

Sustainability Commission Meeting, October 2nd , 2023

Meeting Summary

SC Members in Attendance: Mary Starbuck, MaryJayne Stone, Rick Hawksley

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

Mary Starbuck called the meeting to order at 5:35pm and roll was taken.

Motion was made by Mary to excuse both Judy Nelson and Andy Scholl; MaryJayne seconded and it was passed with unanimous approval.

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

MaryJayne advised she works part-time at the Kent Free Library and she shared the library is looking for employee suggestions of themes for the Summer 2024 reading program. The program spans all ages. MaryJayne advised she'd like to suggest a CAP theme and find ways to partner with the library on this and other CAP education efforts. MaryJayne advised reading lists, groups, art projects, speakers related to components of the theme and other activities are all part of the summer reading program. This year's theme was "inside outside everywhere", the year before was "oceans of possibilities" with aquatic themes, and she and other members felt a climate action theme could be good for the upcoming year.

Julie advised if the suggested theme was to have Commission support, it would need to be voted on by the Commission members at the next meeting in November, which may not allow enough time given the library would be holding their theme vote ahead of our next commission meeting. It was agreed that MaryJayne will send information about the library theme survey to Julie who will then send that out to the Commission members for review and individual input. Julie clarified that members cannot discuss themes amongst themselves over email, but they could individually send their suggestions for a theme back to Julie who would then forward them to MaryJayne for her consideration.

It was understood that MaryJayne would take any member suggestions into consideration and would be putting forward a theme suggestion at the library as her own individual suggestion that is not representative of the Commission members. If her theme is selected at the library, MaryJayne can bring that back to the Commission at a future meeting for further review and discussion about Commission help to support and/or develop the theme and/or materials for same as needed.

MaryJayne advised that regardless of how the library theme turns out, she would like to see the Commission have a package of educational materials about the CAP that can be shared with the community.

Mary asked whether there were any further items to discuss. Hearing none, Mary advised they were ready to adjourn. MaryJayne motioned to move adjournment to go into working session. Rick seconded, and discussion was offered. Hearing none, and with unanimous approval, the meeting was adjourned at 5:49pm.

Julie began the working session.

Julie explained and confirmed the process members needed to follow to re-apply to the commission when their terms expire. In this case, MaryJayne and Rick's terms are expiring in December, and they will need to fill out the application, submit same to Amy Wilkens (Clerk of Council), and appear before Council on Wednesday, November 8th at 6pm for the associated interview. Julie advised Amy had sent an email to applicable members and would also be sending a letter explaining same.

Julie advised that Mr. Robert Wilson had presented to Council at the September 20th meeting a suggestion that the City pursue public/private partnership opportunities to help fund solar projects in Kent. Community member Ann Ward also spoke in support of Robert's suggestion. In order to clarify both the request and Council's discussion and decision to refer the matter to the Sustainability Commission, Julie played the applicable video clips of same from the live-streamed Council meeting recording for context.

Julie confirmed that the City has prioritized development of the MEMP (p.11 of CAP), Subsidized Energy Audits (p.12 of CAP) and the Expand Solar Energy (p.15 of CAP) areas of the CAP in order to help address our largest areas of emissions as detailed in our GHG inventory. Julie advised that exploration of private/public partnerships, grants, tax incentives and other financial mechanisms are all being worked on to align funding with the planning for and implementation of projects that will help meet our goals within these three prioritized focus areas. Julie advised this includes the kinds of projects and funding that Robert Wilson suggested, and Council has directed the Commission and City to explore.

Julie summarized the funding work already in progress: NOPEC Foundation grant to help get a survey needed to start the residential audit program, the OH EPA/OAQDA letters of support connecting the City of Kent to the State's application for the Solar for All federal IRA grant competition, continued discussions with NOPEC and a meeting with their partners, World Kinect, scheduled for a couple weeks out, to discuss advisement and development services for the MEMP, and a meeting scheduled with Candice Brothers, an energy analyst at the OH Department of Development regarding an upcoming grant opportunity via the Energy Efficiency Conservation Block Grant: Brightening Ohio Communities that can assist with aspects of municipal energy management efforts.

Bill asked why the City couldn't just meet with a private partner and get a solar project implemented immediately that wouldn't cost the City any money. Julie advised that in order for the City to approach a private entity for partnership on such a project, feasibility and siting studies, clear incentives and ROI information, in addition to needed system technical details and financing options all would need to be known. Much of this information needs to be provided by relevant industry experts, which is what the City is working to gather so that all funding possibilities can be explored, including any public/private partnership opportunities. It was noted that individual businesses or private entities can always explore solarization for their own operations (MaryJayne noted later in the meeting that Kent Natural Foods Co-op was starting discussions about solarizing in order to maintain power to run their POS and other systems during power outages), but if we were looking to have their assistance for financing a City solar project, the above components need to be brought together. Rick and Mary also advised these components would be needed. Rick noted the other larger/regional cities had climate action plans adopted years ago and that it will take time for Kent to catch up to other example cities.

Julie advised that Mr. Wilson's suggestion was an indication the City needs a communication strategy that alerts the public and Council to all of this behind-the-scenes development work that is happening and will continue to be in progress related to the City's CAP work. She advised she hoped this is what the Education and Outreach frameworks can help generate. Julie reiterated having Commission input on the Education and Outreach frameworks and work plans being developed for the MEMP, Subsidized Energy Audits and Expansion of Solar initiatives during our meeting working sessions allows for members' suggestions of private stakeholders (as well as other ideas and information members may have) to be brought to the process as well.

Julie noted she will be providing the previously discussed Sustainability Work Summary to Dave Ruller to be included as an information-only item for the October 18th Council meeting which details all of the planning and funding work being done directly related to these CAP initiatives, and will also function as an initial response

to their referral of Mr. Wilson's suggestion. Julie reiterated she will be presenting a "year in review" report to Council in February that will also provide overall CAP progress information.

Julie advised she had attended the Ohio EPA's Sustainability Conference (September 19th – 21st). She noted that 7 out of the 12 sessions offered at the conference had specific components within their presentation devoted to the importance of project planning and management. Julie noted that the City's workplans and planning approaches align directly with how the OH EPA and their associated presenters suggest approaching implementation work.

Bill asked whether Ohio Solar United Neighbors (OH SUN) would be included in any of these processes. Julie advised the CAP specifically directs us to partner with them regarding the expansion of solar in Kent and she advised they are a needed technical expert when it comes to developing solar projects, especially at the community level. They have technical expertise about the systems themselves and all the associated legal, regulatory and legislative components involved in a solar project that will be critical when developing same, and we will be reaching out to them. Julie advised she had attended Ohio Solar United Neighbor's Community Solar information webinar on September 12th which was also very informative.

Before moving into the Education and Outreach Frameworks, MaryJayne mentioned she noticed in Keramida's CAP video, there is a scene in the beginning with a Squirrel where "kent" and "ohio" are lowercase instead of capitalized. Julie advised she'd look into it. Mary advised she was impressed to see that everyone speaking in the film are women which she found encouraging. Rick shared improving statistics about the increase of women in the architecture field.

Members went around and shared their ideas and input regarding their visions for the Education and Outreach frameworks.

Mary advised she had already shared the list of organizations at a prior meeting that she felt would be important to reach out to (areas of arts and faith – also orgs like Kiwanis, Rotary etc.). She felt it would be important to reach out to them, attend their meetings and ask for 5 minutes of their time to present on the CAP. She felt going to places where people gather, especially organizations that have a service mission, would be important.

Mary Jayne agreed with Mary and added that we should include mental health facilities to address the mental health challenges people experience related to climate change. She thought we should look at Coleman Services or other social service agencies and talk to their staff with an approach related to "as your City, we're working on it, we're also concerned with everyone's health and mental health".

Mary suggested putting information out via messages on the signboard and the other members agreed.

Rick advised he'd like to see broadband media outlet information releases. He felt it was good to keep including articles in the Tree City Bulletin but that has a limited audience, and he feels we need to explore all news outlets (naming Record Courier, Beacon Journal, and The Portager) and provide press releases when it's time or appropriate. He noted the Record Courier has been running community focused items and could help reach different audiences. He suggested we find ways to distribute information online. He thought we could put QR code stickers on every flag pole and/or skating park that would link people to CAP information as he noted QR Codes are how many younger folks access information.

MaryJayne advised there is a reporter named Julie Grant who covers a lot of environmental issues and covered the environmental disaster in East Palestine. She is technically a reporter for a news outlet in PA (and can be heard on NPR/WKSU), but she lives locally and could potentially help us connect to other news outlets.

Bill suggested we put information out via the KEC newsletter.

Julie tied the discussion to the frameworks asking members to think about why are we sharing, what do we want to share, how are we going to share, who to share with and when. The frameworks give us things to think through so we have clear information to develop outreach materials with. Julie summarized things we're able to share right now about the CAP and reiterated that it is clear the community and council are asking for information about CAP work and progress, and we should begin to share more about same.

The CAP kick-off was briefly discussed as being something we might plan for January or February when we have a few more items completed or in-progress from the CAP to share about (the GHG Inventory update should be completed, we may have more funding information etc.). Mary suggested we make sure to share about the grants that not only are pending, but that we applied for but did not go through as it is important to show we have been working on it.

Hosting other themed events was also discussed briefly with the larger point being that we have more immediate ability to host an event about the CAP than request meetings with businesses, as outlined in the City-Business and Organization Climate Alliance framework.

Bill asked whether the Economic Development Director, Eric Helmstedter, had funds available to direct towards CAP initiatives. Julie advised that City department heads have some room within their own budgets to find monies to support the CAP initiatives as appropriate to their department goals, but there isn't a city-wide funding stream yet just for the CAP. She advised up to X number of dollars, the departments could look at their own budgets, but after a certain amount, Council has to be made aware of and approve funds being appropriated, sought after and/or received (i.e. through large grants etc.). Julie advised that Eric is under the Community Development Department, directly placing his work under the purview of Bridget Susel as the department head.

MaryJayne suggested providing education for folks related to energy efficiency that could help them right now as the CAP is more long-term. Members agreed that we could think about recommendations that could be made or provided to businesses or residents who are looking to make improvements to their properties or other items that could help them make environmentally friendly choices now that would align with the longer-term CAP strategies. Julie noted we could find ways to share about existing programs (i.e. furnace replacement programs etc.) and connect them to where they fit within the CAP initiatives. MaryJayne reiterated it would be important to address that shorter-term information needs gap with the time it will take to see the CAP programs developed and implemented.

Julie reiterated the differences between specific asks of businesses and organizations and broader CAP education and outreach, clarifying that we could certainly invite businesses and organizations to any CAP event we host, but that we wouldn't be reaching out to them to invite ourselves to their meetings to discuss broad CAP outreach. If any business or organization wants us to come present to them broadly about the CAP, they can absolutely request it and we can do so, but at this time, we would approach business and organizations as part of identified stakeholder work for particular CAP project and program development.

Rick noted there was a need for professional social media and paper handouts, overall design and marketing and wondered whether the City had a budget for this. Julie noted that development of a CAP marketing plan and associated materials would be an excellent way to kick-start the KSU-City experiential learning structure described in the CAP. We could collaborate with KSU faculty, staff and students to generate this. Julie also noted she would like to reach out to Dominique Bollenbacher, the City's new Communication Outreach Coordinator, to see whether we could distribute information there, which members agreed would be good.

Mary noted we should revisit MaryJayne's KCAP idea and MaryJayne advised that wasn't a complete design idea, but could help us think about what our messaging could entail. Mary asked for clarification about the logos appearing on the agenda and Julie clarified the Sustainability Commission has its own logo which is featured on the agenda. Mary thought we should incorporate that logo into our materials. Members reiterated the need to share about the CAP on social media. Bill suggested alerting the press to the new Sustainability Overview webpage that can direct folks to the Keramida video and other information about the CAP which all members agreed would be a good idea. It was agreed this could be done via interviews and/or a well written press release that could be published as an article in the various news outlets.

Julie suggested all members should think about content for a possible press release that we could share immediately and bring their ideas to the next meeting. Julie will also draft a release for all members to work from at the next Commission meeting's working session.

MaryJayne brought up the larger messaging around environmental issues that occurs in society, placing the onus for fixing same on the individual while neglecting to place responsibility on industry and larger corporate entities for their role in the climate crisis. MaryJayne thought it would be important to address this in our CAP education and outreach strategy – to reiterate that yes, it is important for every person to do their part to make changes in their own lives but note that the City is helping address this other component to address the larger systemic changes that need to happen. Mary noted the cost of "being green" for the individual and members agreed that not everyone can afford to purchase electric vehicles or access other expensive products or fixes being promoted to combat climate change.

The two informational pieces for council outlined above (work report to be given to Council as an information-only item ahead of the October 18th meeting, and the "Year in Review" presentation set for February) were discussed again to help clarify how they help address the suggestion made by Mr. Wilson. Julie advised Bridget had made Council aware that the work report was coming that explained how we are gathering the needed program components and funding to put together a project like what Mr. Wilson was suggesting and that if Council had any questions after reading through that work update, they could contact Julie for more information. Mary suggested this work be tracked and Julie advised it will be. Mary asked whether the report would be disseminated to the public and Julie advised it would be in the sense that it becomes a public document as part of the City Manager's report packet given to Council, which anyone can access online. Julie showed the members where they can access the council reports and agendas online.

Bill asked whether Council would expecting more to have been done since the CAP was adopted. Julie advised she hasn't received any feedback from Council about that. Julie advised the CAP is a five-year plan and she felt there was a level of understanding that planning stages must be done before we can implement programs or projects. Julie advised that if Council has any questions or concerns about progress after reviewing her work report that they can contact her with same.

Bill asked whether Council would be expecting to see something implemented or having happened with Mr. Wilson's proposal by the next Council meeting. Members discussed how these things take time, and that while the work appears to move slowly, it is important to build a strong foundation for the CAP programs. Julie reiterated how important it is to communicate about what we are doing to meet our CAP goals.

Members ended the working session at 7:25pm.

The next Sustainability Commission meeting will be held Monday, November 6th, 2023, starting at 5:30 p.m. at the Overholt building.