Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, November 23, 2021
Virtual

EAC members present –D. Beane, A. Sellers, C. Curran-Myers

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

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Beane called the meeting to order at 12:03 pm. He noted that a quorum was not present.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

SIGNAGE, MAPPING

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the project continues to be discussed during Green Infrastructure Committee meetings. She suggested that Public Works begin building the signs during the application process. She questioned Ms. Sellers's progress on the graphics.

Mr. Vitale joined the meeting at this time.

Ms. Sellers stated that everything is ready and waiting for the logo. She stated that the catch phrase will be "Soak Up Reading". She stated that she met with Mr. Bruto, the owner of Mimmo's, and he has agreed to the sign installation.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the applications must be submitted. She requested a meeting with Ms. Ayers-Fisher and the City's sign maker to get the building process started. She noted the need for Public Works to invoice the EAC for reimbursement. She stated that she will continue contacting Mr. Crespo to meet and finalize the logo.

Ms. Sellers stated that the graphic designer is ready to move forward once the logo is received.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher requested the sign samples be emailed to her and she will schedule the meeting.

Ms. Sellers showed a sample sign. She stated that a "courtesy of" line will be added to the signage to note the assistance of the Philadelphia Water Department.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that Ms. Smith and Mr. Crespo also be included in the meeting. She stated that she has contacted Mr. Crespo several times but has been unsuccessful.

Ms. Sellers stated that Mr. Bruto is proud to participate.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned the dimension of the sign. Ms. Sellers stated that it is approximately 11" x 9".

Mr. Vitale questioned where the signs would be installed. Ms. Sellers expressed the belief that they would be installed on the sidewalk in front of the projects.

Mr. Vitale suggested that the sign would be more visible near the Mimmo's parking lot. He stated that people who want to do the right thing often don't get recognition. He stated that this will be a good model moving forward.

Ms. Sellers stated that there were permit issues at the Mimmo's project but that he is very proud of the project.

Mr. Vitale questioned if the tree trench was required. Ms. Sellers stated that it was not required but was the best way to address the issues.

Ms. Smith explained the accounting process and stated that invoices for 2021 funds must be received by December 31.

There was a brief discussion about building several extra signs so that projects can be recognized more quickly in the future.

Mr. Beane stated that the EAC has been allocated $10,000. He cautioned that the funds may not be allocated in the future if they are continually not spent.

Ms. Sellers expressed the belief that the funding will be spent more consistently once the initial bugs are worked out of the process. Mr. Beane agreed.

Ms. Sellers stated that a contract will also need to be signed with the graphic designer. She stated that the price remains the same.

Mr. Beane suggested that Ms. Sellers provide the contract to Ms. Smith who will prepare it for his signature.

INVASIVE PLANTS / NOXIOUS WEEDS

Ms. Curran-Myers briefly reviewed the background of this project.

Ms. Curran-Myers screen shared her updated draft. She stated that the State law regarding enforcement of control orders changed in 2017. She stated that she has added that the City can also issue control orders. She stated that she has removed the provision of prison time for those unable to pay the fine because she opposes debtor's prison.

Mr. Vitale agreed with the removal of the prison provision. He questioned what other recourse is available if the fine is not paid. He questioned if community service was appropriate and suggested that community service removing invasive plants could be educational since many people are unaware of what is happening.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that enforcement is always an issue. She stated that there are costs to the City but that contempt charges in Court can be initiated.

Mr. Beane agreed with Ms. Curran-Myers. He stated that the Court of Common Pleas can issue directives.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed that many people don't realize they are planting and spreading invasive plants.

Mr. Beane stated that this is an educational issue. He stated that enforcement is a tool to convince residents to comply. He stated that 1553 Mineral Spring Rd contains Japanese barberry. He stated that he spoke with the owner and made him aware. He expressed the belief that people will do the right thing once they are made aware.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the biggest issue will be propagating invasive plants for sale. She expressed the belief that the PA Dept of Agriculture will enforce nursery sales. She stated that businesses do not want to tarnish their reputations and will comply.

Ms. Smith stated that the EAC has approved two of the drafts at the October meeting. She stated that she will send all three ordinances to the Law office for review before adding to the City Council agenda.

Motion was made by Mr. Vitale, seconded by Ms. Curran-Myers, to approve the ordinance creating Code of Ordinances Chapter 317 Invasive Plants and Noxious Weeds. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Beane thanked Ms. Curran-Myers for her work on this project.

NEW MEMBERS

Ms. Smith stated that there are no additional applications for EAC membership. She stated that she contacted Ms. Noviello and had no response. She stated that she will attempt to contact her again.

Mr. Vitale stated that he is recruiting members. He stated that there are two Penn State Berks professors who are interested. He stated that they are not City residents but can serve on a Committee.

Mr. Beane expressed the belief that the Administration would reject non-City residents and agreed that they can serve on a Committee.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested sending them a letter describing the Committees. Mr. Vitale agreed that this is a good idea.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she will draft the letter.

Mr. Vitale stated that they seemed interested. He suggested that the EAC be copied on the letter. He stated that he will then follow up by phone.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned if an email is appropriate. Mr. Vitale stated that it is.

Mr. Beane suggested using this email as a template for future recruitment.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUMMIT

Mr. Vitale stated that there is no update. He expressed the belief that filling the Sustainability Manager position is key to moving forward. He stated that the need for a Code Review is a concrete take-away from the Summit.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that interviews for the position are in process.

Mr. Vitale questioned the hiring timeline. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she does not have that information.

Mr. Vitale stated that he is unsure how to move forward in the meantime.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher expressed the belief that starting to review the Code is a good place to start.

Mr. Vitale stated that the Code Review Committee's first meeting is December 7. He noted the need to develop the meeting agenda.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the meeting has been convened by Ms. Ayers-Fisher.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the first meeting will discuss staff assistance, the scope of the review, and identifying which updates are needed. She stated that prioritizing which sections to review first can be addressed.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she provided her notes from the Widener Law School review. She stated that these can be used to brainstorm and to understand the City's options. She stated that not all apply to Reading.

Mr. Vitale agreed with Ms. Curran-Myers. He also agreed that the first meeting should be EAC members and City staff only. He stated that expanding the Committee can also be discussed.

Ms. Smith noted the need for City staff involvement in the review process. She stated that staff has expertise in their respective areas.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed and stated that they would be key contacts.

Mr. Vitale noted the need to discuss staff experience and their availability to assist.

Ms. Smith explained that the Code is compiled of many Chapters and that this will be an expansive review process. She noted the need to prioritize. She stated that she will provide the link to the online Code for members to review before the December 7 meeting.

Mr. Vitale suggested that the Committee also identify gaps in the City's Code.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggesting reviewing the Code and bringing ideas to the initial meeting.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher expressed the belief that reviewing the Code prior to the meeting would be helpful.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that each member provide their priorities to Ms. Smith so there is one single list to work from.

Mr. Vitale suggested that the group communicate with one another and then send one list to Ms. Smith.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that the review be complete and the list compiled by December 3.

Ms. Sellers noted the need for procedures to be in place for transportation. She noted the availability of green energy funding and noted the need for the City to plan how to acquire funding and the best way to use it.

Mr. Vitale expressed the belief that this would best be done by the Sustainability Manager. He stated that public meetings are being held regarding ARPA funding. He suggested EAC members attend and note the need for funding to be used for green infrastructure projects.

Ms. Sellers suggested gathering groups to help facilitate these projects. Ms. Curran-Myers agreed and stated that the groups can also help bring awareness of the need for these projects.

Mr. Vitale stated that this is a valid point. He noted the need to think about how to accomplish this.

Ms. Sellers also noted the need for the City to have project standards.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she will have the Code Review Committee agenda drafted by December 3.

Mr. Vitale suggested that Ms. Ayers-Fisher facilitate the first meeting. Ms. Ayers-Fisher agreed and stated that the Code Review will be a good project to work on during the colder months.

PLASTIC BAG BAN

Mr. Beane stated that he has no report. He noted the need to schedule a Committee meeting.

ACT 2 DATABASE

Mr. Beane expressed the belief that an intern should compile this database. He suggested that the City collect covenants that have been provided to them to create a searchable database. He stated that many covenants cannot be found. He expressed the belief that Liberty Environmental would assist with this project.

Ms. Curran-Myers expressed the belief that this is an environmental justice issue. She expressed the belief that people don't know how to find the covenant so they believe the worst and that everything is contaminated. She stated that many properties have been remediated. She noted the need to include superfund sites in this database. She suggested that Ms. Hoag may have knowledge about some sites to get started.

Mr. Beane stated that there are dozens of City properties in the Act 2 process. He stated that they have been remedied to site specific specifications and most use the public water system. He stated that there could be soil impacts and projections. He suggested that there may be federal funding available to assist with this project.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed that there may be federal funding available since Reading has been identified as an environmental justice community.

Mr. Beane suggested contacting US EPA for assistance.

2022 MEETING SCHEDULE

Mr. Beane suggested that the meeting schedule remain the same and continue virtually since COVID infection rates are once again on the rise.

All agreed to keep the same schedule and to continue virtually.

Mr. Vitale expressed the belief that it is easier to attend meetings via Zoom.

Mr. Beane stated that he also serves on other boards which offer a hybrid meeting for those interested in attending in person.

CHAT WITH THE EAC

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this concept was discussed at the last Green Infrastructure Committee meeting. She stated that this would be a way for public outreach for the EAC to hear people's environmental concerns in the community.

Ms. Curran-Myers explained that the Sustainability Plan would be discussed during the Green Infrastructure Committee but that the first 30 minutes of the meeting would be devoted to a public open forum. She stated that specific topics may be highlighted. She stated that it was suggested that two members attend each session but that members rotate so that the responsibility doesn't fall on specific members. She suggested that the chats occur monthly.

Mr. Beane noted his support of the concept. He noted his hope that the EAC would hold public meetings quarterly in the City's four quadrants. He noted the need for key community members to be involved as resources to the EAC and to help recruit members. He expressed the belief that the chats are a great project and that public outreach is needed.

Mr. Vitale suggested that the chats be held every other month.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the need to determine when the chats would be held.

Mr. Vitale stated that Ms. Anderson made this suggestion. He noted the need for the public to understand that after the public forum that they may listen to the rest of the meeting but not provide comment.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that there was also discussion to hire an intern to manage a blog. She expressed the belief that this would also assist with outreach. She noted the need for the intern to have knowledge / interest in sustainability, community outreach and be IT savvy. She suggested that EAC funding can be used to pay the intern to ensure it is done well. She noted the need for the use of social media to reach more people. She stated that Ms. Smith has contacted the Law Office regarding the EAC hiring an intern.

Ms. Smith stated that the EAC can hire contractors. She stated that the City Solicitor indicated that the EAC would need to work through Human Resources to hire an intern but can hire a contractor on its own.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed with this opinion. She stated that a contract will need to be drafted and the position advertised.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the Penn State (Main Campus) Sustainability Institute pairs students with municipalities. She stated that they could be a resource. She stated that a newsletter / blog could be created during the Spring 2022 semester and used as a template moving forward.

Mr. Vitale expressed the belief that these programs are designed to benefit the student and not the municipality. He stated that they only work well if staff works closely with the student. He expressed the belief that it would be more beneficial to hire an individual.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed with Mr. Vitale.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher explained that the student would be completing their capstone project.

Mr. Vitale reiterated the need for staff supervision. He expressed the belief that Ms. Anderson could assist as she has additional resources.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Ms. Anderson is willing to assist with the blog.

Mr. Vitale questioned how to identify someone to hire. He noted his preference that the person be a City resident.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed with Mr. Vitale and noted the need to draft a proposal.

Ms. Sellers agreed with the need for a proposal.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that Mr. Vitale and Ms. Anderson draft the proposal. Ms. Sellers agreed to utilize Ms. Anderson's expertise.

Ms. Curran-Myers requested that the proposal be drafted by December 3 to be reviewed at the Green Infrastructure Committee meeting.

Mr. Vitale suggested paying the consultant $2,500. He questioned if unspent funding could be carried into 2022. Ms. Smith stated that unspent funding cannot be carried to the next year.

Ms. Curran-Myers reminded all that the EAC does not meet in December. She questioned if approval could be given via email.

Mr. Beane agreed to allow approval via email.

DOWNTOWN PLUS PLAN

Ms. Smith stated that Ms. Curran-Myers requested that the draft Plan be shared.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the need for the EAC to be aware of this Plan and to think about environmental considerations and projects to include. She noted the need to incorporate Complete Streets, the urban tree canopy, and connectivity. She stated that the City is working to provide services formerly provided by the Downtown Improvement District (DID).

Mr. Vitale questioned if the Plan is more than a replacement for DID. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that it is more.

Mr. Vitale expressed the belief that the City reinvents the wheel every five years. He noted the need for the EAC to also pay attention to Transit Oriented Development around the train station. He expressed the belief that there may be some overlap with the Downtown Plus Plan.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested David Myers be invited to the January meeting to make a presentation. She stated that it looks very likely that passenger rail will return to Reading. She stated that a committee has been formed and both Amtrak and Pennsylvania have included passenger rail to Reading in their updated Plans. She stated that there is funding for passenger rail in the Federal Infrastructure Bill.

Mr. Vitale expressed the belief that the funding is not dependent on Amtrak. He agreed that progress is positive.

Ms. Sellers expressed the belief that Transit Oriented Development will have a farther reach than the neighborhood around the train station.

Mr. Vitale agreed with Ms. Sellers. He expressed the belief that Transit Oriented Development is based on a walkable community.

Ms. Sellers stated that it should also include Complete Streets.

Mr. Vitale noted the need for the EAC to be involved in both Plan areas.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting date is Tuesday, January 25 at noon.

Mr. Beane reminded all that the EAC reorganizes in January.

The meeting adjourned at 1:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk