

Sustainability Commission Meeting March 7, 2022

Meeting called to order at 5:35 pm by Renee Ruchotzke

Roll Call: Rick Hawksley, Wilder Hritz, MaryJayne Stone Andy Scholl, Renee Ruchotzke

Staff: Patti Long, Assistant to the City Manager

Also present were Students from KSU and UWI for observation. First names only; Sierra, Jessie, Margo, Cade and Chloe.

Approval of the agenda:

Mr. Hawksley moved to approve and Ms. Stone seconded. All approved 5-0

Meeting Summary Minutes:

Ms. Long mentioned two typographical errors she corrected prior to the meeting. No other corrections mentioned. Minutes filed.

Public Comment

None

Old Business:

- a. Light Pollution – Ms. Stone presented information about a dark sky ordinance adopted by the Pittsburgh area. An astronomer, Diane Turnshek from Carnegie Mellon University, shared information with Ms. Stone after she reached out to her. Ms. Stone shared Ms. Turnshek's presentation with the members via email. Ms. Stone also reached out to the International Dark Sky Association and discovered there is an Ohio Chapter. That Chapter is working in Springfield Ohio in Clark County. She is working to get the entire county to adopt the dark sky ordinance. Ms. Stone stated she was glad to have the KSU sustainability students present in hopes they would urge the University to reduce its light pollution. Ms. Stone is trying to find a town closer to Kent in which to model our efforts. Ms. Ruchotzke suggested that before we take the proposal to Council that other factors are brought into the benefits of an ordinance such as health and sleep issues.

Ms. Stone shared a handout of the lighting ordinance in Kent (KCO 1106.17). Ms. Long added that the City is reviewing changing over to LED lights and reminded that while the LED's are more environmentally friendly, they also tend to be brighter. Ms. Long showed the pictures from the Powerpoint that Ms. Stone shared. Ms. Stone will continue to gather more information and share it at the next meeting. She asked if a committee could be formed to work on this. Ms. Ruchotzke stated there could be. Ms. Stone added that she would like to see better stewardship of the river and the wildlife around it by reducing light nearby. Mr. Hawksley offered to work with Ms. Stone on the project.

- b. Community Gardens – Thomas Anderson Garden will have sidewalks and curbs constructed nearby but it will not create problems with accessing the garden. Bricks will be laid along the edges of the pathway to keep edges clean. Planting will not start until May. Seeds have been donated from a local grocery store and will be used for the McElrath Community Garden in Ravenna and possibly other places. Ms. Ruchotzke mentioned that there was an event held where speakers shared on topics surrounding urban gardening. They spoke about the collapse of food supply and the need to help out neighborhoods who would see the greatest negative impact.
- c. Report from Ad Hoc – Ms. Ruchotzke stated that in 2017 the Paris Climate Agreement was established and Council passed a resolution to line up with the Agreement. The Ad Hoc Committee was formed to create an action plan. Mr. Hawksley stated that the summary gives an overview but he did want to highlight that the Ad Hoc is creating a historical document to show what has been done to date by the Commission and Committee.

Ms. Ruchotzke stated that until the plan is completed, the Commission is not going to reference climate action plan but will still keep working on addressing issues such as leaf blowers or lighting.

Ms. Stone asked about the historical document. Mr. Hawksley said it's being compiled now and asked if anyone can think of something that has been done in Kent the last several years that would line up with the Agreement to let him know.

- d. Pollinator Pockets – KEC is planning to promote a “No Mow May” because pollinators nest in the ground and in leaf litter in the spring and this could reduce the negative impact on pollinators, helping them to be able to hatch. Ms. Ruchotzke then went on to read the ordinance (KCO 551.01) on noxious weeds or vines, adding that the list ought to be updated as many of them are pollinator friendly and necessary. She would also like to ask Council that no citations be written in May for high grass. She also mentioned the need to stop residents from spraying the weeds in a neighbor's yard. She plans to ask for enforcement in that area. She also would like to see residents be able to have pollinator friendly and wildlife friendly yards and will ask for City support for that.

Mr. Hawksley asked if KEC will be bringing this to Council soon. Ms. Ruchotzke said for now it is just a public information campaign and they will advertise in the Portager. Mr. Hawksley added that it could be a good TCB article for the Fall. Mr. Hritz stated that this is not something that is talked about very broadly. Ms. Stone suggested using social media to share the concept. Ms. Ruchotzke said the goal is to get support for residents who wish to have a more organic yard.

New Buisnesses

- a. Athens Sustainability Action Plan – Ms. Ruchotzke asked if the Ad Hoc is looking at this plan as a model. Mr. Hawksley stated it could potentially be the model but added that there are many types of plans. They may cover social and economic

elements that ours might not in the first plan. Community input will be important.

- b. Effects of small engines (2-cycle) on the environment – Ms. Ruchotzke shared information from other communities that are phasing out leaf blowers. Some had intermediate steps where gas blowers were only allowed to be used during certain times of the year, spring and fall. Electric units can be used anytime of the year. She added that the dust that is kicked up is also a health issue and the noise is likely against our noise ordinance too.

Mr. Hawksley asked if any Ohio cities have imposed the ban and Ms. Ruchotzke had not found one yet. Mr. Hawksley suggested she reach out to Ohio Municipals Group to find out. He added that having a city from Ohio as an example is better to bring to council. More information and examples will be gathered. Mr. Hawksley reminded the group that it will be controversial but that it is still very important that people become educated about sustainability. He added that if Ms. Ruchotzke is willing to keep working on it then he would bring it to Committee during a Council meeting. Ms. Ruchotzke asked about when it could be added to the agenda and Ms. Long suggested she call Amy Wilkens to determine that.

Mr. Hritz like the idea and wants it to keep moving forward.

Ms. Stone suggested using the digital sign to start easing into awareness of the importance of making sustainable changes. She also suggested we converge some of these ideas together now, prior to the plan being written.

Dr. Scholl was in agreement as well.

Ms. Ruchotzke added that this is a good barometer to determine what the community thinks about sustainability.

Dr. Scholl stated that the pushback will likely come from homeowners rather than renters, fearing reduced property values possibly.

Ms. Long suggested some “Did you know...?” posts to help get the word out in a softer tenor. She also said signs could be made for the digital sign as well so submit ideas so the images can be created.

Good of the order

Move Farmers Market and Polinator Pockets from Pending back into Old Business.

Ms. Ruchotzke asked if anyone would like to set up a booth for River Day. 5/21/22

Adjournment

Ms. Stone made a motion to adjourn and Mr. Hritz seconded it. All in favor, 5-0. Meeting ended at 6:35.

Next Meeting

April 4, 2022 at the Kent Police Department Chief’s Conference Room, 3rd floor.