

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, November 26, 2024
Virtually

EAC members present – S. Thompson, D. Beane, W. Vitale, J. Cole, C. Curran-Myers, S. Bach

Others present – S. Smith, B. Ayers-Fisher, L. Lara, T. Melendez, J. Mitchell, C. Trachte, B. Murray, H. Takacs, D. Osgood, S. Bachman

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Bach called the meeting to order at 12:02 pm. She noted that a quorum was present.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Mr. Beane, seconded by Ms. Curran-Myers, to approve the meeting summary for October 22, 2024 as written. Motion carried unanimously.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND STAFF UPDATES

- **Lead Water Service Lines**

Mr. Murray stated that US EPA has set lead requirements for water systems. He stated that RAWA has sent letters to customers requesting that they provide the piping source to their water service. RAWA has not yet had any responses.

Ms. Sellers connected to the meeting at this time.

Mr. Murray stated that RAWA has joined the PA DEP “Get the Lead Out” program and lead pipe service lines can be replaced at no cost to the homeowner. He stated that RAWA has estimated the cost to complete this inventory and to replace lead pipes as they are located. He stated that weekly meetings are being held and regular assistance is being provided. He stated that Reading will be on the cutting edge of removing lead pipes.

Mr. Murray stated that he anticipates some changes due to the recent election results. He explained that Pennsylvania and Michigan have higher water lead

standards and this may be more difficult to attain. He stated that water systems have been working with the Governor to determine ways to address the higher standards so that improvements can be made and to ensure that the standards can be reached.

Mr. Murray stated that RAWA and the City have installation records that date back to the 1880's and he is confident that they can use these records to identify the materials used to install the service line piping. He stated that the initial estimate to complete the inventory would be \$15 million and would require soft digs at each property. He stated that these soft digs through the concrete of City properties would cost \$5,000 - \$6,000 each. He expressed the belief that these digs would not be necessary and that the projected cost would be reduced by several million dollars.

Mr. Murray stated that data will be created that can use predictive modeling. He stated that to date there is no significant number of lead service lines that have been identified. He stated that when lead service lines are identified, they have been replaced at no cost. He stated that this work is done at properties with up to four rental units and approximately fifteen service lines have been replaced in the last six years. He stated that RAWA made a similar effort in 1999.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that there was also an effort to locate lead service lines in the 1980's and that Reading found no significant issues.

Mr. Murray stated that he has been aware of this issue for the last two years. He stated that he attended the program roll out at Penn State where the speaker indicated that Reading would have severe issues because most of their lines were galvanized piping with lead connections. He stated that it turned out that the speaker incorrectly noted Reading, PA when it was actually Reading, MA.

Mr. Murray expressed the belief that if there are issues in Reading that it is connections within the property and the property's fixtures. He explained that water testing is not an acceptable means to determine the location of lead service lines. He stated that the inventory must be completed within three years and noted the need for community outreach.

Using the chat feature, Ms. Smith stated that she began completing the survey but needed to research the year her home was built.

Ms. Bach questioned if all RAWA customers must complete the survey. Mr. Murray stated that if all customers complete the survey it will greatly assist RAWA. He stated that the date that the home was built is not completely definitive about whether there are lead service lines. He expressed the belief that the request for the survey completion was not presented well to the public.

Mr. Thompson expressed the belief that the new presidential administration will not be environmentally friendly.

Mr. Murray noted the need to not allow politics to drive individual needs. He expressed the belief that if water science is not followed, there will be additional situations similar that that in Flint, MI.

- **Fluoride in Drinking Water**

Mr. Murray noted the need for the EAC to take its time reevaluating the need for fluoride in the water and to listen to quality resources. He expressed the belief that there is no new information about fluoride and that the recent reduction in the safe level has already resulted in RAWA lowering the amount added to Reading's water. He stated that he has also requested comments from his colleagues. He expressed the belief that the noise makers always get their way and that if fluoride is removed from water systems it will be the poor who suffer. He stated that RAWA would save only \$75,000 per year if it removed fluoride and expressed the belief that it would be bad policy. He expressed the belief that DEP and EPA experts and science will prevail. He noted that the public is better served when professionals listen to experts.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the CA court decision includes 90 pages of science. She agreed with the need for the EAC to allow EPA to study this science. She expressed the belief that the benefits of fluoride outweigh the dangers. She noted the need to follow the science and the experts.

Mr. Murray stated that he has documentation showing that the science used in the decision is flawed and stated that this is only one study and one judge's opinion.

Ms. Curran-Myers requested that Mr. Murray share this information with the EAC. Mr. Murray stated that the CDC is already reviewing the information. He stated that the 1.5 that is applied in the decision is two times what RAWA uses. He stated that chlorine is also added to water in very small quantities and used the comparison of water and bleach. He noted the need to compare apples to apples and not apples to oranges. He stated that if fluoride is removed from water

there will be an increase in dental issues. He noted the need to keep emotion out of this issue.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted her confidence in EPA but noted the need for the agency to work more quickly than normal. She agreed that removing fluoride will lead to more dental issues and infections.

- **Ontelaunee Dam Maintenance**

Mr. Murray stated that this work is needed to protect downstream properties. He stated that the cost of the engineering will be \$2.3 million. He expressed the belief that 65% of the cost can be covered by a grant, FEMA funding, and \$400,000 paid by RAWA.

- **Ongoing Drought Conditions**

Mr. Murray noted the need for all RAWA customers to reduce their water usage by 15%. He stated that if this is not achieved that Ontelaunee Lake's level will get too low. He stated that he has met with the system's top users and there has been an 8% - 9% reduction. He encouraged all to visit the lake to see its low level.

Ms. Curran-Myers reminded all that the current rains will not alleviate the situation. She noted the need for the public to understand that the lake will take time to refill.

Mr. Murray stated that he attended a meeting with the Delaware River Basin Commission and DEP. He stated that Lake Ontelaunee is ground zero of a two County drought. He stated that he is looking for ways to reduce the required discharges for municipalities downstream. He noted the need to control the salt line in Philadelphia to prevent further movement which would force Philadelphia's system to shut down. He noted the need to address these issues before they become worse. He stated that RAWA has no enforcement powers unless the Governor declares an emergency.

Mr. Cole stated that he already conserves much water and stated that it would be difficult for him to conserve any more. He noted the needs of the watershed versus his personal needs.

Mr. Murray suggested an MS4 tax and stated that this is a complicated issue. He stated that it has been his most difficult time in service thus far. He stated that he has no control to fix the issue. He stated that any rain is helpful to keep the situation from getting worse.

Ms. Bach thanked Mr. Murray for his updates. She noted her hope that the recent rainy trend continues.

Mr. Murray expressed the belief that the recent rains help to keep up with demand but that it has not made any progress on the level of the Lake.

Mr. Murray disconnected from the meeting at this time.

- **Training Session**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that Mr. Mitchell and Ms. Lara had their CAP training this morning. She stated that Ms. Melendez is serving as a translator.

- **PML Sustainability Conference**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the tone of the conference was more apprehensive this year due to changes at the federal level. She stated that DEP was in attendance. She stated that the Governor plans to continue his climate and efficiency initiatives.

- **Holiday Happenings**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher thanked all who were part of the Holiday Parade. She stated that the Tree Lighting Ceremony will take place this evening at 6 pm.

- **Upcoming Events**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is planning an MLK Day of Service on January 20 at 10 am with the Widoktodwen Center and Keep Reading Beautiful.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is planning tours of the RAWA plant and the WWTP.

- **MS4**

Mr. Bachman stated that there have been many sewer backups caused by reduced water usage. He stated that his crew continues to clean catch basins to prevent litter from entering the river.

OLD BUSINESS

- **Signage / Mapping**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the signs will be located on private property and public property. She stated that the map will also include locations that have not

yet had signage installed. She noted the need for photos and coordinates to begin building the map. She stated that individuals can visit locations for photos or get digital images. She stated that the text for the signage is complete.

Ms. Bach requested that Monday's Green Infrastructure Committee meeting be rescheduled.

Ms. Sellers stated that Ms. Showers from the County Planning Commission made a presentation at a recent Schuylkill Action Network meeting and outlined County environmental initiatives. She stated that they are also working on a map and suggested that this work be coordinated.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that they were approached about coordinating this project in the past. She stated that she is excited that it is moving forward.

Mr. Bachman stated that he has four signs which need to be installed on Reading property in the Wyomissing Creek Watershed. He stated that Reading has only a small area in the watershed and requested location suggestions.

Ms. Bach suggested that a sign be installed on the grass triangle at Parkside Dr & Evergreen Dr.

Dr. Osgood suggested a sign on the Schuylkill River Trail near the new solar lighting installation. He stated that the Conservation District provided a portion of the funding for the lighting. He stated that this is a high profile location and is near the watershed boundary.

Ms. Sellers stated that she is glad these signs are being installed and expressed the belief that they do make an impression on people and draws attention to the sensitivity of the area. She suggested that signs be installed along major roadsides.

- **Annual Report to City Council**

Ms. Curran-Myers apologized for the delays in completing the report. She stated that she will send her draft to Ms. Smith for distribution. She stated that she has expanded the report due to the new members of Council.

- **Berks County EAC Mixer**

Mr. Beane stated that a meeting was held at Berks Nature last week. He stated that Berks Nature has agreed to facilitate two meetings – one on shade trees and one on a single use plastics ban. He stated that shade trees will be addressed at

the February 20 luncheon meeting featuring dialog to update tree responsibilities and maintenance. He noted the need to determine how to fund this new City initiative. He stated that DCNR has also agreed to be part of this conversation. He stated that there are grants available for tree plantings.

Mr. Beane stated that the single use plastic ban committee also includes community members. He stated that West Reading is also interested in working with Reading on the ban.

- **Goggleworks Rain Barrel Workshop**

No update.

- **2025 Budget Request**

Ms. Smith stated that City Council is currently working through their budget review process.

- **Beekeeping**

Mr. Beane stated that the EAC has approved the language and the draft ordinance has been forwarded to the City Planning Commission. He stated that he, Mr. Cole, Ms. Smith, and Ms. Ayers-Fisher attended the Planning Commission's workshop. He stated that the ordinance will begin the review process.

- **Single Use Plastics Ban Work Group**

See Berks County EAC Mixer above.

- **Use of Ebikes**

Mr. Cole stated that conversations are beginning to determine who is interested.

Mr. Trachte stated that this is an important issue to review. He described the different ranges and performance of ebikes.

Ms. Bach suggested that Mr. Cole and Mr. Trachte work on this issue.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the need for a group to organize and be the voice of those who support the installation of bike lanes and to bring safety issues forward.

Mr. Trachte stated that the Planning Commission is currently looking at the intersection of 9th & Washington Sts. He noted the conflicts with traffic and

pedestrians who use the senior center and the bus stop. He stated that he is attending town halls as he is able to bring these issues forward.

Ms. Sellers stated that she attended a presentation about bike and pedestrian initiatives. She stated that Philadelphia has a Multi-Modal department and that ebikes are a big issue. She noted the need for intersection design standards. She stated that she will follow up to get Philadelphia's intersection standards.

Mr. Cole noted the need to also address dirt bikes and ATVs. He noted the need for a place for these owners to ride their vehicles. He expressed the belief that these vehicles are becoming part of the culture.

NEW BUSINESS

- **2025 Meeting Schedule**

Ms. Smith suggested keeping the meeting schedule the same in 2025. All agreed.

- **CA Supreme Court Case re Fluoride in Drinking Water**

Mr. Beane stated that this case questions the existing science. He stated that EPA is following up.

Mr. Beane stated that the EAC and Board of Health provided position statements on fluoride in drinking water in the past. He recommended that the EAC's statement rely on the EPA study. He suggested holding a meeting in January with stakeholders to begin discussions.

Mr. Cole stated that safe fluoride levels have been reduced. He stated that some locations have naturally occurring fluoride in their water at already high levels.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that there is speculation that fluoride can have similar effects as lead and lead to a lower IQ. She noted the need to ensure safe levels and noted the need to continue studying the science. She stated that there is also fluoride in toothpaste.

Mr. Vitale questioned how this topic came to Reading. Ms. Smith stated that a resident made comments at a City Council meeting.

Mr. Cole noted the high quality of Reading's drinking water.

Mr. Thompson expressed the belief that fluoride is needed in drinking water for dental purposes. He noted the need to keep fluoride in the water if it is warranted.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that the amount added to drinking water may need to be reduced.

Ms. Bach informed all that she will need to recuse herself from any topic that is related to EPA.

PROJECT UPDATES

- **Communication Committee**

Mr. Vitale stated that he received notice from RAWA about completing the survey. He stated that he contacted them and his property is fine. He stated that the RAWA website has clear instructions.

Mr. Vitale stated that Ms. Lara is now engaged and her training was completed this morning. He stated that Ms. Lara and Ms. Ayers-Fisher delivered flyers to those invited to the event at Franklyn's. He stated that this event will discuss the Climate Action Plan and single use plastics. He noted the need for business owner feedback and stated that 25 – 30 people are expected to attend.

Ms. Curran-Myers also noted the need to discuss transitioning from gas stoves to electric.

Mr. Vitale noted the need to learn their challenges.

Mr. Vitale stated that the Schneider Electric project will begin soon. He stated that his letter to the editor about the project was published and shared by Ms. Smith. He stated that they were guests on his latest Building Green program and stated that he will share the program link.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she and Mr. Murray will appear on the League of Women Voters of Berks County December BCTV program regarding the drought.

Mr. Vitale stated that materials and videos continue to be produced. He stated that three brochures are complete and are available at City Hall.

- **EPA Exide Cleanup Update**

Mr. Beane stated that a community meeting was held but that the notice did not reach the public. He stated that another meeting will be scheduled in 2025. He stated that the topic of the meeting is the formation of the Community Action Group. He stated that he indicated that Reading is interested in serving as part of the group. He stated that updated sampling will begin in 2025 and will take 1 – 2 years to complete.

- **County Ag Center Tour**

Dr. Osgood suggested that the EAC tour the County Ag Center.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the Conservation District was very helpful in the past and noted her hope to rebuild that relationship. She stated that she is excited to work together. She stated that the County Ag Center has a rain garden and a green roof.

NEXT MEETING

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

The meeting adjourned at 1:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk