

Sustainability Commission Meeting, September 11th, 2023

Meeting Summary

SC Members in Attendance: Judy Nelson, Mary Starbuck, MaryJayne Stone, Rick Hawksley, Andrew (Andy) Scholl

Others in Attendance: Julie Morris, City of Kent; William (Bill) Wilen, Ad Hoc Committee member

Judy Nelson called the meeting to order at 5:35pm and roll was taken.

Judy opened the Good of the Order/Open Comment section of the meeting and asked whether anyone had any items to discuss.

Mary Jayne noted that her logo and phrasing idea for K-CAP as presented at the last meeting was meant to be an idea that could get members discussing the need for a logo and catch-phrase.

Judy noted she sits on the Portage County Solid Waste District Policy Committee and had items to share from their last meeting. She noted that Portage County Recycling is starting a new program on September 18th called CHaRM (Center for Hard to Recycle Materials). It will offer a drive-through service for Portage County Residents only to drop-off appliances, electronics, paper shredding, scrap tires, some automotive fluids, batteries, some scrap metals, cooking oils, plastic bags and will have a hazardous waste collection option coming soon as part of this program as well. Some of these materials will require a fee to drop off. In addition, Portage County Recycling offers a drop-off for U.S. Flags that are ready for retirement and a compost drop-off service as well. Judy circulated flyers for the program and services and will send Julie electronic copies of same for distribution to Commission members.

Mary noted she liked the Fall Tree City Bulletin article Julie had submitted that provided a CAP overview.

Judy asked whether there were any further items to discuss. Hearing none, Judy advised they were ready to adjourn. Rick motioned to move adjournment to go into working session. Mary Jayne seconded, and discussion was offered. Hearing none, and with unanimous approval, the meeting was adjourned at 5:39pm.

Julie provided materials for review to start the working session and help facilitate same. Included were the session outline, frameworks to help guide the CAP Education and Outreach and City Climate Business/Org Alliance work, the 2023-2028 CAP Initiative Workplan template, summary sheets for the Solar for All IRA funding opportunity and the associated themes the Ohio EPA and Ohio Air Quality Development Board (OAQDA) are using to lead the state in their application for same.

Julie provided a review of the new Sustainability Overview webpage that has come online on the City's website. She reviewed the features and members provided feedback. Rick suggested we add some kind of "climate crisis" alert message to the either the City's site to help people locate the Sustainability Overview page on the site and alert people to the seriousness of the issue. Members felt people will have a hard time finding the page. Andy noted we should add the year of the data request to the GHG Inventory Update sub-page link titles on the side bar to help users find and distinguish between the different inventories that have and will be done in the future.

It was noted that at some point, Patti Long had mentioned there might be some kind of tagging on permits for solar being done within the City and that it might be worth finding those project to include them, along with any other sustainable initiatives, on the page.

Members were questioning why our timeline to carbon neutrality offered on the Sustainability Webpage reflects the year 2050 when the Paris Climate Agreement uses 2030. It was noted that while many cities and entities are using the 2030 deadline year, many are not able to or don't have capacity to meet that deadline and are using different year metrics. Julie advised that per the City's adopted CAP, 2050 is the year being referenced for worldwide carbon neutrality goals and she read the portion of the CAP on page 6 that explains same. She advised that while we will be trying to implement programs to reduce our emissions as soon as possible, this is the overall year metric our CAP referenced and is reflected in the timeline currently provided. It was noted that our next CAP, to be created in 2029, may feature a different timeline depending on our program implementations and reductions achieved between now and then.

Julie noted the GHG Inventory update is well underway with the help of KERAMIDA. She advised all data requests are out and she's received about half of the data she has requested so far. At the members request, she briefly reviewed the entities that were contacted for data and members who had worked on the previous GHG Inventory compared their experiences with getting data. Bill asked whether we were expecting any significant difference in results from the previous inventory to this new one and Julie advised she wasn't sure what the results would show, but most likely, as Bill suggested, Residential and Commercial energy might still be our biggest emission sectors. Andy noted that we will have two data points (GHG Inventory using 2016 data, and the GHG Inventory using 2022 data) before active implementation of CAP that will be useful to compare with later inventories to help assess how our reduction strategies and program initiatives are working. It was also noted that any reductions between the 2016 and 2022 data may be reflective of clean energy and energy efficiency measures happening in the larger community and region.

Julie reviewed summary sheets for the Solar for All IRA funding opportunity and the associated themes the OH EPA and OAQDA are using to lead the state in their application for same. She advised they have asked the City to provide letters of support for key programmatic areas of the Solar For All funding opportunity and both the City and the University are working to submit same. Julie advised that if funds are awarded to the state, we would have to apply for grants from OAQDA and OH EPA as sub awardees. Julie advised that these large funds and coordinated projects would be used to help develop a networked community solar program for Kent. She advised that all parties (the City, University, OH EPA and OAQDA) are still developing frameworks for actual project details, and any future and additional program guidelines provided by OH EPA and OAQDA will help shape our local program development around same. Julie noted that Bill's various solar siting suggestions (excluding the 800 Mogadore road property for now, as per Bridget's response to same which was briefly discussed), the idea for panels on City Hall etc. could all be explored under this possible community solar program. Julie noted the letters of support are due on September 20th and the state's application is due by October 12th.

Julie briefly reviewed the upcoming Ohio EPA's Sustainability Conference (September 19th – 21st) and Ohio Solar United Neighbor's Community Solar information webinar (September 12th) – members had previously sent Julie information about same to share with other commission members. Julie noted that members could register for all OH EPA Sustainability Conference sessions and if they could not attend at the scheduled time, the session recording would still be able to be shared with them.

Julie provided information regarding Judy's requests regarding Republic's recycling materials. Julie advised that the City would not be able to request Republic correct and resend their recycling program flyer to Kent residents. Julie advised that both Bridget and Republic confirmed that any education materials accessible on Republic's website are sanctioned and fine to use for any event or tabling needs the Commission has. Julie also advised she talked with Terry Thompson, the Republic Municipal Services manager, who advised Republic would also be very willing to provide us with large poster files, or other special themed materials as needed via jump drive for any specific event needs we may have in the future.

Julie noted that the Flashes 1st Thursday tabling event scheduled for August 24th originally had been cancelled due to the bad weather and has been rescheduled as part of the Black Squirrel Festival downtown on Friday, September 29th from 4-7pm. Julie advised the KSU Office of Sustainability will still share their table with the City and Commission members are welcome to join and table during the event if they want. Due to sharing the space, there will only be room for one commission member at a time to join the tabling, and Julie will send out a scheduling email for any who would like to participate.

Julie noted there will be two upcoming communications for Council regarding Sustainability work being completed. Julie explained she will be emailing City Manager, Dave Ruller, a work update report (these are also created and sent by other staff/departments to provide their own work updates for council) highlighting all the work she has done (which includes highlighting work the Commission has done) at the City and University since being hired in March through the end of September 2023. This report gets emailed to Council for their review but does not go through Council meetings. Julie will be providing a “year-in-review” style presentation regarding progress on the CAP at the February 7th Council Committee meeting.

Julie reviewed the 2023-2028 CAP Initiative work plan template that is being used to develop the program initiatives for each of our 15 CAP suggested strategies. She advised she will be using this at the City as well as at the University, and advised she’d like to use part of our Commission working sessions moving forward to have the Commission complete the same exercise in order to gain their input and have commission members continue to participate in program development for the CAP. The process involves selecting the CAP strategy for review and then filling out the associated work plan template for same.

Julie noted that her completing these plans with City staff, University Office of Sustainability Staff, and the Commission to start will help provide a variety of perspectives needed to thoughtfully develop the necessary components of initiatives that need to be created for implementation. Julie noted not all ideas and suggestions generated may make it into a final initiative or program, but this process helps ensure different ideas are brought to the table for consideration. Julie also noted these are not the only work plans or work sessions that will be used to develop the CAP programs and this initial work is needed to help create the basic components of the initiatives that can then be brought to other parties as needed for further development as we move through their implementation.

Julie briefly reviewed the new Community Input database that holds all suggestions received at events and through various communication channels for the CAP and advised that this too can be referenced while working through the CAP initiative work plans. Julie provided an update for Mary that there were 8 suggestions provided in the Suggestion Box at the July farmer’s market tabling event and they have all been added to this database. Mary Jayne Stone saw the suggestion in same for hosting an environmental film night and noted that Standing Rock Cultural Arts hosts one every year.

Discussion was had about capacity of, and legalities related to sharing other organization event information on the City’s website, but Julie noted that an “events” tab on the City’s Sustainability Overview webpage will be developed to showcase City-hosted sustainability events and she can check with Bridget regarding sharing other community related sustainability events as they arise on a case-by-case basis.

Andy also noted that we could include information in this section about City lots where trees have been planted over the years, citing the lot behind the Burger King where around 300 or 400 trees were planted, and around the berm of the retention pond behind the Enterprise car lot where a couple hundred seedlings had been planted. Andy noted this was discussed as part of his past work on the Shade Tree Commission and was done to not just add more trees to the city, but also help reduce the need for mowing on vacant lot areas.

Julie and Judy noted they hoped the webpage would eventually be a place to highlight all Sustainability efforts happening across the City, and potentially add all the historical legislation and efforts noted back to 1993 when the Commission was first noted as being established.

Bill and Mary advised that a member from KEC is going to be presenting a solar panel project to Council for their consideration at the next meeting.

Bill Wilen provided some information about two solar installations completed in the Akron area. He noted a 6.25mw system was installed on 31 acres off Seville Road that has 21,000 panels and can power around 1800 households. The other is a 2.6mw system built on 10 acres off Rittman Road. He felt these would be good case studies to look into. Members discussed different projects including a KSU array and different funding options for getting these kinds of projects implemented. Julie reiterated that the OAQDA grant is our immediate path forward for funding, but that the City will continue to pursue other possible funding as well. Bill referenced the 800 Mogadore site as a solar siting example which Bridget had made clear is privately owned, being remediated as a brownfield, and is not a property the City would be looking to purchase at this time.

Andy noted that Kent City Schools are currently conducting a survey relating to the walkability and biking infrastructure for kids going to our schools. Additionally, the survey is looking at what other kinds of barriers may be present beyond physical infrastructure (safety or other concerns/reasons etc.) that prevent kids from walking or biking to school more often. He said we may want to look to integrate these survey results with our CAP Education and Outreach efforts and/or program development. Members also discussed the differences between City and State regulations for sections of State Route 43 and 59 regarding pedestrian and biking safety measures as they can be different, and the State has authority over their sections of highway. Mary Jayne noted that having benches along stretches of sidewalks helps to make walking feel more pleasant and hospitable. Julie reiterated that the results of this survey and issues like these can be integrated into our CAP planning.

Julie noted that it was about 7pm and there wouldn't be time to get through the Education and Outreach items from the session outline. Julie advised that the next working session (after any updates she had) would be devoted to reviewing the Education and Outreach and City-Business Climate Alliance frameworks, as well as discussing members visions for same.

Mary noted that there were two vacancies for the Sustainability Commission showing in the Tree City Bulletin. Julie advised this was because two members are scheduled to rotate off at the end of December. If they want to continue for another term, they have to re-apply, but the City has to also publicly announce the positions as coming available. Members asked and Julie wasn't sure exactly what the current process for re-application of existing members is and she advised she'll check with Bridget to find out what needs to happen to share at the next meeting.

Members ended the working session at 7:10pm.

The next Sustainability Commission meeting will be held Monday, October 2nd, 2023, starting at 5:30 p.m. at the Overholt building.