

Sustainability Commission Meeting, August 5th, 2024

Meeting Summary

SC Members in Attendance: Judy Nelson, Mary Starbuck, Julie Grant, Maryjayne Stone

Excused: Andy Scholl

Motion to excuse Andy Scholl was made by Mary Starbuck, Julie Grant seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

Others in Attendance: Julie Morris

Judy Nelson called the meeting to order at 5:36pm and roll was taken.

Judy opened the Good of the Order/Open Comments section of the meeting.

Mary noted she saw the article in the Tree City Bulletin (TCB) providing a CAP update and thought it was good. It was confirmed the TCB is issued twice a year and members agreed it is good to have a CAP presence in same. Members expressed interest in potentially writing articles or providing input on other content ideas for future issues and Julie M. will provide them with the future deadlines so they can be thinking about same. Julie M. advised the next deadline will most likely be in February ahead of the Spring 2025 issue.

Mary noted she had just come from the Shade Tree Commission and was informed by Brad McCay, the City arborist, that Julie M. is helping him with some program flyers and grants. Julie M. confirmed same and provided some basic information about the programs. Brad is looking to provide select properties along parts of Mantua St. the option of foregoing a smaller tree planted in the tree lawn for a much larger tree (i.e. oak) that could be planted on the resident's private property instead. The City would handle the planting of same and the maintenance of the tree for a prescribed period of time with the aim of being able to get more, larger trees planted when the tree lawn is too small to accommodate same. Julie M. explained she helped design the flyer for this and Mary advised Brad will be sending these out to select properties beginning in October. Julie M. noted she will be providing some possible grant support for work Brad is doing with Davey Tree as well. She noted she is still pending more details about same.

Judy moved the meeting on to Old Business. Julie M. recapped the previous discussions regarding carbon storage and fracking injection water wells. Reference was made to the research information along with the email correspondence she had had with John Ellison, the City's Water Treatment Plant (WTP) manager, all of which had been furnished to the Commission members ahead of the meeting. Julie M. reiterated John's primary concern, which isn't so much about contaminants as it is the impact of fracking wells, along with other regular items like sewer lines and overall regional development on the ability to safely drill new water source wells in the future. Julie M. turned the discussion over to members to continue their conversation.

Judy noted John's point about the difference between ground water wells and surface water sources is important and something that could be shared with residents to help them better understand how our water system works. Members acknowledged that groundwater has natural filtration to help clean the water and would have less issues with contamination than surface water.

Members discussed PFAs contamination that is generated by residential and commercial sources via items that are washed or produced that release these chemicals, and it was noted they are more of a surface water problem that would be more likely seen at the water reclamation plant than the water treatment plant.

Julie M. briefly reviewed the Ohio EPA's PFAS Action Plan webpage that had been provided with research materials and which offers detailed plans of action for addressing this class of contaminants. It was asked whether John knew if they were testing for PFAS in the effluent coming from the water reclamation plant, but Julie M. advised that is a different plant with a different staff. John had advised that required PFAS testing was done several years ago and two more tests for same will be conducted next year at the WTP.

Discussion was had about the Oil & Gas Wells map from ODNR that Julie M. had provided the members. The map and its associated legend were reviewed to help explain the different types of wells showing on same, and it was noted the City boundary was unclear as it also appeared to include some areas of Franklin Township and continued over into Summit county.

It was noted there appeared to be two actively producing gas wells within Kent's city limits, and several whose status were unclear due to the color of same not being clearly indicated or accounted for in the map legend. It was noted the majority of the other wells in the City are either plugged or no longer producing, and only two were indicated as being permitted, but also shown as those permits having expired. Judy and Julie M. noted that when they had been on the Commission during the 2016 to 2019 term, copies of these maps were generated each month to review for any changes, and there were no changes to the maps or well status during that time.

Julie G. asked whether the City would be notified if any new oil and gas wells were to be permitted. Julie M. advised most likely yes, but she would double check with Bridget about same. Julie G. advised while the City may be notified, they wouldn't have a say. All members agreed that if the wells were on private property, then that would be correct. Julie M. reiterated that the State is responsible for providing all the well regulation and monitoring. Julie G. mentioned a group called Save Ohio Parks tracks spills from producing oil and gas wells, including fracking wastewater brine etc. and advised this problem happens often. It was reiterated that this is a larger issue across Ohio and if the City doesn't have recourse to act, then as individual citizens, they could contact state representatives and/or other organizations that work on this issue.

Members expressed concern about the number of wells shown in Portage County and Julie G. advised Portage County is known for having one of largest amount/concentration of wells in the country. It was reiterated that their questions about Portage County wells would be within the County's purview. Julie G. expressed concern at viewing how many wells were in and around Kent specifically and felt that they all pose a potential threat to our water supply.

Julie M. advised she did not have answers for some of the questions members were asking in response to the research provided as they were outside her expertise and many of them would be better addressed by John. Julie M. advised she could talk to John about coming to speak to the Commission to further clarify and answer their questions, but members expressed interest in being able to go on a tour of the WTP with him instead. Julie M. advised she would reach out to John to see whether a tour could be accommodated during the Commission's regularly scheduled meeting time, or whether another time would need to be found during business hours and she will work to schedule same with the members.

It was clarified that the actual water source wells are not something that could be viewed or visited due to security, and viewing actual producing oil and gas wells would not be possible as they are located on private property. Members agreed that being able to tour the WTP and get more information about testing and the overall process would be useful for answering their additional questions and would help inform what they would like to do next regarding this issue.

Members will work to develop specific questions they would like to have answered that can be compiled and shared with Julie M. ahead of the WTP tour. Julie M. can share those questions with John ahead of the tour as well so that they can be discussed when everyone is onsite together.

In discussing what potential meetings might work to hold the WTP tour in lieu of the regular meeting, members moved into the new business item to decide whether to cancel or reschedule the September 2nd meeting date since it falls on the Labor Day Holiday. Julie G. motioned to move the meeting to Monday, September 9th, with the option of holding that meeting as a tour of the WTP. Maryjayne seconded the motion and hearing no further discussion, the motion passed unanimously. It was understood that if that date couldn't be considered, they could potentially try for a tour in lieu of the October meeting, but that all would depend on John's availability and capacity.

Discussion moved to the other new business item regarding the working session focus for future meetings. Julie M. explained that while updating the new Sustainability Overview webpage, she looked at the Sustainability Commission's page on the new site and realized it needed work to correct information about the commission that is currently being displayed. Julie M. advised this larger topic of Commission roles and responsibilities has been mentioned previously over the course of recent Commission working sessions and she felt that review of the Commission's bylaws, goals, and role now that the City has adopted a CAP and instituted a full time sustainability coordinator position would be helpful in clarifying all for current and future members. Julie M. felt having members' input on where they see alignment in these documents with current practices, where there are gaps or areas of confusion, and any suggestions for updates to clarify this would be important.

Judy reiterated that what is outlined in the previous goals document and bylaws isn't what is done in practice even during her previous term on the Commission, and she agreed the discrepancies need to be addressed so that going forward there is no confusion when someone joins the Commission as to what their job is on same. Judy envisioned a packet being created that could be given to anyone considering joining the Commission to help them understand what they are signing up for.

Mary agreed but felt this work should be done as a retreat. Mary felt it would be important to have something ready by the end of the year when Andy's term is up in case anyone new is appointed. Mary made a motion to have a retreat dedicated to this work with the goal of having something ready for new members by the end of this year. Maryjayne asked for clarification of what was meant as a retreat. Julie M. advised while there are some things that can be done outside of the meeting times, we'd need to be considerate of members' time. Judy advised she thought retreat in this case meant more of an Ad-hoc session held separately from the meeting and Mary agreed.

Discussion continued with Julie G. advising she felt utilizing the meeting working session time for this purpose would be good use of the Commission's time. Judy asked Mary what Mary felt was not being accomplished during the meetings that would necessitate doing this work as part of an Ad Hoc group instead. Mary advised she wasn't sure, but she had an idea to explore legislation in the City of Kent to require approval before private individuals can cut down trees of a certain size. Mary said Julie G. inspired her to take things to Council and that the Commission should be getting items to Council for review.

Julie M. advised that Council has directed staff to implement the Climate Action Plan with the Sustainability Commission helping to advise on same. Julie M. advised Council isn't expecting the Commission to bring them issues at this point. Mary and Julie G. disagreed with Mary advising they have heard the opposite from at least one council person. Julie M. clarified that Council does want to know when there are sustainability concerns in the community that the Commission can help relay, but the focus is on the CAP. Mary interjected to advise she felt Council wants the Commission members to advise Council and make recommendations to them. Judy

advised some of this went back to what a council person had asked of Maryjayne during Maryjayne's interview for appointment to the Commission, which has already been previously discussed and clarified. Judy advised that what that Council person had expected from the Commission in the past is not what the Commission is now set up to do, and that is why this review work needs to be done.

Maryjayne felt it would be important to keep and showcase the history of the Commission, as well as the changes that have occurred on the website for the public to be able to view as well. Maryjayne felt the work could be broken up into small components that could be sent to members ahead of time for review, with comments sent to Julie M. ahead of the meeting so that during the meeting, the time could be spent efficiently and any votes that needed to happen could. Julie M. agreed and advised the changes to the structure of the commission meetings implemented last year (when no formal items on the agenda, the meeting is called and then immediately adjourned into a working session that is focused on a task) helped create time for ad-hoc working sessions during the regularly scheduled meeting time. Judy advised it could be that some members work together separately on drafting material in between the meetings and then report back to the group during the working session with same so that all members aren't trying to write documents together at the same time.

Judy proposed that Julie M. send out the bylaws, goals, and legislation pertaining to the Commission to the members for review and that members become familiar with that history before discussing whether they should spend their time doing the described review and alignment work. Judy suggested the discussion around same continue at the next meeting. Julie M. advised ideally the end deliverables for this work would be a set of updated bylaws that reflect current needs and practices and a set of informational materials about the Commission's roles and responsibilities that could be given to new members. She reiterated that these would have to be reviewed and approved by Bridget, potentially the law department and any other associated staff as well before being able to utilize same.

Julie M. reiterated that based on the discussion, she will send out the bylaws, goals and legislation to members for review ahead of further discussion at September's meeting. Members agreed and Mary withdrew her previous motion related to holding a retreat for this work.

Brief discussion was had regarding what members could do to alert folks to the open term on the Commission coming available at the end of the year. Julie M. reiterated we have no say in that process – staff will post the vacancy, anyone can apply (including Andy if he wishes to rejoin) and then Council holds interviews and determines who is appointed.

Members encouraged each other to let folks know about the upcoming vacancy, to check the TCB for any vacancy notices and they requested notice be added in the next edition of the Sustainable Kent e-newsletter. Julie M. will also provide members with the e-newsletter content deadline so they can contribute items if they wish. Mary felt it would be important to add various deadlines applicable to the Commission to meeting agendas to ensure they are reminded of same in a timely manner. Julie M. advised she could add them to the work updates she sends out to members every month as well.

Mary moved to adjourn the meeting, Julie G. seconded, discussion was offered and hearing none, the vote was held. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 7:10pm.

The next Sustainability Commission meeting will be held Monday, September 9th, 2024, starting at 5:30 p.m. at the Overholt building.