

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, September 23, 2025
Zoom
Noon

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

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

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Thompson called the meeting to order at 12:07 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 August 12, 2025 meeting summary as written. Motion carried unanimously.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND STAFF UPDATES

Mr. Thompson stated that the EAC has received an extensive list of upcoming event dates. He stated that these are all tabling opportunities to interact with the community.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she will send calendar invitations for the fieldhouse ribbon cutting ceremonies.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the City has received its first rebate of \$23,794.15 from the GESA project. She stated that the rebates will be used to pay for the projects. She stated that she anticipates approximately \$200,000 in rebates.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher shared the newest recycling public service announcement.

Mr. Bachman stated that he has no specific updates. He stated that he continues to clean and repair catch basins and to address the City's many sinkholes. He stated that it is a struggle to keep up.

OLD BUSINESS

- **Beekeeping**

Ms. Smith stated that the Planning Commission and Zoning Hearing Board have a list of Zoning amendments that will move forward to City Council. She stated that this amendment is among them but she is unsure of the timeline.

- **Signage / Mapping**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the EAC's portion of this project is complete and that Ms. Ayers-Fisher must order the signage.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that Public Works has ordered the graphics printer. She stated that the rest of the supplies are on order and noted her hope that the signage would be installed before the winter months.

Ms. Sellers noted the need for her to complete the list of categories. She stated that she will complete this task this fall.

- **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 the presentation is scheduled for October 13. He encouraged all to attend as support and acknowledgement of the EAC's work.

NEW BUSINESS

- **Sidewalk Improvements**

Ms. Meas stated that she has been researching grant funding available for sidewalks. She stated that they are generally related to safe walking routes to schools. She stated that sidewalks within one mile of schools are eligible.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this is a good program.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher requested that Ms. Meas send her the link to the program.

Mr. Vitale noted the need to work with the City on this project to dovetail with their sidewalk program. Ms. Ayers-Fisher agreed and stated that Public Works would need to work with the City's Grants Coordinator.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that sidewalk replacement also include consideration for tree root issues and tree replacements.

Mr. Vitale agreed but noted that neighborhood conditions vary.

Using the chat feature, Ms. Smith stated that Mr. Barr (new CD Director) has been working on the updated sidewalk program but that it has not yet been finalized.

Ms. Sellers agreed that sidewalks also need to address trees.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that South of Penn applied for an EPA grant to address neighborhood issues but that the program is no longer funded.

Ms. Sellers noted the need for a comprehensive evaluation of bike and pedestrian pathways. She suggested that trees separate these areas from motor vehicles to create specific pathways. She noted the need to also increase safe usage of electric bikes and scooters.

- **Green Infrastructure Ordinance Amendments**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this topic will be added to the Green Infrastructure Committee agenda. She stated that she attended a Penn State Extension webinar highlighting how to use ordinances and policies to encourage the installation of green infrastructure in building projects. She stated that a group is auditing several specific municipalities to develop model ordinance language. She noted the need to analyze Reading's ordinances to include specific features. She stated that she would share the link to the webinar recording and asked the group to view it. She suggested that this may be a joint project with the Policy Committee.

Ms. Sellers agreed with the need for new policy. She suggested following trends from other areas.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the need to use the new language to remove barriers to green infrastructure and to encourage developers to install these systems. She noted the need for clear standards.

Ms. Sellers expressed the belief that developers won't spend money on the more expensive green systems unless they need to.

Mr. Vitale noted that this work may overlap with the US Green Building Council. He stated that they have models and benchmarks. He agreed that these items should be added to Reading's ordinances. He noted how developers now accept some green items that were added in years past. He suggested that this should hold true for green systems if the items become standardized.

Ms. Sellers suggested creating an algorithm to compare the values and benefits of green systems. She described the NPR program she heard where a doctor created an algorithm of the medical values of all medications. She also noted the need for public buy-in for green systems.

Ms. Curran-Myers reminded all that public buy-in is the purpose of the signage project. She noted the need to educate at the community level.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher agreed that the Policy Committee should assist with this project to amend the City's ordinances.

PROJECT UPDATES

- **Policy Committee**

Mr. Beane stated that the EAC has been revising ordinances since 2011. He noted the need to include stakeholders and welcomed the opportunity to continue with this work.

Mr. Beane stated that the Policy Committee met last week with the Shade Tree Commission and City Arborist to finalize the Shade Tree Ordinance amendment. He stated that there were several minor tweaks which have been approved by the Arborist. He stated that approval of the amendment will be on the EAC's October agenda so that it can move forward to City Council. He stated that he will prepare an outline of the revisions made and provide that to the EAC before the October meeting.

Mr. Beane stated that this is not a Zoning amendment and does not need to go through that lengthy process. He noted his hope that City Council would enact the amendment before the end of 2025. He stated that the amendment gives the Arborist additional enforcement tools.

Mr. Beane stated that the Committee's next topic will be single use plastics. He requested that possible stakeholder contact information be submitted to Ms. Smith so that they can be invited to the next meeting and be included in discussions.

Mr. Thompson stated that the Communication Committee also started a discussion about single use plastics. He questioned if there has been any progress.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is coordinating technical assistance with bodega and restaurant owners through Penn State. She stated that What's Up Berks has two teams from Penn State researching the impact of single use plastic bans on the community. She noted the need for businesses to support the ban. She stated that the focus will begin with the Penn Corridor. She requested EAC assistance with this project since her schedule is full.

Mr. Beane stated that these are early discussions. He suggested that this group be invited to the next meeting and welcomed their input.

- **Green Infrastructure Committee**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the Committee has not met recently.

Ms. Smith stated that she sent a draft agenda to Ms. Curran-Myers for her review prior to the October 7 meeting.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned whether Ms. Meas would be interested in serving on this Committee after the loss of Ms. Bach and Mr. Cole. Ms. Meas agreed to serve on the Committee.

- **Communications Committee**

Mr. Vitale stated that the Sustainable Six documents have been finalized, are being translated and then will be sent to the graphic designer. He stated that Ms. Lara has collated all the information on the sticky notes to ensure the EAC addresses the topics that the community is concerned about. He stated that she has created a new survey and that she is connecting with people. He noted the need for the City to address the projects that the community wants to see. He stated that Ms. Lara was scheduled to make a CAP presentation at St. Margaret's but that there was no announcement.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the presentation did not occur and that it will be rescheduled. She suggested that the presentation occur when parents are already

present (CCD class). She also noted the struggles with parking in the area on Sundays.

Mr. Vitale stated that Ms. Lara attends community events. He stated that she continues to produce educational videos. He will be interviewing the Green Building Alliance coordinators for a BCTV program.

- **Green Building Alliance**

Mr. Thompson stated that the GBA has requested interviews with EAC members. He suggested that the interviews fit within Ms. Ayers-Fisher's schedule. He suggested that the meeting occur at the Community Foundation or at City Hall.

Ms. Sellers stated that she cannot attend unless there is a virtual option.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher suggested meeting on Wednesday morning. She stated that the GBA was awarded a \$250,000 planning grant and noted the need to set priorities. She suggested that the meeting occur at City Hall to allow a virtual option.

Mr. Vitale suggested that the EAC receive the GBA's questions or items to consider prior to the meeting to focus discussion and allow the EAC members to prepare comments. Ms. Curran-Myers agreed.

- **Rain Barrel Workshop**

Mr. Bachman stated that he has begun collecting usable barrels.

- **Rain Garden Installations**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she has drafted a model agreement. Ms. Smith requested that Ms. Curran-Myers resend the agreement so that it can be reviewed by the Law office.

- **GESA Project**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the interconnection has been approved by Met-Ed for the City Hall Cedar Street solar installation. She stated that the project is moving toward construction. She stated that the solar panels have been delivered and that the project must be completed by June 2027. She stated that the City Hall roof did not pass the final inspection and that the solar panels planned for the roof will be relocated to Public Works.

Mr. Vitale questioned if this was a weight issue. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it is and that the deficit was very slight.

Mr. Vitale questioned if there would be the same output. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the output would be the same.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the solar installation on Skyline is complete. She stated that lighting was added at the gate areas but since there will be no new guiderail the lights planned in those areas will be shifted to other areas of the City including City Park, other playgrounds, and downtown.

Ms. Sellers questioned the type of lighting and noted her concern with wildlife implications and the inability to see the stars in the sky. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that all the lighting meets Dark Sky requirements and that the contractor is aware of these requirements.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that working with Schneider Electric allows the project to pivot quickly based on conditions.

- **EPA Exide Cleanup**

Mr. Beane stated that there was an informational meeting last week and EPA feels that there is not enough community interest to form the Community Advisory Group (CAG). He stated that there is a core group but EPA would like additional people to participate. He stated that the community has made it clear to EPA that they want a CAG.

Mr. Beane stated that another meeting will be held in January after there is more outreach done by EPA. He stated that he has indicated that he is interested in serving on the CAG as has another member of the EAC.

Mr. Beane stated that lead sampling will continue throughout 2026. He stated that after the sampling is completed, remediation planning will begin.

Ms. Curran-Myers and Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that they were not notified of the meeting. Mr. Beane stated that this is part of the problem. He stated that people have signed up but that EPA is not notifying them.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the plan is for the lakebed at Bernhart to be sampled in late fall so that it can be accessed safely.

- **NREL Project**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the cold weather modeling is nearly completed and will be presented in November.

- **Climate Action Plan**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is begging to have consultant funding in the 2026 budget to finish drafting the Plan.

She stated that Sustainable PA has changed their certification program and that she would like Reading to earn gold status. She stated that working toward the certification will assist with policy work. She stated that recertification is required every 3 – 4 years and that some State grants adjust scores if the municipality is rated silver or above.

Ms. Sellers questioned Reading's rating. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it had been bronze but that it had expired. She stated that sustainability work continues and expressed the belief that gold is attainable.

There was a discussion about the STAR rating used in the past.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher requested that members review the program before the next meeting for future discussions. She provided all with the link to the program via email.

- **Urban Agriculture / BARN**

No report.

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

No report.

- **Invasive Plants / Noxious Weeds Education**

No report.

- **Storm Water / MS4 Issues**

Mr. Bachman reported that sinkholes continue. He stated that most of them are sanitary lines.

- **Solid Waste / Recycling**

No report.

- **BCTV Program**

Mr. Beane stated that he will have an update at the October meeting.

- **City-owned Dams**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the Bushong Dam has been removed and that she is working with Mr. Lloyd and the County on restoration. She requested that Ms. Smith email the Confluence Point Park Plan because she is using this Plan for restoration. She stated that she is hoping that Simone Collins will update the Plan for better financial benchmarks.

Mr. Vitale stated that this was a preliminary Plan. He questioned if the mill race had been removed. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the mill race remains. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the spillway also remains.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher noted the need to start with a Plan that has already been prepared. She stated that tree plantings will begin on October 21. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Trout Unlimited is also assisting with the tree plantings.

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

OTHER MATTERS

None

NEXT MEETING

The next EAC meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, October 28, 2025 at noon via Zoom.

The meeting adjourned at 1:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk