

Sustainability Commission Meeting, October 7th, 2024

Meeting Summary

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

Others in Attendance: Bill Wilen, Julie Morris

Judy Nelson called the meeting to order at 5:42pm and roll was taken. It was noted the meeting started later due to technical problems with internet that could not be resolved.

Judy opened the Good of the Order/Open Comments section of the meeting. Judy provided a recap of the film screening held by Kent's United Church of Christ Green Team. Judy noted the film covered the value of regenerative agriculture in not only rebuilding healthy soils but also for carbon sequestration. A second film will be screened soon, and Judy passed out event flyers to the group. Judy reiterated she is not a member of Kent United Church of Christ but has been engaging with their Green Team for a while.

Judy suggested that members consider the importance of knowing where political candidates stand on sustainability related issues, especially at the State levels. She noted that actions taken by State House Representatives and the legislature can affect sustainability initiatives at the local level, including issues like moratoriums on solar system installations in our counties and towns. Members briefly discussed examples of these issues.

Julie M. advised there were several items for Good of the Order related to the upcoming newsletter. She advised that both Mary and Judy had reached out to her regarding the newsletter. Mary began by explaining the concerns she had about including an article from one business – the planned article to be submitted by Kelsi Biondo from Branded in Kent about their sustainable business model – but not including other local businesses in the feature. Mary advised she had spoken with the owner of the Sun in Leo shop downtown who is also interested in sharing their knowledge of sustainability. Mary said it didn't seem right to exclude other businesses, restaurants or other kinds of organizations from the newsletter. Members asked whether individuals who are spearheading sustainability projects in the community could have articles submitted.

Julie M. advised the purpose of the Around the City column in the e-newsletter is to highlight sustainability efforts happening in the City. This includes not just City departments, but the larger Kent community, including its businesses and organizations, possibly including individual projects. All would have to be vetted by staff anyway, but the purpose is not to be exclusionary and to showcase the work being done in the community.

Judy noted that the original, commission-creation ordinance in 1995 indicates an intent to have the Commission engage the community around their sustainability work and doing so helps act as an incentive to the community to continue or start that work, and/or helps provides ideas for others.

Members noted it would be important to get some parameters set around who/what kinds of projects can have articles featured in the newsletter. Julie M. advised that is being worked on, and for now, a tag line will be added after the Branded In Kent article indicating any entity looking to highlight their sustainability efforts in our newsletter can contact Julie M. for more information. Julie M. also reiterated the context for Branded In Kent's article as they had reached out to the City earlier this summer to learn more about the Sustainability Commission and the City's Climate Action Plan. They wanted to share more about their sustainable business model to see whether there were areas of cross over or fit for future engagement around the CAP. This had sparked the idea for their inclusion of an article about their

business in the newsletter. Julie M. noted other avenues of soliciting articles can be pursued as this outreach tool becomes more developed.

Mary advised she has done research into the sustainability issues surrounding fast fashion and has some facts and figures she advised should be added to the Branded in Kent article. Julie M. advised that will not be possible as Branded in Kent is writing their own article, about their own business. Julie M. advised that if Mary wanted to write an article herself using the research she did to comment on issues with fast fashion, that could be done, and if reviewed and approved by staff, then it could be included in the newsletter as a separate article from the Branded in Kent article. Julie M. noted more than one article can be featured in the Around the City section of the newsletter, being mindful however that including too many articles in one edition could be overwhelming.

Julie M. noted that ideas for articles could always be sent to her and the more she receives, the more it would help to create themes for future newsletters. Members agreed this could be a good practice, and other sustainability projects or topics for the newsletters were briefly discussed.

Bill asked whether Kent State sustainability work could be featured in our newsletter. Julie M. advised it would depend, but Kent State has their own media channels that they use to share about their work. Andy reiterated the KSU Office of Sustainability sends out a monthly newsletter that is large and highlights everything related to sustainability across the university. Kent State's new solar project on 261 was mentioned and Maryjayne mentioned she had heard there might be pollinator type plantings happening underneath same.

Maryjayne also mentioned the Dark Sky project that assists with outdoor lighting's impact on migrating birds, noting that members of that organization had contacted her providing presentation materials that could be shared to help educate about the issue. Mary advised she felt this would be beyond the scope of the Commission to highlight in the newsletter unless there was group of people in Kent actively working with this group here, which could then cause it to be a local activity that could be highlighted.

Julie G. noted members could send ideas to Julie M. to develop a theme for the next edition around the holidays. Julie M. noted that right now, the newsletter is issued quarterly making the next edition go out sometime in January. Mary advised she will get in contact with Sun in Leo and have them contact Julie M. for more information about the newsletter, and Mary advised she will write her article about fast fashion that she would like to have included in the October newsletter that will go out at the end of next week.

Maryjayne noted that while on the topic of bird migration, she felt the City should be more in-tune with environmental happenings which should be shared as notices like what is seen on the City's digital sign downtown. For example, if a particular kind of bird was passing through our area, it could be noted on the sign and/or website along with a request to dim lights at night to help with their migration etc. Mary advised she felt this was beyond the scope of the Commission or the City to do. Members discussed how environmental habitat is important to issues of sustainability, just as energy efficiency or the climate action plan are. Members agreed that sustainability encompasses multiple areas that are interrelated.

Julie M. advised that City Manager, Dave Ruller, had reached out to her earlier in the year regarding a wildlife migration project called Motus which tracks various migrations across the globe. There were some recent collaborations Dave was aware of that allowed for installation of one of the tracking towers on a public library in Avon Lake that could help provide migration data and showcase same to the public. Julie M. advised at the time Dave was interested in seeing whether it was feasible to install a tracking antenna on Kent's new city hall, but it was determined to not be feasible at that time. Julie M. advised that in their discussions, she noted future collaborations could be explored with Kent Free Library or the Kent City Schools on such a project that could then have data included in a public dashboard concept.

Julie M. explained further that she is exploring the idea of a public dashboard in general that can help showcase the city's sustainability work and she cited Oberlin's dashboard as an example. Members agreed this would be a good tool.

Julie M. asked Judy whether she would like to share about her newsletter topic idea. Judy declined in the interest of time and advised it could be discussed later at another meeting.

Judy asked whether there were any further Good of the Order comments and hearing none, moved the meeting to New Business.

Julie M. provided an overview of the planned presentations for the October CAP Open House that will be focused on energy efficiency. She noted that David Shae from Community Action Council of Portage County (Portage CAC) confirmed he will provide information about their Energy & Housing programs, with Bridget also sharing about the Hot Water and Furnace Replacement program that funded and administered in partnership between the City and Portage CAC. Julie M. advised she will be sharing information on the City's completed energy audits and provide a brief slide about clean energy tax rebates available to consumers as outlined by the U.S. Department of Energy. Judy advised she has had some issues with tracking some of those rebates and will reach out to Julie M. separately to discuss the content of the slide and whether she sees any problems with same.

Julie M. noted it was decided that refreshments will not be provided at this event. Julie M. advised they could use help from commission members to set up and clean up before and after the event. Mary advised she thinks a number should be added to the event flyers/announcements to let people know this is the third open house we've held, and it is part of a series that will continue to have more events in the future.

Judy asked whether there were any further New Business items and hearing none, moved the meeting to Old Business. Julie M. noted there isn't any new information to share – she is pending the WTP tour and presentation materials from Jim Bowling and John Ellison and once received, they will work to schedule the tour date.

Judy asked whether there were any further comments and hearing none, called for a motion to adjourn and move into the working session. Julie G. motioned to adjourn the meeting, Maryjayne seconded, discussion was offered and hearing none, the vote was held. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 6:23pm.

Julie M. began the working session. She advised there could be a couple of ways to approach the evening's review work, either going section by section of each document or taking turns to provide all their thoughts and comments about each document as a whole. Either way, Julie M. advised members will need to speak one at a time and hold their questions and comments until each member has had a chance to share.

Members discussed the options and other things to consider in the review were mentioned. Judy advised some of the content of the original ordinance have been amended and suggested that the review either acknowledge the amended changes, and/or not review those original sections that were amended. Julie M. suggested that it may be good to look at the original language to understand the intent and whether there were items in that original language that might want to be considered for proposed changes etc. It was agreed to take them in combination – original with the amended language.

Maryjayne asked for clarification as to why the original name of the commission was amended. The related amendment stated it was done to align the commission name with the goals document they had generated which was adopted by council and refers to sustainability. It was noted that sustainability is

broader and encompasses more of the aspects reflected in the goals than just being named the environmental commission.

Bill asked for clarification in the 2009 ordinance as to what the number 7 was referencing – it references council members and not the total number of commission members.

Members agreed to do the review work section by section, taking turns to share their thoughts.

The review started with Ordinance 1995-103 Section 1.

Judy noted the commission's name was changed from the Environmental Commission to the Sustainability Commission in the 2009 amendment document. Andy, Maryjayne, Julie G. and Bill had no other comments to add. Mary suggested that future documents generated from this review work keep and mention the original commission creation date of 11/15/1995.

Ordinance 1995-103 Section 2 was reviewed.

Judy noted outdated language references the Environmental Services Manager and then the Sustainability Planner in the ordinance and online and should be updated. She commented the 3-year member term reference was amended in 1999 to allow for the staggering of terms. Judy noted this is still in practice today as her most recent appointment letter references the dates of appointment allow for staggering of term endings. Judy noted the current practice of Council alone doing the interviewing of potential candidates and asked whether they currently use this section of the ordinance as determining factors for who to appoint.

Andy noted he agrees with Judy's findings as they align with things he noticed in his review.

Maryjayne had no additional comments.

Julie G. asked whether public speaking skills and public relations were currently needed as she feels commission members are not currently empowered to use these skills in their duties. She noted she agreed with the rest of member's comments made so far for the section.

Bill agreed with the rest of the comments made.

Mary advised she thinks commission membership should be increased from 5 members to 7 as she feels 5 is too small. Mary agrees with the comments Julie G. made. Mary feels that writing skills could replace public speaking skills in the listed criteria. She noted that the ordinance skills list feels boilerplate.

Members continued to ask questions and discuss this section.

Judy asked how members should look at the document moving forward – should they be assessing by the past intent, current experience and/or what may be needed for the future. Julie M. noted when crafting the framework questions for the review, she thought all three perspectives are important to consider and gather comments on.

Andy suggested the skills list remain but change the expectation that each candidate would have all the listed skills. He suggested use of "or" for the skills list and adding writing skills to the list as well. The idea is that some activities in the future may need the commission members to utilize those skills and as a team, they could embody all the skills, though the members could be called on separately based on their expertise or skill area for whatever is needed.

Mary asked whether the original goals should match their current experience, even if its not reflective of what the members want. Julie G. noted that there are clear gaps in the outlined responsibilities with current practices.

Andy related his experiences during his past commission terms. He advised it used to be more community oriented and focused on initiatives generated by member interest. He advised that the commission has more recently been very focused and controlled around the creation and implementation of the CAP. He noted a difference between the commissions experience and needs then versus the appearance of it now. He provided the example of future Open House sessions where members may be needed to speak about different topics making the public speaking skills possibly necessary and reiterated his concept of focusing more on building a team that together embodies all the needed skills, asking candidates to articulate what skills they individually have and could contribute.

Judy suggested marketing be a skill that is added to this list. She explained that getting messages out about the CAP and its programs among other work all fell under this skill set. Julie G. advised she did not feel the commission is empowered to market anything.

Judy advised council has not amended the purpose of the commission as apart from the few amendments, this original ordinance still stands. She noted there is a disconnect between what the original ordinance sets out and what is currently being practiced and she wondered what it is that council wants them to be doing. Julie G. asked what members think the purpose of the commission is.

It was noted that no one on this current commission has presented anything to council and Mary advised she thinks members should have the chance to create items to bring before council. It was noted that everything must go through administration. It was also noted the commission is strictly advisory and can only make suggestions and recommendations as opposed to other boards that can legally create legislation or make legal decisions.

Judy requested a copy of Council's standing rules (noted in the 1999 amendment) to help guide the review work and better understand what they might want of the commission. Julie M. advised she would talk to Bridget about obtaining a copy of same to send to members.

Julie G. advised she thinks members should be able to keep an eye on legislation, that this ordinance allows for same, and this activity could be added to the commission meetings.

It was noted that Council created the commission to provide advisement but hasn't been utilizing it. An example was offered of when solar panels were being discussed for City Hall and the commission was never consulted for their advisement on the issue.

Judy provided an example of the legislation around chickens to illustrate a time when the commission did generate an initiative, worked with Bridget to get the associated legislation created, and then she presented same along with Bridget to council.

Julie M. provided two other examples of instances where council had solicited advisement from the commission – one was regarding fracking issues back in 2012 and another was related to banning plastic bags in the City back in 2016. In both instances, the commission researched the topics and provided a letter of recommendations to council for consideration.

It was noted the next review will start with Ordinance 1995-103 Section 3. Members ended the working session at 7:05pm.

The next Sustainability Commission meeting will be held Monday, November 4th, 2024, starting at 5:30 p.m. at the Overholt building.