a multi-municipal approach.

Mr. Thompson stated that he is looking forward to working on single use plastics. He stated that many municipalities have already put bans in place and expressed the belief that there will be buy-in for the ban in Reading.

- **Rain Garden Installations**

Mr. Bachman stated that he has no update but that the gardens must be installed before the end of the City's current permit cycle in 2026.

- **GESA Project**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher provided background about the project and stated that it is approximately ½ complete. She stated that the City recently received a permit from Met Ed to begin the solar portion of the project and that construction should begin in September. She stated that the solar portion of the project was championed by the EAC.

Mr. Thompson suggested that project updates be provided to the press.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is working with the Recreation Commission and the Mayor to hold open houses at the fieldhouses as they are completed.

- **EPA Exide Cleanup**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that EPA is currently in the assessment phase. She stated that the City has not received any recent communications.

Mr. Beane stated that sampling has begun and will take approximately one year to complete.

- **NREL Project**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is working on a winter comfort modeling project. She noted the need for data from additional rowhome style single family properties.

Ms. Meas questioned the data that is needed. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the properties square footage and 1 – 2 years of energy usage is required. She stated that the goal of the project is to provide low cost solutions with increased comfort but less energy usage.

- **Climate Action Plan**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that projects continue to be implemented but that she has not had time to update the Plan this summer.

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

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that this is the program that will produce the green infrastructure map. She noted her hope to begin working with a student this fall.

- **Invasive Plants / Noxious Weeds Education**

Mr. Beane stated that Ms. Curran-Myers arranged an educational walk in the Hampden Heights area and that they would like to have the program in other City neighborhoods. He stated that he is working to become a Master Gardener and stated that they are interested in increasing interest in home gardening. He stated that this may be a partnership to increase educational opportunities and can include invasive species. He stated that he will coordinate with Ms. Curran-Myers and noted his hope for a walking tour this fall.

Mr. Thompson stated that there are also fewer community members with plots at the Albright Garden this summer. He agreed with the need to increase interest in home gardening.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher suggested that people may be interested but don't know how to sign up to participate in community gardens.

- **Storm Water / MS4 Issues**

Mr. Bachman stated that his crew has been dealing with many sinkholes and cleaning catch basins. He stated that it has been difficult keeping up and noted that all three of the City's vacuum trucks are currently out of service.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher disconnected from the meeting at this time.

Mr. Thompson stated that the weather is a large contributing factor. Mr. Bachman noted his hope for a break in the storms. He stated that most of the main breaks are in the sanitary system.

Mr. Vitale questioned if the sinkholes were due to broken pipes. Mr. Bachman stated that they are and stated that much of the system was built using terra cotta pipes which are breaking. He stated that generally storm system breaks are from rusted corrugated metal pipes.

- **Solid Waste / Recycling**

Mr. Harrity stated that 600 recycling bins have been delivered since April. He stated that he expects to deliver an additional 400 by the end of 2025. He stated that 70% of the City now has the new recycling containers.

Mr. Harrity stated that Reading has an 18% recycling rate. He noted his hope to reach 20%. He stated that there are also recycling educational ads playing on Comcast.

Mr. Vitale questioned whether the 18% recycling rate is the percentage of waste or the percentage of participation. Mr. Harrity stated that it is 18% of the waste stream.

Mr. Thompson questioned if there was a way to see the recycling ads outside of Comcast. Mr. Harrity stated that he will share the ads.

- **City-owned Dams**

Mr. Bachman stated that the removal of Bushong Dam has begun and stated that it should be completed before October to avoid bog turtle issues.

OTHER MATTERS

None

LONG TERM PROJECT UPDATES

- **Fluoride in Drinking Water**

Mr. Beane stated that there is no update while the EAC awaits updated research by EPA.

Mr. Thompson questioned if Sec. Kennedy had taken any action on the issue. Mr. Beane stated that the decision to remove fluoride from drinking water is a local decision. He stated that many municipalities are looking to ban fluoride.

NEXT MEETING

The next EAC meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 23, 2025 at noon at Reading Rising Park, 2nd & Franklin Sts, weather permitting.

The meeting adjourned at 1:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk