

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, November 25, 2025
Zoom
Noon

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

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

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Thompson called the meeting to order at 12:07 pm. He noted that a quorum was not present.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

UPCOMING EVENTS AND STAFF UPDATES

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that there are no events scheduled in December. She stated that she is planning a Martin Luther King Jr Day of Service on January 18, 2026.

Ms. Curran-Myers connected to the meeting at this time.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is planning projects at the Greenhouse and stated that Public Works escorted Santa in the Holiday Parade. She reminded all about the revised trash / recycling pick up schedules for Thanksgiving and Christmas. She stated that there would be no street sweeping on November 27 and 28 or on December 24 and 25.

Mr. Thompson noted that a quorum of members was now present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Ms. Curran-Myers, seconded by Mr. Beane, to approve the October 28, 2025 meeting summary as written. Motion carried unanimously.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND STAFF UPDATES (Continued)

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is planning a seed starting event at the Greenhouse.

Mr. Vitale questioned what would be done with the plants that are started. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that they will be given away at Earth Day and used in public gardens and community gardens.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested using a voucher system to give the plants to children at Earth Day.

Mr. Thompson expressed the belief that this was a great idea to keep youth involved in the environment. Mr. Vitale agreed and stated that it would help increase awareness of environmental issues.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the GESA project will begin construction on the 6th & Court courtyard lighting in early December. She stated that this project will increase lighting to increase the comfort level for those walking through the courtyard and will also reduce the shadowed areas. She stated that the Cedar St solar panels are being reviewed by Zoning and the Public Works parking area solar panel construction will begin this winter.

Mr. Vitale reminded all about the Penn State Sustainability Fair on December 1 at Penn State Berks.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the updated agreement with Barrio Alegria to continue Ms. Lara's services has been signed and the initial payment has been made.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the GBA will be holding a round table on December 9 at 11:30 am at Pendora Fieldhouse to describe why it is best to hire an architect for projects. She stated that before and after photos of the fieldhouse will be shared to show that historic buildings can be upgraded.

OLD BUSINESS

- **Signage / Mapping**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that Public Works has purchased the necessary graphics and that she is currently working to obtain costs for the sign bases. She stated that the signage should be ready for installation in the spring of 2026.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested using the funding allocated for signage in 2025 on other EAC projects before the end of 2025. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she will discuss this with Ms. Smith.

Ms. Smith stated that the EAC has \$14,000 remaining in their 2025 budget.

Mr. Thompson noted the discussion of having give away items at tabling events and suggested purchasing those supplies.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she will price tote bags. All agreed.

Mr. Thompson also noted the need for all EAC members to have tee shirts to wear at tabling events.

Ms. Smith requested a formal motion allowing the spending of funds.

Mr. Vitale noted the need for printing costs for the Communications Committee's printed materials.

Ms. Curran-Myers moved, seconded by Mr. Thompson, to use a portion of the EAC's 2025 budget to fund the signage project and to purchase give away items for tabling events including the EAC logo and an environmental message, along with tee shirts for EAC members. Motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she will provide information to the EAC for their consideration. Ms. Curran-Myers requested that the information be provided at the next Communications Committee meeting. She noted the need to also provide funding as Ms. Lara's work requirements.

Mr. Vitale also suggested that the EAC provide funding for the January seed starting event.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she has a device that turns newspapers into small pots if it is needed for the seed starting event.

There was a brief discussion regarding daily newspapers.

- **Sidewalk Improvements**

No report.

- **Shade Tree Ordinance Amendment**

Ms. Smith reported that the amendment was enacted by Council by unanimous vote at their November 24 meeting. She stated that Council thanked and commended Mr. Kissinger and the EAC for their work.

Those present commended Mr. Beane for his work on this amendment.

NEW BUSINESS

- **2026 Meeting Schedule**

Ms. Smith stated that she used the same practice that was followed for previous schedules.

Mr. Vitale noted the need to correct the August meeting date. Ms. Smith stated that she would make this correction.

All present approved the 2026 meeting schedule.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

- **Communications Committee**

Mr. Vitale stated that the Committee held a workshop to review its 2025 accomplishments and to set 2026 priorities. He stated that Mr. Orozco, Ms. Lara, and Ms. Melendez attended. He stated that the Committee will partner with Barrio on Ms. Lara's professional development and stated that everyone agreed that working with Ms. Lara has been a great experience and should continue. He stated that Ms. Lara responds to the community. He noted the need to bring climate change back into the conversation.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she was sorry that she missed the workshop.

Mr. Thompson stated that he attended the EAC Conference with Ms. Ayers-Fisher. He noted that a field trip to Total Recycle is being considered. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she will schedule the field trip. She stated that visiting these types of sites is better in cooler weather and suggested it be scheduled for late February or early March. She suggested inviting other decision makers so they can see the scale of operations.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed with Ms. Ayers-Fisher's suggestion and noted the amount of misinformation about recycling. Mr. Thompson agreed and stated that there is an urban myth that separated materials aren't recycled.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that a meaningful amount of materials is recycled.

Mr. Thompson described a campaign sign recycling program that was highlighted at the EAC Conference. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that several counties have this type of program and she suggested adding it to the EAC's 2026 projects.

Mr. Bachman stated that the Tulpehocken Creek Watershed toured Total Recycle. He stated that this facility also recycles single use plastics. He stated that they accept, sort, and sell recyclable materials.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the City and School District recycling goes to Total Recycle and City household pickup goes to Cougle's. She also recommended a field trip to Republic's facility.

- **Policy Committee**

Mr. Beane stated that the Committee met last week and noted the need to begin working on single use plastics now that work on the Shade Tree Amendment is complete. He noted the need for a draft ordinance to begin moving forward and stated that Penn Environmental has a model. He stated that Ms. Smith will be preparing the first draft to begin the review.

Mr. Beane stated that the Committee's next meeting is December 9 at 8 am.

Mr. Beane stated that the February Berks Nature Municipal Networking event should feature single use plastics and noted the need for Reading to have a goal by that time. He stated that Ms. Ayers-Fisher has indicated that other local municipalities are looking to Reading for their model so that there is consistency.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted her agreement with this approach. She suggested that Mr. Beane contact Ms. Shimp and offer the EAC's congratulations on being named Berks Nature's next President and to confirm the February program. Mr. Beane agreed and stated that he will email Ms. Shimp.

Mr. Vitale stated that he was glad to see that Ms. Shimp will be the new President.

Mr. Beane noted that Ms. Smith has indicated that the Charter Review Commission is considering adding Toxic Trespass to the Charter. He stated that he will review his prior research and work with Ms. Curran-Myers.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she had also heard about this and had begun researching. She stated that there have been no new developments since the last time the EAC discussed this. She stated that Googling the topic provides only Rev. Morrison's prior articles. She stated that it is difficult to disagree with the concept of toxic exposure. She stated that it is difficult to prove where and how a person was exposed and that if it can be proven, there are other laws that better address the issues. She expressed the belief that this is a popular citizen idea but that it is not workable and is more of a political message than a helpful law.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher noted the clean air and water provisions in the PA Constitution.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted that there are already many federal and state environmental laws that cover this topic. She questioned who in the City would enforce the law. She expressed the belief that this citizen group doesn't understand that there are other protections already in place so they believe the City should enforce the laws.

Mr. Vitale noted that local ordinances cannot supersede federal and state law. Ms. Curran-Myers agreed that there can be no conflict with federal and state law but that if local jurisdiction is not prohibited, it can be done. She stated that most environmental law does supersede local regulations.

Mr. Vitale suggested a legal test case to set precedent. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that there may have been a PA test case and stated that she will continue her research. She stated that she will work with Mr. Beane before the EAC has a lengthy discussion on the issue.

- **Green Infrastructure Committee**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the Committee meets next week.

PROJECT UPDATES

- **Beekeeping Zoning Amendment**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that completion of the signage requirement is a priority.

- **Use of ebikes**

Using the chat feature, Ms. Smith noted a recent article about the dangers of riding ebikes and the increase in injuries.

- **EPA Exide Cleanup Update**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that soil testing will begin at Bernhart's once the ground has stabilized in the colder weather. She stated that she is planning 2026 projects with the Master Watershed Stewards.

- **2025 EAC Conference**

Mr. Thompson stated that an EAC that made a presentation at the Conference noted their work to remove invasive plants. He stated that Reading is far ahead of other municipalities in their environmental work. Ms. Ayers-Fisher agreed.

Mr. Thompson stated that Reading was the largest community participating. Ms. Ayers-Fisher agreed and stated that participants were mostly townships.

Mr. Thompson stated that most EACs are used as a labor force to remove invasive plants rather than in an advisory capacity.

Ms. Curran-Myers expressed the belief that Reading is too large for the EAC alone to address invasives. She noted the need for education so that residents can assist.

Mr. Beane noted his hope that the EAC would partner with Berks Nature and the Conservation District on projects. He stated that he is currently enrolled in the Master Gardener program and is hoping that Reading becomes more active in this area.

Mr. Thompson expressed the belief that people would be interested if the EAC spreads the message.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed and stated that the Master Gardeners can assist with other EAC projects including education about invasive plants.

OTHER MATTERS

None

LONG TERM PROJECTS

- **Fluoride in Drinking Water**

Ms. Curran-Myers expressed the belief that this topic will come forward again. She noted that Sec. Kennedy opposes adding fluoride to drinking water.

Mr. Bachman stated that water companies are also addressing the issue. He stated that RAWA does add fluoride but that others in the County do not.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she has been reviewing articles about the backlash that is happening.

Mr. Vitale questioned RAWA's current position. Mr. Bachman stated that he is unsure.

Mr. Vitale stated that dentists support adding fluoride. All agreed.

- **Code Review**

Mr. Vitale stated that the State is working to adopt the updated construction codes. He stated that these include substantial improvements in green and sustainable construction. He stated that the City's Codes should be reviewed once the State adoption is completed.

Ms. Curran-Myers also reminded all that Penn State is reviewing green incentives in local construction codes.

Ms. Smith stated that, generally, Reading adopts the Codes one year after the State after legal review.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that conversations have already begun.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that these two approaches be done together.

Mr. Bachman noted that he has been observing an increase in green infrastructure installations. He stated that projects over one acre in size require NPDES permits. He stated that some redevelopment projects are also using green infrastructure.

Mr. Thompson noted House Bill 1512 which is currently being considered by the PA House and addresses electric bills and House Bill 1233 which considers the

safety of batteries less than 25 pounds. He stated that both of these Bills have GOP support.

NEXT MEETING

The next EAC meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 27, 2026 at noon via Zoom.

Mr. Thompson encouraged all to attend tabling events.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the Sustainability Fair features Penn State students and faculty and many other environmental groups. She stated that it is great networking with the other groups.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that students will also be presenting their projects.

Mr. Thompson stated that he was the darkest person at the EAC Conference. He expressed the belief that Reading's EAC is moving slowly toward diversity. He expressed the belief that Reading is taking the lead on this initiative also.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that former environmental students have expressed to her that sustainability is not a focus for people of color but after they have taken her classes, they reconsider that belief. She noted that when they learn about environmental justice issues, they realize that this must be addressed.

The meeting adjourned at 1:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk