<u>Sustainability Commission Meeting, March 27, 2023</u>

<u>Meeting Summary</u>

<u>SC Members in Attendance</u>: Judy Nelson, Mary Jayne Stone, Mary Starbuck

<u>SC Members Absent</u>: Andrew Scholl, Rick Hawksley (excused)

<u>Others in Attendance</u>: Bridget Susel, City of Kent; Julie Morris, City of Kent

Bridget Susel called the meeting to order.

First order of business was the election of officers. Bridget Susel explained that since not all members were present, members could choose to elect officers with motions for nominees with the group that is present, or motion to continue the elections for another month. It was clarified that the position open is for Chair, and that both Chair and Vice Chair positions encompass a one-year term.

It was also clarified that these positions are responsible for helping run the meetings, but City staff are responsible for generating the agendas and summary minutes for all activities under its purview. It was noted that under a City Manager form of government, administration of boards and commissions fall under the purview of the staff under which the board and commission is assigned. As such, Julie Morris and Bridget Susel are the associated staff for the Sustainability Commission which falls under the Community Development Department, but this responsibility will transition primarily to Julie as the new staff Sustainability Coordinator.

Mary Starbuck nominated Mary Jayne Stone for Chair. Mary Jayne Stone advised she believes she currently holds the position of Vice Chair, but will be looking to step back from the role, and will not be seeing the role of Chair, once her current term expires. Mary Starbuck expressed she liked running meetings and nominated herself for Chair. Bridget Susel advised there was a nomination on the floor for Mary Starbuck to be Chair, and Mary Jayne seconded. During the call for a vote, Judy Nelson expressed she also had an interest in becoming Chair and nominated herself for the position. Bridget clarified that because each member was nominating themselves (and it didn't matter if Judy nominated Mary Starbuck and vice versa), a full vote would not be able to be held today because there isn't a quorum. Bridget advised it would be better to move the election of officers to the next meeting and asked whether any members would entertain that motion. Judy Nelson motioned, Mary Starbuck seconded and it was agreed the elections will be moved to next months agenda.

Julie Morris introduced herself, providing her background, credentials, and experience. Bridget provided a brief background on the process leading up to the City's resolution in support of the Paris Climate Agreement which led to the climate action planning process and in turn, evolved into the need for more staff which helped bring about the Sustainability Coordinator position.

Bridget Susel provided an update on the Davey Tree SEED Campus project. SEED stands for Science, Employee Education, and Development. Bridget reviewed site maps for same and advised that Davey Tree acquired the Oak Knolls Golf Course which is the last parcel on Hwy 43, and which used to be part of Franklin Township but through a later agreed upon annexation the property is now officially considered to be a part of the City of Kent. It is combined with the old Franklin School parcel and between the two parcels there are 187acres, of which 170 will be developed into the SEED Campus.

Bridget highlighted some features of the site which include but are not limited to research areas associated with urban forestry and plants, a community arboretum, walking paths, onsite stormwater management including retention and detention ponds, maintenance of an existing bog and more. There is a riparian setback that will not be developed save a small mulch walking path that doesn't change anything about the riparian habitat or flow. There will be classroom spaces and offices. The tallest building onsite will allow people to learn how to repel and climb, and contests will be held there. There will be a 3-hole golf green just to experiment with different types of grasses. There will be unelectrified utility poles to learn how to trim trees around wires. There will be storage maintenance facilities and inside greenhouses for seedlings. There is an old growth forest onsite that will also be maintained. The entire site will be self-contained and will be powered entirely by a large solar array on the property.

Members expressed appreciation for Davey's investment in such a project here in Kent. Bridget Susel advised that this is one of the largest projects for property development in the City's history and income tax is a big driver of our city's budget. It was acknowledged that the presence of this campus, and associated trainings held, will bring Davey's employees from all over the country and world to stay in our local hotel, and patronize our local restaurants and shops.

Julie Morris advised that the final draft of the City of Kent's Climate Action Plan (CAP) has been sent out. The CAP will be presented to Council at the April 5th committee meeting, and if approved, a resolution will be issued and adopted at the following April 19th meeting. Judy Nelson asked and Bridget Susel confirmed that the CAP's final draft is now considered public and can be shared.

Bridget Susel advised that no changes to the existing strategies and initiatives will be done to this draft now, as it is based on our existing, approved GHG inventory and our contract with Keramida has ended, but changes and amendments to the CAP may need to be made once an updated GHG Inventory is done and we move through implementation of the plan.

Bridget Susel provided an overview of how work from the CAP can be compared to work done on other large, consolidated plans that must be approved by Council, using a large HUD grant as an example which requires a 5-year plan as part of same. She advised that in our case, the Climate Action Plan is also a 5-year plan and acts as a guiding document. Ideas that are developed to address identified targets and recommendations in the CAP must be vetted for feasibility given legal and legislative requirements, as well as have a plan for funding (if necessary) before they can be brought to Council for approval. This vetting process can take a long time and she recommends the work be done incrementally on some of the larger initiatives.

Julie Morris explained her approach to beginning the work of implementing the CAP, and described the database she is developing to house the initiatives and data that will arise out of that work. Julie will present an initial version of this database at next month's Commission meeting. Julie Morris and Bridget Susel explained how the Commission could work through the plan section by section, first prioritizing what sections to focus on, and then as the work continued through same, City staff will be consulted for legal and legislative parameters, and community stakeholders can be connected to the process. The database will hold all ideas, recommendations, and program ideas until a vetting process can be complete. Briget Susel noted the education and outreach components of the plan do not require approval from council as they do not have any cost or legislative requirements, and Bridget recommends these sections be worked on first.

Examples of issues related to the CAP were discussed – the suggested update to RFP language for waste haulers and issues related to lighting, in particular light shields:

Bridget explained the differences between requests for proposals (RFPs) and requests for qualifications (RFQs). She explained that we are too far along in our current trash bid process to include the CAP suggested wording changes in the current bid, and that we cannot put requirements or restrictive language into RFQs that would preclude opportunities for all businesses to submit an application.

Judy Nelson asked whether the commission could request language be put into the bid that asks the haulers to provide information related to any initiatives they have that could help meet our CAP RFP suggestions. Bridget Susel affirmed that this could be asked for and that the commission could send a letter of support to Council regarding same.

Judy Nelson referred to the presentation public service director Melanie Baker made to City Council in early March, asking for Council's input on what should be included in the bid and potentially reducing the number of options for trash service currently being provided. Judy asked whether Council had provided that input. Bridget advised that they had not. It was noted that there has been a lot of discussion around whether to eliminate the bag service option, and Bridget advised a menu of bid options could be developed that could provide different price points for a variety of service options, one of which could still include the bags. Bridget advised that the next step in the process is to go to the council committee meeting next week with the proposed bid option information, and then have Council vote on each of those options at the following council meeting. Mary Starbuck clarified, and it was affirmed by Bridget Susel that the contract for waste will be bid before the Commission would be able to request CAP language suggestions be included. It was discussed that the language could be included for the next round of bids when this new contract expires in the future.

Mary Jayne Stone advised she had reviewed the CAP and saw the sections in same addressing lighting issues through use of LEDs, and she was wondering about whether that would address shielded light, and/or red, or other light spectrum colors. Bridget advised that different aspects of lighting are handled by different entities and boards within the City, and funding for those initiatives would come out of different budgets Shielded light is a zoning issue and heard by the BZA which is under her purview. Bridget advised she can bring the issue to the next BZA meeting for discussion. It was noted that zoning changes can be a lengthy process.

Julie Morris provided suggestions related to how these issues could be directly connected back to the CAP process, reiterating that while some ideas will not be explicitly found in the CAP, they will still be within the Sustainability Commission's purview to work through and potentially be included in future amendments to the CAP. Bridget reiterated that any suggestion that is intended as a "requirement" which would become law has to go before and be approved by Council.

It was noted that Julie works for both Kent State and the City, and part of the CAP includes developing a pipeline between KSU faculty and student interns, to get help and creative support without having to hire out consultants for everything. An ambassador program to local businesses could also be developed. Bridget noted that the City will be hiring a consultant for the GHG inventory update, and there may be other initiatives that arise which require outside consultants be brought in, but there are lots of creative ways that help, funding and collaboration can be shared between the City and Kent State. Bridget noted that both herself and the Sustainability Manager at Kent State, Melanie Knowles, know the bureaucracies and are here to help guide us through this work.

Mary Starbuck asked about the Continued (Tabled) Business items on the agenda. It was noted that the agenda may need to be reworked to reflect the Climate Action Plan as the core agenda item. Judy Nelson mentioned needing to determine a topic for each month's Farmer's Market booth, and it was noted that it could stay as potential active agenda item. Judy Nelson discussed the previous activity of the Sustainability Commission, advising that prior to the CAP, Council was to give things for the commission to do, and in absence of those directives, members were coming up with ideas for things to do. It was noted that approval of the CAP changes the focus of the Sustainability Commission such that its work is now focused on the CAP implementation. Julie Morris advised most of the tabled items could be folded into different areas of the CAP work. Julie will provide a proposed new agenda for review at the next Commission meeting.

Mary Starbuck asked whether there was a local housing organization working to develop a garden in one of the resident's yard. Bridget Susel provided information about local garden initiatives in the South End neighborhood, including the Thomas-Anderson Memorial garden project spearheaded by Doria Daniels, and a currently vacant parcel owned by the Community Action Council (CAC) that could be developed into a garden project. To do so would require a formal agreement between the CAC and the entity leading the garden project to ensure there are enough volunteers to maintain it. There is water onsite and a metered tap would have to be installed on the hydrant to access same. Julie Morris provided information about the community garden next to the Kent Recreation Center building being operated by Kent Cooperative Housing, whom she previously worked for. Julie advised one of their resident houses was trying to develop a garden in their front yard, but her employment ended and she doesn't know the current status of that project.

Judy Nelson requested the Commission be provided with training on the rules and regulations of being on a City committee. Bridget advised boards only exist because of council, statutory charter, and can be codified or quasi judicial, but some have no authority to approve or make law. The Sustainability Commission is an advisory entity only, but members can recommend items for action or legislation to Council – it is Council who must approve anything the commission is recommending. Judy Nelson mentioned that any member as a resident can always go before Council to provide comments and recommendations during the public comment period of council meetings.

The next meeting is TBD. Julie Morris will send out an email for everyone's availability. It was suggested to hold our next meeting in the middle of April so that we can then get back to holding meetings the first Monday's of the month. The meetings will still be held in the evenings, starting at 5:30pm and will continue to meet at the Overholt building.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7 p.m.