

Meeting Minutes

City of Ypsilanti
Sustainability Commission
Regular Meeting
City Council Chambers
1 S Huron St.
Ypsilanti, MI 48197
Monday, January 8, 2018, 7:00 P.M.

I. CALL TO ORDER: 7:01 pm

II. ROLL CALL:

Sustainability Commission:

Commissioner Emily Drennen	Present
Commissioner Nancy Heine	Present
Commissioner Natalie Sampson	Present
Commissioner Thomas McKee	Present
Commissioner Brett Zeuner	Present
Commissioner Julia Bayha	Present
Commissioner Keith Michalowski	Present
Commissioner Thomas Kovacs	Present

Staff:

Council Member Beth Bashert	Present
City Manager Darwin McClary	Present
Commission Secretary Seth Torkelson-Regan	Present

III. CONSENT OF AGENDA

A. Approval of Agenda

Amendment (by Kovacs): Omit the sustainability plan subcommittee meeting dates from the agenda because they are not correct.

Bayha (second Kovacs) moved to approve the agenda with one amendment. Unanimous approval. Motion passed.

B. Approval of Minutes for November 6, 2017 and December 4, 2017

Amendment (from Zeuner): For November 6, 2017 meeting minutes, under section F of New Business, change "UM pays" to "UM requires."

Zeuner (second Drennen) moved to approve the meeting minutes for both dates as amended. Unanimous approval. Motion carries.

IV. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION/COMMISSION RESPONSE: none

V. PROCLAMATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

VI. RESOLUTIONS/MOTIONS/DISCUSSIONS

A. Community Benefits Staff Response Discussion - Solar Energy

Kovacs: Stated he would prefer to address this topic when the sustainability plan framework is complete.

Drennen: Stated PACE--Property Assessed Clean Energy--is a way for local governments to provide low interest rate loans for clean energy developments. Commercial properties can put it on their tax bill and pay it off over time.

Bashert: Stated she thinks Dave (from Solar Ypsi) is aware of a bank that will back the financing of some of his solar projects using the PACE program. Asked Kovacs if he thinks much of the feedback will be more useful when the framework is complete.

Kovacs: Responded yes, and the STAR program will help that process as well.

Bashert: Asked Michalowski if he would like to combine the sustainability plan process, the STAR process, and the feedback review process.

Michalowski: Responded that that is a good idea.

Kovacs: Added that the sustainability plan process will be able to use the staff feedback well.

Michalowski: Stated it is the consensus of the commission that the Sustainability Plan Subcommittee will discuss the staff recommendations further before the Sustainability Commission reviews the feedback further.

B. Community Benefits Surveys Proposal

McKee: Stated he is hoping to generate data from the community via a survey designed by the SC that will help inform a CBO/CBA. Thinks the survey should take the form of an ordered list of what is most important to citizens regarding. A survey would be more valuable to a CBA than a CBO, but the survey would be valuable to both. This is part of the SC's role in helping City Council make good decisions.

Bayha: Stated that she wants more data on demographics of Ypsi and how the SC can gather data equitably and with fair representation.

Zeuner: Stated that if the SC took on some of the labor, he would be interested in helping with the survey. The SC would need some funding for the survey. Asked if other commissions are doing similar surveying work.

McKee: Responded to Zeuner that the SC will use a sustainability lense to the survey and that it would be designed by the SC.

Michalowski: Asked if the city has experience with city-wide surveys.

Bashert: Responded to Michalowski that surveying is difficult but can be helpful. Added that surveying is a snapshot in a moment of time, but is not timeless. Advocated for professional surveys.

Zeuner: Responded to Bashert that he thinks people on the SC could do a professional-level survey because of their surveying experience.

Sampson: Wondered what questions are most important to the survey for the SC's purpose.

Michalowski: Stated that surveys are more CBA-relevant.

McKee: Agreed with Michalowski.

Bayha: Added that the survey would be a good opportunity to get out the word about the SC.

Bashert: Asked how long surveys take.

Sampson: Responded to Bashert that one can add six months to each survey objective. Raised the point of incentives for participants and that one wants to keep surveys short. Additionally, one needs to be careful about who owns the data and how this is communicated to those surveyed.

Zeuner: Asked if there is a date for the CBO.

Bashert: Responded that Council is 2-3 months away from the final draft of the CBO.

Zeuner: Asked if Council wants to do community outreach for the CBO process.

Bashert: Responded by asking what the goals of the survey are. Added that the goals of Council are clear and have been consistent for a few years now.

McKee: Stated that the methodology of the survey would help the city understand the values of the citizens (regarding sustainability issues) in a hierarchized form.

Bashert: Agreed that the survey is value, but the timing is off for the CBO, but that it would be helpful for a CBA. Added that pragmatics often drive CBA discussions as much as any survey.

Bayha: Asked if ordinances are modifiable.

Bashert: Responded yes.

Zeuner: Suggested using the survey to poll people about a hypothetical development which could be useful for revising a CBO later.

McKee: Agrees that a test run of a survey is smart, but not with a hypothetical development.

Kovacs: Suggested gearing the survey towards the CBA and the sustainability framework so that it can inform all sustainable development, for example, ranking the 21 leading indicators (of the STAR system).

McKee: Agrees that using leading indicators is a good idea, but the goal should be linked to a CBA because the survey is a snapshot.

Basehrt: Stated that surveys need contexts to get accurate data. CBOs and CBAs will drive up cost of development and living in Ypsi. Survey needs to gather data on both people's ideas and their pragmatic decisions.

Zeuner: Stated that for that reason, a test case survey is smart.

Sampson: Added that surveys can capture the participants' ideals and pragmatic decisions with the right decisions.

McKee: Added that once a draft survey is made, he has resources at U of M who will help review the survey.

Michalowski: Asked for volunteers on the survey and if the SC wants other commissions to participate.

McKee: Stated that the first step would be getting together to design the survey.

Bayha: Responded that she thinks other commissions would be interested.

Sampson: Suggested getting a draft before approaching other commissions.

Bashert: Stated that at some point, Council will vote on funding for the survey.

C. 220 N. Park Developers Agreement Discussion

Michalowski: Stated that what the SC has done is already making an impact on this issue, and we should keep this in mind going forward.

Bashert: Explained the background on the development at the old Boys and Girls Club on the east side of the city. Added that City Council has chosen a development company, and they are considering a range of individual units, possibly townhouses, between 25-60 units. Council is waiting on the development company to share their full proposal. Council has stated that they want buildings without garages facing the street; tree and sidewalk consideration; hiring preferences starting in the city, county, and then state; considerations of affordable housing. Added that local residents are asking for less density.

McKee: Asked if it is a buy right development.

Bashert: Responded to McKee yes.

Zeuner: Asked if it would be inside the DDA district.

McClary: Responded no, it would not be in the DDA district.

Heine: Asked if union labor will be hired.

Bashert: Responded that the question is between a living wage and a prevailing wage. Living wage may favor local, smaller businesses, but a prevailing wage may favor larger businesses that come from outside the area.

Michalowski: Stated that this development is an example of how the SC wants to be involved in big picture development, not just individual developments.

McKee: Stated that at the latest City Council meeting, Council Member Rob asked for a list of what Council feels is most important, and one response was affordable housing, train stop access, prevailing wage and training issues. Added that, for him, this is an example of the importance of surveying and polling the citizenry and not just staff about what is important to them.

Zeuner: Added that he thinks it is a good idea to let the CBO process ride out further because that would play out what the parameters are for hypothetical and real development cases.

VII. LIAISON REPORTS

A. Sustainability Plan Subcommittee

Kovacs: Stated the subcommittee discussed how the framework would fit into the Master Plan. The next meeting is January 18th at 7pm at the YDL Michigan Ave branch.

McKee: Asked how much the subcommittee has the climate action plan to inform the framework.

Kovacs: Responded to McKee that they plan on using the climate action plan.

Zeuner: Added that he would be willing to help in that process.

Sampson: Asked if it would be too late to get help from UM masters students.

Zeuner: Responded to Sampson that it is too late for now, but next year would be a good idea.

McKee: Added that urban planning students are also a good resource.

B. MGC Challenge Subcommittee

McKee: Stated there are few to no changes to the 2018 challenge from 2017. The next meeting is this Friday the 11th at Ypsi Alehouse for research.

Michalowski: Asked how much overlap there will be between the MGC and STAR.

McKee: Responded that workflow will be from the MGC to STAR, mostly. Asked McClary if the SC can represent Ypsi in the MGC.

McClary: Responded that as long as there is authorization from the SC, and as long as the SC does not commit the city to anything, that is fine.

McKee: Asked for the consensus from the SC. The Commission responded affirmatively.

Sampson: Asked if different categories/topics could be delegated to commissioners. Volunteered herself for green infrastructure.

McKee: Responded that he has begun to separate the document into categories.

C. Outreach Subcommittee

Michalowski: Stated that he has been focused on Ypsi Live work. Is working with Council to get more formal equipment. Now is connecting with four software companies and three different individuals to help determine what equipment is most needed and valuable. Will have a proposal for next meeting. Thinks the live streaming has interest from the public. The biggest issue right now is the quality of the sound. Would like to get videos transcribed with subtitles to reduce the need for minutes, and add timestamps so viewers can find the parts of the dialogue they want.

Bayha: Asked if outreach is limited to Ypsi Live at the moment, and if the winter is affecting this. Stated she wants to look at events in the spring the SC can show up to with identifying t-shirts.

Michalowski: Responded that the outreach subcommittee is limited to him at the moment. Added that he wants to discuss First Fridays and other events with local businesses so as to increase the SC's outreach.

Bayha: Offered to look through the spring schedule of events and choose at least one event that commissioners show up to as a unit.

Zeuner: Suggested the SC discuss participating in an Earth Day event, probably to discuss at the next meeting.

Michalowski: Added that what he thinks will draw people in are incentives and savings programs, like Habitat for Humanity programs that help increase home energy efficiency.

Bayha: Added that she will call WCC to see if the SC can have a presence at one of their events. Added that having a uniform logo that people recognize is important.

D. STAR update

Drennen: Stated that the resolution was passed by Council. Staff approved Ypsi to be part of the STAR Communities. The first call with STAR is on Thursday at noon.

E. NOAA Climate Resilience Program update

Sampson: Stated that some city staff have a pre-proposal with EcoWorks for a grant to NOAA based on getting youth involved in climate resiliency projects in the area. Has not heard the status of the proposal.

VIII. COMMUNICATIONS

A. Citizen Committee on Housing Affordability and Accessibility discussion

Michalowski: Stated the charter lists that a SC commissioner should be on the committee.

Bayha: Asked what kind of participation is needed. Expressed interest in participating in the subcommittee.

McKee: Responded 1-2 times per month. Planning Commission (PC) chair (Heidi) will be the chair of this, too. Added that he is also interested in representing the SC in the subcommittee.

Michalowski: Stated he will get more info on the position. Asked for a straw poll from the commission to see who should represent the SC at the subcommittee, at least to start. [The Commission agreed McKee could start as the representative.]

B. Report on Recycling Program

Heine: Stated she met with Beth on December 11th. The current location is illegal and has to be moved. The center takes many materials; however, glass is not currently recycled. Center must be relocated in three years. There is no money to move the recycling center. The city loses 50 points per grant application everytime the city applies because of this center location, which is a big deal. City Council will vote to close or relocate it.

Kovacs: Asked why it is illegally placed.

McClary: Responded that its location is in violation of some grant funding Ypsi received for Frog Island Park. Added he will gather and share more details about a meeting regarding regional recycling programs.

Heine: Stated there are lots of issues with closing the current recycling center. There needs to be a discussion of how to include multi-family and commercial buildings with recycling pickup. This would cost landlords money. Some complexes don't have room for dumpsters. Ann Arbor has curbside pickup. Would like to do a study of recycling in similarly sized towns. The current center needs two acres of access at new location.

Michalowski: Wondered if the Water Street property may have space for a recycling center.

Zeuner: Suggested a PSA soon about the problem with glass not being recyclable in the current market.

Bashert: Added that another national issue is China's saturation of recycling. Added that this issue reminds us of the importance of *reducing* waste before recycling waste.

Michalowski: Asked if there is anything commissioners think they can do now regarding this issue.

Heine: Suggested that the SC have some say as to where the recycling center be moved.

Zeuner: Asked if the SC banner on their Facebook page be changed to a PSA about the absence of glass recycling in the city.

Bashert: Responded to Zeuner that this needs to be stated so that the city is not blamed, but rather it is understood that this is due to national market trends.

Michalowski: Suggested to Zeuner that he write up a draft that could be used as a PSA.

C. Report on Peninsular Dam

Zeuner: Stated that dams in general harms the environment, including reducing and impairing sediment transport, disrupting natural flow variations, and fostering alga blooms and invasive plants. From a human perspective, dams have benefits, but from an ecological perspective, they usually do not. There is a potential property enhancement to property owners along the river. Hydroelectric power is not feasible due to the relatively low 6-16 foot drops. By 2020, 90% of dams in the US will have exceeded their intended lifetimes. The study will take 20 weeks, but there is not set date because weather is a factor. There is some funding through the DEQ for dam removal projects, but it is highly competitive and difficult to acquire. Added that the cost of dam removal is usually underestimated. The city is responsible for safety and liability insurance of the dam. In 2016 the DEQ gave a report on the dam and reported that Ypsilanti had ten years to either restore or remove the dam. The county has said they will supply \$10,000 to the dam removal feasibility study costs, which leaves \$37,000 to Ypsilanti. The total cost of the study will be \$122,000, the rest of which will be taken up by Friends of Pen Park and the HRWC. The engineering firm is Princeton Hydro.

McClary: Added that the study will allow City Council to decide between dam removal and restoration. Some property owners believe City Council and the Huron River Watershed Council have already taken positions on this issue, but the City Council has not taken a position.

Kovacs: Questioned the human benefits of restoring a dam, particularly the increased property values of adjacent homes, and of recreation.

Zeuner: Stated that removing dams like those at Higgins Lake can lower shorelines. However, this is not unlikely the case for the Peninsular Dam.

Bashert: Added that the most important aspect of the study is the sediment: how it will change and what will be exposed.

D. Discussion of New Commission Members

Michalowski: Stated Sam will be joining next meeting. Asked for suggestions for new SC members to replace Leah.

Bashert: Stated she wants to add a person of color as a commissioner.

Michalowski: Added that the newest member is a youth non-voting member.

Kovacs: Asked if the previous applicants were people of color.

Zeuner: Stated that Mayor Edmunds has shared that she is waiting on more apps from people of color. She is sensitive to this issue, as well.

Kovacs: Suggested that this is something for the outreach subcommittee.

Bayha: Stated she has been trying to connect with pastors of black congregations in the city about this issue. This is a very important issue to her and she feels people of color are significantly underrepresented in organizations working on sustainability issues.

Michalowski: Stated he has talked with leaders of the Sustainability Club at Ypsi International High School.

E. Report on Bike Share program

Michalowski: Stated the city is involved with the program as of now.

McClary: Stated this is an EMU project mainly, but they will coordinate with the city regarding policy.

Kovacs: Stated that at the last meeting, they discussed concerns about bike corrals. EMU has requested policy samples regarding bike programs from San Francisco and Portland.

Zeuner: Stated the Housing Commission is working on sustainability initiatives, and the SC should partner with them.

Kovacs: Stated the chair of the Housing Commission was at a meeting about the bike program.

Zeuner: Asked if the Housing Commission is an autonomous body.

McClary: Responded pretty much, yes. They have their own separate budget from the City budget. Therefore, just because the Housing Commission is working on this doesn't mean the city is.

F. Report on Sun Shot challenge

Michalowski: Encouraged commissioners to connect with owners from the list of fifty best properties for solar.

IX. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION/COMMISSION RESPONSE

Jennifer Schlicht: Suggested incentives for renters who pay own utility bills because landlords don't have an economic incentive to increase efficiency in these cases. Added that a Master Gardener program is offered by the County Water Works office.

Bayha: Stated that Detroit DTE offers a free energy audit for renters and owners.

Zeuner: Added that this may be the last fiscal year for that project.

X. PROPOSED BUSINESS

Zeuner: Suggested a discussion about Earth Day or spring events next meeting.

Kovacs: Asked if the city has thought of “shovel ready initiatives” to take advantage of the possible pending national infrastructure bill.

McClary: Responded that City Council is working on capital improvement planning to take advantage of this.

Kovacs: Added that he would like to learn what the city is considering in this area.

Drennen: Stated Ann Arbor is using sustainability framework to score their CIP process.

McClary: Added that he would like City Council to tailor their goals around sustainability framework and goals.

XI. NEXT MEETING DATE: February 12, 2018

XII. ADJOURNMENT: 9:45pm

Kovacs (second Heine) moved to adjourn the meeting. Unanimous approval. Motion carries.