

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, November 28, 2023
Virtually

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

Others present – S. Smith, R. Bradley, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, T. Krall

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Curran-Myers called the meeting to order at 12:03 pm. She noted that a quorum was present.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Smith stated that she received written public comment and has a response to that comment from Mr. Krall. She read the comments into the record.

From Alex High, no address provided: “Can you provide an update on the status of the removal project for the Bushong Dam? If not, can one be provided at the next meeting? I have not seen any updates on this topic recently, and it is an important ecological project.”

The response from Mr. Krall: “The Bushong Dam Removal design achieved a major step with the completion of the archaeological study by AECOM. The report is now with the AECOM engineering PM, Bob Pinciotti, who said today he is reviewing it and will provide that report with his input very soon. The removal design was nearly completed when we learned from the DEP that the archeological study had to be performed. The next step is to determine what if anything must be added or changed due to this study.”

Ms. Curran-Myers thanked Mr. Krall for the update. She agreed that this is an important project. She stated that several years ago the EAC visited the dam area and were shocked at the clear hazards in the dam’s current condition. She stated that the mill race is an attractive nuisance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Mr. Beane, seconded by Ms. Sellers, to approve the October 28, 2023 meeting summary as written.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the last meeting was held at Reading Rising Park. She questioned if the Climate Corps clean-up scheduled for this morning was cancelled due to the early morning snow. Mr. Bradley stated that the clean-up was not cancelled. He stated that he will provide updated photos to the group.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the EAC clean-up schedule will be discussed later in the meeting.

Mr. Bradley stated that he will also report on the Park as needed.

Motion carried unanimously.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Ms. Sellers stated that the Berks Water & Sewer Association is holding a breakfast and training session on December 7 from 9 am – noon. She stated that RAWA will be speaking on lead and copper in the Berks County water system, Entech will be speaking on PFA's, and the Berks County Planning Commission will address the systems' current usage versus its total capacity.

Mr. Vitale requested that Ms. Sellers share the registration information with the group.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she would like to attend.

Mr. Vitale stated that the Yale Center for Climate Change is holding a Zoom session on December 1 at noon called "Deep Canvassing". He stated that he understands that this session will focus on how to communicate about climate change.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the Yale Center is an excellent institution.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the need to amend the agenda for today's meeting to add the City Council annual report schedule and the School District project at the Reservoir in Hampden Park. EAC members agreed.

STAFF UPDATES

Received via text message from Ms. Ayers-Fisher – From Mr. Harrity - Recycling bins will be back in stock in late December / early January.

OLD BUSINESS

- **Signage**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the EAC has been working on this project for many years. She stated that there is forward movement – the City’s webmaster will assist with the website and virtual tour and Dean Marketing is working on the signage design and graphics.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the EAC has received a proposal and estimate for the design of 8 types of signs from Dean Marketing. She stated that the sign design will be based on the signs provided by the Philadelphia Water Department. The first sign will be on tree trenches. After the first design has been approved by the EAC, the others will be created. She stated that the estimate is \$5,000.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher connected to the meeting at this time.

Motion was made by Ms. Sellers, seconded by Ms. Bach, to approve the estimate and the work as described in the proposal.

Ms. Sellers suggested amending the motion to include the scope of work and the number of signs. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the proposal and cost includes eight types of signs. She read the scope of work included in the proposal.

Mr. Vitale stated that the proposal addresses the sign design and fabrication. He questioned who would install the signs. Ms. Curran-Myers and Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the signs will be installed by Public Works staff.

Ms. Sellers noted the need for anti-graffiti coatings.

Mr. Vitale stated that the story walk signs have already been vandalized in City Park.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that vandalism is consistent and noted the need to monitor the signs for stickers and graffiti and stated that some signs are removed. She noted the need to understand the City’s culture.

Mr. Krall stated that the City has approximately 18,000 signs to monitor. He stated that if there is vandalism, he will have the City respond. He stated that 1.5 employees are responsible for all the signs.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that after the design is complete, a sign maker will be contacted and Public Works will install the final product. She stated that for future projects, the signage will be part of the overall project.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that members of the Green Infrastructure Committee monitor the signs periodically to assist Public Works.

Mr. Krall reminded all that signage should not be installed in the public right of way or cause sight obstructions for drivers.

Mr. Cole suggested that a digital copy of the signs could be used on the map and on social media to share the EAC's story.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that one sign will be designed of all eight of the green infrastructure examples. She stated that signage will not be installed at each physical location of green infrastructure but that all the projects will be featured on the website and virtual tour.

Ms. Sellers questioned who will own the graphics. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the graphics will be owned by the City.

Motion carried unanimously.

- **Rain Garden Installations**

Ms. Sellers noted Mr. Krall's opinion that rain gardens should be installed in the best locations. She suggested using EAC funding for a watershed analysis to determine the best places for the gardens to be installed. She stated that this type of analysis is not difficult to do but is expensive.

Ms. Curran-Myers expressed the belief that the EAC may not have enough funding to cover the cost of the analysis but that a search can be done for grant funding. She expressed the belief that this is a priority for the US EPA.

Mr. Bradley questioned if the gardens could be installed at schools. Ms. Sellers expressed the belief that they could. She stated that it would be education for the students. She also noted the runoff created by school parking lots.

Mr. Bradley stated that he is currently working with Northwest Middle School on their courtyard. He stated that the Climate Corp is currently cleaning up the area and he has a meeting scheduled with the Berks County Conservation District. He stated that raised beds are being considered and stated that there is already an aquaponics project inside the building.

Ms. Sellers stated that her company worked with RHS to design and install the interior courtyard at RHS. She stated that she worked with many students.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned if the courtyard qualified as a rain garden. Ms. Sellers stated that it does not but she taught the students how one would operate.

- **Brownfields Database**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the City receives Act 2 notifications and the EAC receives a copy. She stated that Zoning and Planning officials need access to these notifications when a development or redevelopment plan is submitted.

Mr. Thompson disconnected from the meeting at this time.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that converting paper records to digital records is time consuming. She stated that DEP's records are moving toward digital and noted her hope that this would help improve accessibility. She noted the need for staff access and to work toward resident access in the future.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the City has purchased the ARIS database but that the database does not include Act 2 notices. She stated that staff has access to this database and that the information is available on every City property.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that neither PA DEP nor the County has a complete Act 2 database. She stated that the City must track these properties and stated that many emails have been exchanged working toward a solution to this issue.

Ms. Smith stated that a meeting with herself, Mr. Krall and Ms. Hoag is scheduled in the near future to discuss possible solutions. She stated that Mr. Krall indicated that these notices are tracked by Ms. Hoag but access to others is unknown at this time.

Mr. Beane explained that developers should perform Phase 1 research at the Recorder of Deeds office. He stated that Act 2 notices are required to be recorded

on the deed but that this is not a fool proof system. He noted the need for a fallback index.

Mr. Beane explained that resources are available to research Act 2 notices through a DEP search by address on their website. He stated that this process is tedious and time consuming. He noted the EAC's hope to make this process easier for City staff to identify properties with use restrictions.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that during her time at DEP this program was most often not enforced or in compliance. She noted her hope that the program is better managed now.

Mr. Beane stated that the City also gets notices for properties outside City limits. He stated that he met with Ms. Smith to help her understand the different types of notices. Ms. Smith added to the chat that DEP notifies the municipality in the mailing address and many suburban municipalities use Reading as a mailing address.

Ms. Sellers questioned what triggers the Phase 1 research requirement. Mr. Beane stated that it is usually triggered by the lending company when properties are purchased.

Mr. Krall explained that it is not a function of Zoning or Planning to make developers perform Phase 1 research. He stated that if staff has knowledge of a specific property or suspects there are Act 2 issues that will be discussed but there is nothing in the PA Municipalities Planning Code to require it.

Ms. Curran-Myers explained that this program was created by the private sector to protect themselves from future liability for past property owner behavior. She explained that Phase 1 is a review of records and Phase 2 is follow up based on any records discovered.

Mr. Beane stated that there may be site visits during Phase 1 but no sampling will be conducted. He stated that any Act 2 concerns will be noted and provided to the client who will determine if Phase 2 is conducted. He stated that the property owner will have federal protections if Phase 1 is completed and that Phase 1 is considered due diligence.

Ms. Sellers stated that this is very interesting. She stated that the Berks County Conservation District will request Phase 1 completion if they have knowledge of the former use of a parcel.

Mr. Krall questioned where notices are sent. Ms. Smith explained that the notices are sent to the City Clerk who copies them out to City offices and to the EAC.

Mr. Krall stated that when he receives copies of notices, he files them in the project files.

- **Berks Alliance Community Forum on the Climate Action Plan**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the Alliance received good feedback on the program. She expressed the belief that attendees didn't realize how much is being done. She stated that Enersys and Penske are using very sophisticated systems.

Mr. Cole stated that he has resent the Beekeeping Ordinance with his edits.

Mr. Vitale agreed with Ms. Curran-Myers about the extensive work being done regarding sustainability at Enersys and Penske. He stated that it was reassuring that sustainability issues are being addressed in Berks County.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Enersys is not only working on batteries. She stated that they are examining their waste, water conservation, and other issues. She stated that Penske is adding electric vehicles to their fleet, analyzing its supply chain, building LEED buildings, and increasing their energy efficiency.

Ms. Sellers questioned if there were incentives for businesses to address sustainability. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that there is not. She stated that their work is driven by their customers, the supply chain, partnerships, etc. She stated that successful businesses will be leaders and will prepare for the future. Mr. Cole added that shareholders are supportive of sustainability and DEI issues. He stated that the businesses also work to exceed government mandates.

Mr. Vitale stated that corporations are moving forward and understand the future.

Ms. Sellers stated that there are refineries and petro chemical plants trying to be carbon neutral. She expressed the belief that this is counter intuitive.

Mr. Vitale stated that the oil industry is a whole other topic.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she taught sustainability and how to measure improvements. She stated that there are companies that monitor businesses on the stock exchanges on their sustainability work and report on each company. She stated that many investors base their investments on this data. She expressed the belief that the private sector is way ahead of the public sector.

Mr. Beane stated that this is a very proactive approach. He stated that he serves on the Chamber's environmental committee and agreed that there is shareholder support for sustainability.

Mr. Bradley and Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz disconnected from the meeting at this time.

- **EAC Adopt-a-Block Schedule**

Mr. Cole stated that he lives near Reading Rising Park and can monitor the park to determine when clean-ups are needed. He stated that he will work with Mr. Bradley as needed.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed with this approach.

- **Bernhart's Park**

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the two year bridge construction project downstream has begun. She stated that there are no updates from EPA.

Mr. Krall explained that the bridge is County-owned. He stated that there are no definite plans for the park at this time but that \$300,000 was requested in the 2024 budget. He stated that EPA and DEP decisions will make work difficult until the City has official notifications. He noted his hope to dismantle the valve house and dam and save the stone.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher noted her hope that the stone would be reused at the Bernhart's location.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that EPA announced at the public meeting that they are already assessing the area. She stated that they have committed to addressing restoration in the early stages of work. She noted the need to stabilize the area before moving forward.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher noted the need to address the park area and to address the future goals of the watershed. She noted her hope that the \$300,000 will be approved for 2024.

Mr. Krall stated that although the spillway has been removed and the water level lowered, the dam remains in place.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she is working to schedule a meeting in early 2024 with EPA. She stated that removing the dam during the bridge project would lessen the effects of the construction on neighbors.

Mr. Krall stated that Egelman's lower dam will be rebuilt in 2024. He stated that ARPA funding has been committed for the removal of Bushong Dam and that the rain gardens in Glenside will be installed in 2024. He stated that progress is being made.

Mr. Krall disconnected from the meeting at this time.

NEW BUSINESS

- **2024 Meeting Schedule**

Motion was made by Ms. Sellers, seconded by Mr. Beane, to adopt the 2024 meeting schedule as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Curran-Myers reminded all that there is no meeting in December.

- **Council Report Schedule**

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the EAC is scheduled to present to Council in June 2025. She stated that the EAC is required to report to Council annually and that she will prepare a written report for all to review at the January meeting.

- **Reading School District Project at the Reservoir in Hampden Park**

Ms. Curran-Myers requested additional information about the project.

Ms. Smith stated that the project is in a steep slope area and is within the park.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that it is also near the Katzenmoyer springhouse and the wetland area.

PROJECT UPDATES

- **Communication Committee**

Mr. Vitale stated that the next book club reading has been scheduled for January 5 at 6 pm. He stated that the book is “Salvage the Bones” and that the library will provide snacks.

Mr. Vitale stated that the committee is also working on these projects:

- Goggleworks film viewing
- Hiring someone for community engagement
- Holding additional Climate Action Plan workshops
- Social media and web content

He stated that the committee is meeting tomorrow.

- **Policy Committee**

Mr. Beane stated that the focus of the committee is currently amending the Shade Tree Ordinance and drafting beekeeping legislation. He stated that the committee met with Ms. Gockley from the Shade Tree Commission and discussed her concerns with the Shade Tree Ordinance. He stated that Ms. Gockley is seeking input from the EAC and stated that one of her concerns is that the City does not currently require the stump to be removed when a tree is taken down.

Mr. Beane stated that Mr. Cole has reviewed the beekeeping legislation and has recommended a few changes. He expressed the belief that the beekeeping legislation will be completed first.

Mr. Beane noted his hope that Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz would join the Policy Committee after her term on City Council is completed.

Ms. Sellers stated that Wyomissing provides funding for sidewalk repairs caused by trees and requires tree replacement. She expressed the belief that this is a popular program.

Mr. Beane stated that the committee will be reviewing Wyomissing, West Reading, and Lancaster tree regulations. He expressed the belief that Reading’s ordinance needs a complete review and update.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that some changes were made several years ago. She noted that Reading puts the responsibility for street trees on the property owner

including all maintenance and removals. She expressed the belief that this system doesn't work and that Reading is one of only a few municipalities using this system.

- **MP3 Environmental Committee**

Ms. Smith stated that a public meeting with Natural Lands is scheduled for Tuesday, December 5 at 6 pm to learn about the MP3 Forest Management Plan.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she worked with Natural Lands and showed them areas of the forest where there are invasive species and areas where there are native plants.

UPCOMING MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the City tree lighting event is this evening at 6 pm at 5th & Penn Steets.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the City is beginning to examine available grants to apply for federal infrastructure funding.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 23 at noon via Zoom.

The meeting adjourned at 1:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk