

Environmental Advisory Council

Tuesday, October 28, 2025

Zoom

Noon

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

Others present – S. Smith, S. Bachman, N. Addeo

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Thompson called the meeting to order at 12:02 pm. He noted that a quorum was present.

REMEMBERING HARRIET RAUENZAHN

Mr. Beane stated that Ms. Rauenzahn was a former EAC chair. He stated that she did not have a professional environmental background but cared deeply about the environment. He described her work to improve the environment and stated that she was chair when the EAC was determining its mission and focus. He expressed the belief that she was the right person for that job and stated that she arranged for many guest speakers at EAC meetings. He noted the need to recognize her dedication and hard work.

Mr. Vitale stated that Ms. Rauenzahn was a genuine activist. He thanked Mr. Beane for his words and stated that he worked with her frequently. He stated that she wrote many letters to the editor and believed in citizen participation in government. He stated that she had a gift to rally people around an issue.

Mr. Thompson thanked Mr. Beane and Mr. Vitale for their words of remembrance. He noted that Ms. Rauenzahn laid the groundwork for the EAC to move forward.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

Ms. Smith stated that Ms. Addeo is attending this meeting because she is interested in volunteering on a City board and the EAC is among her choices. All introduced themselves.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Ms. Curran-Myers, seconded by Mr. Beane, to approve the September 23, 2025 meeting summary as written. Motion carried unanimously.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND STAFF UPDATES

Mr. Bachman stated that he continues to work to keep catch basins clean and repaired.

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. Smith stated that the Halloween on Penn event date has been changed to Wednesday, October 29 due to forecasted rain on Thursday.

Mr. Thompson stated that this is always a fun event with many people in attendance. He stated that the City does a great job planning the event and it is an excellent tabling opportunity.

OLD BUSINESS

- **Signage / Mapping**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that there is no substantial update. She stated that Ms. Ayers-Fisher is working to produce the signs in-house and has ordered the supplies. She provided background on this project.

Ms. Sellers questioned if any of the signage would need permits. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that permits would be needed for Mimmo's. She also noted the need for an agreement. She stated that she has drafted an agreement for the City's legal team to review. She stated that the draft is simple and in plain language.

Ms. Smith was requested to provide the graphics for the signage to Ms. Sellers so that her descriptions match the signage design.

- **2024 Annual Report to City Council**

Mr. Thompson stated that he and Ms. Curran-Myers presented the report to City Council on October 13.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Mr. Thompson did a great job with the presentation and that it went well. She stated that the report also described the EAC's work in 2025.

Mr. Thompson stated that there were several questions.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the need to keep Council updated on work that is being accomplished by the EAC.

- **Sidewalk Improvements**

Ms. Meas stated that she has provided information on several grants to Ms. Ayers-Fisher. She stated that she often sees wheelchairs riding in the streets because of poor sidewalk conditions. She stated that this creates dangerous situations.

Mr. Thompson agreed but stated that he has noticed some improvements.

NEW BUSINESS

- **Shade Tree Amendment**

Mr. Beane noted that the Policy Committee has completed its work on the amendment and it is ready for EAC approval to move it forward to City Council.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that much work was done with the Shade Tree Commission and the City Arborist. She stated that the amendment mainly addresses enforcement issues. She noted the need for additional trees and that many are being lost. She noted the need to move Shade Tree regulations forward further after it is determined how the City would fund taking ownership of all shade trees along the rights of way. She stated that these trees are currently the property owners' responsibility but that this model is no longer working.

Mr. Beane stated that the amendment review process has taken 6 – 9 months. He stated that the amendment is composed of the City Arborists' recommendations with slight amendments by the joint committee.

Ms. Sellers questioned if EAC members received the amendment. Ms. Smith stated that it is included in today's meeting packet. She stated that strikeouts are language being removed and bold, italics is used for new language.

Mr. Thompson questioned whether action should be tabled to allow EAC members time for further review. Mr. Beane noted his hope that Council will act

in November. He suggested taking formal action at the end of the meeting to allow members with additional time for review today.

Ms. Curran-Myers moved, seconded by Mr. Beane, to approve the Shade Tree amendment as drafted and recommend it move forward for City Council consideration.

Mr. Vitale stated that he recently spent time in Providence, RI and they do collective plantings in neighborhoods. He noted the need to utilize tree trenches to reduce conflicts with underground utilities.

Using the chat feature, Ms. Smith stated that this method was formerly used by John Slifko.

Ms. Sellers noted that many municipalities are planting smaller tree types which do not create the needed canopy. She questioned whether the City had a recommended tree list. Ms. Smith stated that the list is part of the SALDO. Ms. Curran-Myers agreed and stated that the list was updated several years ago.

Ms. Sellers suggested that the City take ownership of shade trees. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Mr. Kissinger is not able to do all that work himself and that there are staffing and budget issues. She stated that this amendment gives Mr. Kissinger additional tools.

Mr. Miller expressed the belief that moving this amendment forward now is good timing. He stated that Council just approved a tree inventory. He stated that Mr. Zeiber explained that the inventory will provide maps of the areas with trees and areas in need of additional trees. He agreed with Ms. Smith that Mr. Slifko used a method similar to that described by Mr. Vitale. He stated that Mr. Slifko educated new tree owners about tree care and then planted the trees. He stated that this program was very successful.

Mr. Vitale stated that Ms. Ayers-Fisher uses college students with volunteer requirements to assist with tree plantings in parks.

There was a discussion of organizations that may be able to assist with tree plantings.

Mr. Miller stated that Mr. Slifko left funds to create a tree fund for plantings in and around the Centre Park area. He stated that the fund will purchase the tree but

that the property owner must plant it. He stated that most residents do not have the ability to plant trees on their own. He suggested offering this program to those removing trees in Centre Park as an incentive.

Ms. Sellers suggested partnering with RAWA to plant trees as is done in Philadelphia. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Philadelphia is different from Reading and has a full Environmental Department.

Mr. Bachman stated that Met-Ed and UGI assisted with the tree planting along the Tulpehocken Creek after the removal of Bushong Dam.

Ms. Curran-Myers explained that the RFP to remove the dam was for the dam removal only and not the spillway or the mill race. She stated that these remain.

Ms. Curran-Myers called for the question, seconded by Ms. Sellers.

The motion to approve the Shade Tree amendment as drafted and recommend it move forward for City Council consideration was approved unanimously.

Ms. Smith stated that she will submit the amendment for inclusion on City Council's November 10 agenda for introduction.

Mr. Thompson stated that this was a great discussion.

Mr. Bachman disconnected from the meeting at this time.

- **Berks Sustainability Expo**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she registered the EAC to table at this event.

Ms. Smith stated that she would distribute the flyer. She stated that the event is on Thursday, December 4 from 12:15 – 5:15 at Penn State Berks Gaige Lobby.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

- **Communications Committee**

Mr. Vitale stated that the Committee is holding a workshop on November 17 from 9 – 11:30 am at Public Works to assess its work and to plan for 2026. He stated that Ms. Lara's contract is being renewed and that she has been doing great work. He expressed the belief that her work has been a breakthrough and she has been able to frame the issues to increase community understanding.

Ms. Meas disconnected from the meeting at this time.

Mr. Thompson suggested that Ms. Lara begin to focus on trees.

Mr. Vitale stated that trees can be added to Ms. Lara's list. He described Ms. Lara's social media videos. He stated that she has hosted a presentation on the CAP and attends tabling events as she is able. He stated that she has updated the survey and is also compiling the survey results.

Mr. Vitale stated that the Sustainable Six documents are currently being translated into Spanish. He expressed the belief that there should be much more publicity about the GESA project accomplishments.

- **Policy Committee**

Mr. Beane stated that he missed the last meeting and thanked those in attendance for moving items forward.

Mr. Beane stated that Ms. Ayers-Fisher is finalizing the signage required by the Beekeeping Zoning amendment and that the Committee is beginning to work on Sustainable PA certification.

Mr. Beane stated that single use plastics will be the focus of the next Berks Nature municipal networking event in February. He noted the need for a multi-municipal effort.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she was speaking with Art and Louise Grim at the Shirk Awards. She stated that the Grims were not aware of Berks Nature's intent but that they are excited to see single use plastics moving forward. She suggested that the Grims attend a Policy Committee meeting before February. She stated that they have been working on this issue for approximately 18 months.

Mr. Beane stated that he also spoke with the Grims about this issue at a tabling event. He agreed that they should attend the next Committee meeting and suggested that the meeting should be scheduled in November.

Mr. Vitale suggested that the Grims may also know of others who would like to participate as well. He expressed the belief that they recognize this challenge.

Mr. Beane suggested that the Grims attend an EAC meeting after the topic has been discussed in Committee.

Mr. Vitale expressed the belief that the Grims will be good partners. He stated that Ms. Curran-Myers and Mr. Myers were Shirk Award winners.

- **Green Infrastructure Committee**

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the need to update the City's Code to include green infrastructure. She expressed the belief that local ordinance language is the most influential for installations. She provided background information about the Penn State Extension presentation. She stated that the City's silence on the issue is interpreted that green infrastructure is prohibited. She stated that Ms. Ayers-Fisher will be contacting the Extension for assistance with updating Reading's Codes.

Ms. Sellers stated that she was recently at a conference and a North Carolina town was highlighted. She stated that developers loved this town's Code updates which allowed them to build in areas that could not be developed in the past.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the Extension is using a grad student to review several municipality's Codes.

Mr. Thompson warned that the meeting ending time has been reached.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the need for a Code review was discussed in the past. She stated that participation in this program will allow that review and suggest streamlining key areas for amendment.

PROJECT UPDATES

- **Urban Agriculture**

Ms. Smith stated that the next meeting is tomorrow and she will have a more detailed update at the next meeting.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she also plans to attend. She stated that there is a graduate student testing soil composition in community gardens that wishes to work with the EAC.

OTHER MATTERS

None

NEXT MEETING

The next EAC meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, November 25, 2025 at noon via Zoom.

The meeting adjourned at 1:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk