

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, September 27, 2022
Zoom

EAC members present – B. Vitale, C Curran-Myers, D. Beane, S. Bach

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

Cathy Myers prepared minutes of this virtual meeting, which was recorded on zoom, in Michelle Smith’s absence.

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair David Beane welcomed everyone to this virtual meeting and called the meeting to order at 12:05. He noted a quorum was present. Ms. Ayers-Fisher noted that it would be helpful to amend the agenda so that city staff present with updates for the EAC could present them toward the beginning of the meeting. Without objection, Beane agreed to do so after the approval of the minutes.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Curran-Myers moved the minutes of the August 9, 2022 meeting be approved as filed. Mr. Vitale seconded the motion and Mr. Beane asked if there were any additions, corrections or comments. Hearing **none the motion was unanimously approved.**

MS4 UPDATE

Scott Bachman provided an update on developments related to the MS4 program and storm water management. Mr. Bachman reported the completion of repairs to an outfall in Heritage Park. Several sections of pipe were replaced, and a vault and rock filter installed related to the discharge of storm water between Egelman’s Park and the outfall at 6th and Canal discharging into the Schuylkill River.

Mr. Vitale and Ms. Curran-Myers led a discussion about the need to raise consciousness of connections in our water system between storm water management, drinking water and river water quality. Mr. Vitale noted that the piece of stream that flows through Pendora Park could be a good location for

educational signage or a program, and emphasizes the importance of updating the GIS infrastructure map.

In response to a question from Ms. Curran-Myers regarding progress on planned green infrastructure such as several raingardens, Mr. Bachman advised there was nothing new to report.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher reported that, going forward, green infrastructure such as raingardens would be included by Public Works as part of the project specs in RFP's for new Public Works projects'

RAIN GARDENS / SIGNAGE PROJECT UPDATE

Ms. Ayers-Fisher reported that she was reaching out to new staff at the Philadelphia Water Dept. to reengage efforts to obtain their Green Infrastructure educational information for use in signage in Reading. Previous efforts were stalled by staff changes. She noted that consultant Desi Chesson had developed some draft definitions for green infrastructure types for use on the website and map, which should be reviewed by Ann Sellers and other members for accuracy and clarity. Members noted the EAC intends to have a QR code on educational signage to provide access to definitions and more information about rain gardens, porous pavement, green roofs and other plant and landscaping-centered storm water management.

INVASIVE PLANTS / YARD WASTE INITIATIVES

Ms. Curran Myers reported nothing new on the invasive plant initiative. Efforts will continue in the spring to schedule walks and educational programs to increase awareness of the damage to natural systems, parks and preserves from invasive plants and engage people to help remove existing invasive plantings. Mr. Beane noted he has spent much of the summer removing his barberry plants, which members noted would help provide peer pressure on neighbors. A repeat invasive plant walk along Oak Dr. on Mt. Penn, and at Hessian Camp/Pendora Park and the Rotary Park are being considered. Ms. Curran Myers noted that she needed to work with the City sign department to get "No Yard Waste Dumping" signs ready before spring clean-up time.

MEMBER UPDATE

Mr. Vitale and Ms. Myers noted the continuing need to find 2 new members to bring the EAC to its full of 7 members, and urged members to think creatively about how to recruit more diverse membership to reflect those portions of the

community not currently represented on the Board. Mr. Beane noted that recruiting residents with environmental experience and knowledge, whether science, policy, or activism remains another critical factor as the effectiveness and productivity of the EAC improved greatly when members were sought with professional skill sets as compared with early years when the EAC members possessed an interest in the topic rather than experience.

PLASTIC BAG BAN

Mr. Beane had nothing new to report. Ms. Bach has reviewed some of the programs adopted in Philly and other municipalities.

ACT 2 DATABASE

Ms. Curran-Myers noted that two matters fall within this update: 1) a collaboration with Liberty Environmental to prepare the information that would be needed for the City to consider adoption of a Non-use aquifer designation to facilitate brownfields remediation projects and encourage redevelopment; and 2) development of a database of Act 2 remediation projects to inform the public and land use officials regarding any restrictions that may have been placed on contaminated properties.

Ms. Curran-Myers recommended that the brownfields database issue continue to be included as an old business topic entitled Environmental Justice Initiatives, and the “Non-use Aquifer Designation” be a separate project with updates as needed (it is currently identified as *City Brownfield sites and requirement to hook up to public water system.*) Mr. Beane agreed with that clarification. Mr. Beane reported that he has been discussing possible work with students for this summer to collect some of the data needed for a non-Use aquifer designation such as the one in Lancaster.

SCHUYLKILL RIVER CONTAMINATION

Schuylkill River Contamination refers to concerns raised again by Rev. Evelyn Morrison regarding toxics in the community. Ms. Curran Myers offered to look further into it and send some information to the EAC members. Mr. Beane noted that concerns previously relayed to the EAC were related to the American Chain and Cable operations and the radioactive slag pile that was investigated as a Superfund and Act 2 remediation. A cap was placed over materials that were not removed and he is unaware of any releases of toxics from the site. Further investigation into these concerns may be needed.

BERNHART'S DAM UPDATE

Ms. Ayers-Fisher reported on the status of the dewatered Bernhardt Dam and the small remaining lake and stream reconfiguration. Sediments and water have been tested and are good except in the areas of concern already noted in our earlier report to City Council. The stream is finding a new channel and the seed bank in the sediments is sprouting with some native and some invasive species. Seedling trees have been ordered for stabilization while the longer term plans for the park restoration are worked out. Ms. Ayers Fisher reported that the lead levels, while within EPA's current guidelines for recreational use remain worrisome.

Mr. Beane noted that the EPA is considering 2 new NPL (National Priorities List under CERCLA) sites in the area with lead contamination relating to Exide. He will talk with Joe Vittella, the EPA lawyer for the 2 new sites to obtain an update and suggest that the areas of concern at Bernhardt be considered for inclusion in EPA's planning and funding in some way.

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE / PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Mr. Vitale reported that the Committee with the assistance of Desiree Chesson and David Nazario, have completed a framework for more effective EAC communication and outreach. While the primary focus of this subcommittee was to assist the City with outreach and engagement on the Climate Resiliency and Sustainability Plan under development, the effort has created a framework for better EAC outreach and communication generally. The website was upgraded, social media, an email address and a mail chimp newsletter were created. A power point created by Ms. Chesson and Mr. Nazario has been provided to members outlining communication and engagement strategies.

Two outreach events planned to engage the community on Climate Action and Sustainability are: a book club selection for October with the Reading Public Library and a film (TBD) to be screened at the Goggleworks in February. The Book Club selection, *The Intersectional Environmentalist* will be discussed at the Mecca Caribbean and Soul Food Restaurant in West Reading on Oct. 28 at 6pm. EAC members are encouraged to share the flyer with colleagues, read the book and attend the Club conversation. Copies were purchased by the EAC and may be obtained from Michelle Smith.

Mr. Vitale advised that the contracts for Ms. Chesson and Mr. Nazario have been nearly completed, neither Ms. Chesson nor Mr. Nazario are available at the end of the current commitment. The EAC needs to consider its needs going forward, such as newsletter development and maintaining the online presence and email responses.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ms. Bach announced she is moving from her current position at the Schuylkill Greenway Partnership to a position with American Rivers.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher announced the City will hold a public outreach meeting on the Active Transportation Plan on Oct. 25, at the Central Middle School in two identical sessions at 4-6 pm and 7-9 pm.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, October 25 at noon via Zoom.

The meeting adjourned at 1:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Cathy Curran-Myers
EAC Co-chair