



CITY COUNCIL

Nominations & Appointments Committee

Monday, October 17, 2016
Meeting Report

Attendance: S. Marmarou, J. Slifko
Others Attending: S. Katzenmoyer

The meeting was called to order at 4:01 pm by Mr. Marmarou.

I. Interview

Ann Sellers (appointment – Environmental Advisory Council)

Mr. Slifko questioned why Ms. Sellers was interested in serving on the EAC. Ms. Sellers stated that she was raised to care about the environment. She stated that she grew up in the 1960's and always recycled. She stated that this lead her to her profession – landscape architecture.

Mr. Slifko questioned how landscape architecture fit into urban planning. Ms. Sellers explained that she her projects often require her to complete the paperwork required for federal permits in relation to the Clean Water Act and PA regulations regarding clean streams. She stated that she worked with engineers in the past on MS4 and NPDES permits. She stated that storm water must be captured. She stated that she also worked with the Berks County Conservation District in the past and learned a lot there.

Mr. Marmarou questioned what Reading needed to do to increase its environmental sustainability. Ms. Sellers expressed the belief that additional environmental measures, including green spaces, would improve the quality of life of residents. She stated that Reading must put a better emphasis on its natural resources and improve access to these recreational areas. She stated that Reading has a great history and wonderful natural resources including many miles of trails. She stated that many local residents don't know these opportunities exist. She also noted the need to incorporate green infrastructure into projects. She stated that these will have social, economic and environmental impacts.

Mr. Marmarou questioned how the City could assist. Ms. Sellers suggested an incentive to reuse abandoned properties. She expressed the belief that many of them could be converted to other uses without extremely high costs. She noted the need for the City to prioritize where to add green areas and to add bike lanes to streets. She stated that this will make Reading a livable and walkable place. She stated that Philadelphia has been working on this and that they have shown a correlation between greened areas and a reduced crime rate.

Mr. Slifko expressed the belief that Ms. Sellers would also be an asset to the Shade Tree Commission. He agreed with the reduced crime rate as green spaces have been proven to have a calming effect.

Ms. Sellers stated that not all green projects are costly.

Mr. Slifko questioned how the City could add bike lanes with its existing street structure and parking shortage. He used 5th St as an example. Ms. Sellers stated that 5th St is more than wide enough for bike lanes. She stated that Lancaster is also currently looking at adding bike lanes. She stated that vehicles need 10 feet of lane for travel and bikes need 5 feet. She expressed the belief that parking would not be lost but that lanes would shift. She suggested that bike lanes run next to the sidewalks with parking between the bike lane and the auto lane to help protect bikers from traffic.

Ms. Sellers stated that Lancaster paid for a walkability analysis and the consultant stated that traffic studies are not needed. She also suggested that all the two lane, one way streets be changed to two way or reduced to one vehicle lane with a bike lane. She stated that this would also slow down the traffic and reduce accidents. She stated that once this is complete, the City can thoughtfully determine where to add green spaces to the streetscape and add green infrastructure to manage storm water.

Mr. Marmarou stated that the schools on N 13th St cause traffic problems. He stated that school buses and double parked cars make the street impassable at start and dismissal times. Ms. Sellers noted the need to ticket double parkers.

Mr. Marmarou questioned if Ms. Sellers would be able to attend meetings regularly. Ms. Sellers stated that she would be able to attend regularly. Ms. Katzenmoyer explained that Ms. Sellers is currently serving on an EAC subcommittee and has begun attending meetings.

Mr. Slifko stated that he is fascinated by Ms. Sellers's ideas.

Mr. Slifko questioned if the EAC supports bike lanes. Ms. Katzenmoyer explained that the EAC does not devote meeting time to this topic but that she believes that they would support this. She stated that they do support the Complete Streets aspect of the draft Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz arrived at this time.

Mr. Slifko stated that Ms. Sellers should also discuss these issues with the Shade Tree Commission. He stated that she has many good ideas and the Shade Tree Commission has a big project coming.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned where Ms. Sellers resides. Ms. Sellers stated that she has lived on Carsonia Ave for 17 years but that her business is located in Reading in the Berks County Community Foundation building.

Mr. Slifko stated that the Shade Tree Commission meets on the 3rd Thursday of the month at 6 pm. Ms. Sellers stated that she will try to attend a future meeting.

Mr. Slifko stated that this is a critical time for the Shade Tree Commission. Ms. Sellers stated that she is glad to be involved. She expressed the belief that there are many great trees for an urban environment.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the importance of the EAC.

Mr. Slifko agreed and stated that the EAC goes into depth in their discussion of issues and that there is follow through between meetings.

Ms. Sellers noted her hope for a commercial hemp project which would reuse one of Reading's old factory buildings. Mr. Slifko explained that there is a Reading resident who is already working on using an old factory building to grow medical marijuana. He stated that the resident believes that the old factories are very suitable for indoor agriculture.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz warned that many small growing facilities are being purchased by big tobacco companies.

Ms. Sellers noted the benefits of hemp including its ability to clean brownfield pollutants from soil and as a replacement for plastic wrapping.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned why hemp is no longer grown. Ms. Sellers expressed the belief that it was a political decision. She stated that it was lumped in with marijuana. She stated that this plant is very viable and is under-utilized.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that urban farming has great potential.

Ms. Sellers noted the need for the City to look at the big picture and how all these things interact.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz requested that people stop referring to medical marijuana and call it cannabis.

Ms. Sellers explained that hemp plastic products are biodegradable and would reduce the need for Styrofoam. She explained that currently plastics that are recycled are shipped to China.

The Nominations and Appointments Committee recommends the appointment of Ann Sellers to the Environmental Advisory Council.

The Nominations and Appointments Committee adjourned at 4:35 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by,
Shelly Katzenmoyer, CMC
Deputy City Clerk