

Sustainability Commission Meeting, November 4th, 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 5:35pm and roll was taken.

Judy opened the Good of the Order/Open Comments section of the meeting. Judy advised she had navigated to the City's Sustainability Overview webpage to see all the updates to same and commented that they were well done and look great.

Judy noted that there was a Community Expo held at Kent Roosevelt High School over the past weekend and asked whether anyone had had a chance to attend. No one had, but members commented that it had been 5 years since the last event was held due to Covid. Judy noted that there were a variety of groups represented, and she felt the Commission should consider attending this event in the future – members agreed.

Judy noted she had attended the Ohio State Extension webinar that Mary had shared with the Commission. The focus was on carbon sequestration and regenerative agriculture (which helps sequester carbon), as well as carbon credits for regenerative farming practices, but it also mentioned the new carbon capture injection wells technology that is being explored and starting to be used in Ohio. Judy felt this technology was something the Commission should monitor.

Members discussed the different possible components of the technology and expressed concerns about injection wells full of carbon that utilized similar processes to fracking and/or that were utilizing pipelines to move and help store the carbon. Julie G. noted that the US EPA has received permits from a company to install this technology somewhere in West Virginia, and she is aware that landowners in southeastern Ohio have been approached to consider carbon capture storage wells. Julie G. noted she's aware of a company called Tenaska that is doing some of this leasing work.

Members discussed the possible benefits and negatives of Ohio receiving this kind of technology and it was noted that while private landowners may see some monetary benefits, there isn't much overall benefit to the State. Members questioned why Ohio receives so much fracking waste, now adding the possibility of this kind of carbon capture storage, describing the state as a kind of dumping ground for this activity.

Judy noted Land O' Lakes, that has a facility here in Kent, is a 100-year-old farmer's co-op that features a carbon credit offset program called Truterra which supports regenerative farming practices for their farmers. Judy explained the program pays the contracted farmers to change their farming practices, Truterra monitors the carbon in the soil after the changes, certifies it, and then sells the carbon credits.

Judy noted the webinar advised that 75% of millennials say they consider sustainability when they make their purchases, and it is something to consider.

Mary noted she had listened to the NPR/PBS News Hour show last week that was discussing methane control. Mary noted they were focused on Pennsylvania, which has a lot of unregistered wells, and showcased researchers going in to identify where these wells were. Mary noted the program advised 200 of these wells that were leaking methane have been capped.

Judy noted she had shared a link to an article with Commission members several months ago covering satellite technology that is monitoring leaking methane. Julie G. noted that Pennsylvania is receiving about \$245M from the federal government annually to clean up abandoned mines and orphan gas wells.

Judy asked whether there were any further Good of the Order comments. Mary asked whether we needed to discuss the idea of signing up for tabling at the Community Expo the next time they hold it. Judy noted it was organized by the Chamber of Commerce. Members can discuss this further next time the Community Expo is held.

Julie G. asked how the Energy Efficiency Open House went. Julie M. and Judy provided a recap of the evening presentation content and attendance. It was noted that while it was a small gathering (about 15 people total including speakers/staff) it was good to learn more about Portage CAC's (Community Action Council of Portage County) programs and Portage CAC was excited to learn more about the results of the City's energy audits.

Judy noted the importance of weatherization efforts for energy efficiency given the old age of much of Kent's housing stock. She noted solar/electrification alone isn't going to reduce the residential energy sector's emissions and this weatherization work is how we will help meet our climate action goals for this sector.

It was noted during the Open House that housing rehabilitation is more expensive due to rising material and labor costs, which means the available funding for these programs can't cover as many projects as they used to. That said, Portage CAC noted they can still do lots of projects, and they have plenty of applicants, but the bigger issues are problems with obtaining licensed contractors to do the work, which ends up creating waiting lists to have the work done. It was noted this is an industry-wide problem in construction and there are no easy solutions to fix these issues. Encouraging folks to go into the trades was one suggestion, and it was noted that KCSD has received increased funding to support their vocational programs, and the 6-district compact which might help in the long term.

Mary asked whether Portage CAC was doing any outreach at the schools to help address this problem and to get more applicants for Portage CAC's programs. It was noted their outreach strategies weren't discussed but they said they have plenty of applicants – the construction issue is the bigger problem.

Another issue noted during the Open House was the elections and the impact of same on non-profits who rely on federal funding to support their programs. Mary asked some questions about Portage CAC's revenue streams, but it was noted details of same weren't part of the Open House focus or presentations.

Maryjayne described her experience receiving weatherization services she believes were provided via the City and/or Portage CAC. She noted she found the program in the Tree City Bulletin. They were able to replace her hot water heater and her furnace (the furnace they replaced was originally from Montgomery Ward, noted as an indication of age) and provided some weatherization services in her attic. She noted this has made her home more energy efficient and lowered her energy bills. Maryjayne noted that her house is over 150 years old, and they also wanted to replace her solid wood doors with newer, hollow-core doors. Additionally, they wanted to replace her old windows with new windows. She advised she did not want that work done as it would change the charm and character of the house. It turned out those renovations were going to cost too much given the program funding available, so they were not done, but she wanted to make members aware of this additional perspective – that making energy efficiency upgrades could change the character of the old housing stock.

It was asked whether there were any further Good of the Order comments. Bill asked whether the group would be discussing the work report Julie M. provided. Mary advised it isn't usually discussed during the meetings, but it was noted if members had any questions about it, they can be discussed during the Good of the Order/Open Comments section of the meeting.

Bill asked about the status of the onsite solar studies being done by World Kinect as he noticed in the work report, it mentioned the Water Treatment Plant (WTP) is no longer being pursued for onsite solar development. Judy noted she had the same question. Julie M. explained that Council had selected the downtown Fire Station No. 1 and the WTP to receive in-depth solar site assessments from World Kinect. She explained that as the WTP assessment was being conducted, the City Engineer and Water Treatment Plant Manager expressed concerns over the location of the proposed ground mount as it posed potential problems with flood plain setbacks, underground water tank, and pump access among other issues. After these internal staff discussions, it was decided this site was not viable and would no longer be pursued for the onsite solar development.

That said, Julie M. noted the Community Development Department is exploring some other public/private possible site options for a ground mount solar array. Judy expressed disappointment with this decision as she noted a solar array at the WTP would help offset the site's significant energy use.

Julie M. noted that the Fire Station No. 1 is still on track to pursue for onsite solar development and the City is expecting to receive the in-depth site assessment report from World Kinect's solar team for this site very soon.

Judy asked what the perceived benefits and outcomes are of the City's participation in the ICLEI Cohort noted in the staff work report. Julie M. provided a recap of how the City came to participate in the cohort (ultimately as an additional benefit of the services being received by NOPEC) and explained it is a cohort of regional, north eastern Ohio cities that share best practices, forge relationships, share and receive resources about funding, strategic project planning, connecting work to larger climate goals like the UN's USDGs, and staying connected to the sustainability work being done in our different communities.

Julie M. noted this group of cities is discussing how they can stay connected after the ICLEI Cohort is over in December to maintain these relationships and explore possible regional projects and/or funding for their various work. Julie M. noted that climate action work isn't restricted to one locale but is connected to other regions and this cohort provides an opportunity to work at that scale, along with obtaining beneficial support in the way of information and resources, for the work being done in Kent. Judy suggested Julie M. reach out to the cohort cities that have Sustainability Commissions to ask for information about their structures and activities as case studies to look at while doing the review work of this commission's bylaws. Julie M. advised she will reach out for same.

Judy provided additional context that ICLEI was the organization the City and Sustainability Commission utilized to get the original Green House Gas Inventory completed and a recap of that process was provided by Julie M., Judy and Andy. Julie M. noted that each of the current cohort Cities are in a different place with their climate work – from not having a CAP yet, to Cleveland, who has many years of climate work and planning to share. The current cohort has provided an opportunity to share best practices from the different stages of climate action.

It was asked whether a Greenhouse Gas Inventory Update for Kent was completed. Julie M. advised yes, and it was completed using data from the year 2022. Julie M. noted she's hoping to complete another inventory update before this 5-year CAP plan is finished but she wants to wait to make sure we have implemented some programs before doing so in order to have something to measure against. Julie M. explained how the Energy Star Portfolio Manager project she is working on as part of the ICLEI Cohort

work helps provide tracking options for the City's energy use and helps the City develop reduction metrics. Julie M. explained this project also provides a foundation to develop the Green House Gas Reduction Ordinance program outlined in the CAP which will ask building owners of a prescribed building size to eventually report their energy usage via this same software program.

Mary asked about the Bike Advisory Committee (BAC) work noted on the staff work report. Julie M. and Andy provided a recap of Kent State's Bicycle Friendly University program (a rating program provided by the League of American Bicyclists) and noted that the City of Kent has a rating of honorable mention in the Bicycle Friendly Community program. Julie M. provided an overview of the current BAC work which involves identifying recommended action items that can be accomplished in the next year, in addition to those that lend themselves to being part of a possible Earth Fest event that will help the University achieve their next rating level. Julie M. noted the current committee work also involves exploring expanding membership on the committee to a variety of additional stakeholders.

Julie M. explained she was involved in this work when her position was shared with the University, but the City plays an important role in many of the suggestions offered in the university's award feedback report. As such, remaining on the committee and doing the work is relevant to the City as well.

Mary asked whether other items would be planned for Earth Day. It was noted members can provide Julie M. with ideas for Earth Day events.

Judy noted one of the most important things the Commission can currently do is to share the climate action work the City is doing, that Julie M. is doing, with their various communities, families, friends, and neighbors. Judy noted that education is a large component of the Commission's work. She advised simple, informal conversations and communications are just as important as formal presentations.

The newsletter was mentioned as another avenue of sharing information. Julie M. noted she is working with Patti Long at the City to get the Sustainability listserv connected to the City's software that can help automate sending messages, provide online and QR code registration access for the newsletter. Members noted they could encourage their connections to sign up for the newsletter. Judy noted many folks get inundated with emails and may miss the newsletter when it is sent out, so taking the extra step to share the various news in-person with others would be helpful as well.

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

Julie M. noted she is still pending the WTP tour and presentation materials from Jim Bowling and John Ellison who are designing same to best answer the Commission's questions which were shared with them. Julie M. advised she had reached out to them for an update on possible timing and John noted that due to both his and Jim's impacted schedules, this most likely won't be scheduled until January 2025.

Judy asked whether there were any further comments and hearing none, called for a motion to adjourn and move to the working session. Mary motioned 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 6:21pm.

Julie M. began the working session. The review work resumed with Ordinance 1995-103 Section 3.

Judy asked whether Julie M. was able to get a copy of Council's Standing Rules of Order which would help inform this part of the review that deals with the commission member appointment committee and process. Julie M. noted she had found a version from 2020 but wasn't sure whether this was the most

recent version. She advised she will be checking with Bridget to confirm and/or obtain the most recent version and will send them out to members once received.

Members discussed the merits of reviewing this ordinance section if the current process outlined in Council's Standing Rules wasn't known. Mary felt this section should be passed over until the Standing Rules were obtained. Julie M. noted the original ordinance could still be reviewed, as members may have ideas about what is there that could be recommended or remain discontinued for future practice. Julie M. explained perspectives represented in the review questions framework, and members' responses to same are a critical component of this initial review work that can be applied to all sections of the documents no matter the amendments.

Julie G. began the review of Section 3 by asking whether the practice outlined in same had ever been utilized. It was noted this isn't current practice with only members of Council involved in the appointment of Commission members at this time. It was reiterated it would be helpful to have the current Standing Rules to help shed light on this process since the amendment of this section changes the process to align with Council's Standing Rules.

Andy noted some of the changes in appointment process could be due to the challenge of finding volunteers to serve on the boards and commissions, of which the City has many. Members discussed different aspects of recruitment. It was asked whether the Commission had the authority to help recruit members, especially when they knew a particular skill was needed, like marketing for example. Andy provided the example of when Harrison Wicks (previous City liaison to the Sustainability Commission) recruited Andy to apply for the Commission due to a need for someone with experience in data analysis.

Mary asked whether vacancies could be added to the City's Facebook page or the Sustainability Overview webpage. Julie M. noted it might be possible, and she noted vacancies have been added to the Sustainability Newsletter. Julie M. also noted that any member can talk to any person about applying for the Commission, but they cannot say the Commission wants them to join – it would just be an individual recommendation. Julie M. noted the member should direct the person to the Boards and Commission's page on the City's website to obtain an application and follow the associated application process.

Maryjayne noted that in her reading of the section, it is the Council's responsibility to create the appointment committee, not the Commission. She felt whether or not this practice could help generate attention to and elevate the Sustainability Commission is a question for the group to consider. It was noted there are different appointment processes depending on whether the commission is quasi-judicial or advisory.

Andy suggested the Commission have the ability to communicate a needed skill – someone who's good at writing, or PR, or marketing for example – to whomever is appointing the new Commission member, whether that's a committee or Council, as they may not know what skills might be needed for what work the Commission is doing at a particular time, and those needs could change depending on the work being done. He noted if the focus was on a needed skill, it could help expand the criteria beyond a recommendation grounded in the applicants interests or pedigree etc. This could shift the focus from the person themselves, but whether they also had the skills communicated as being needed. Julie G. noted that under current practices, even if a member has a particular skill, they don't have an outlet in the Commission work to use it.

Mary felt this might be beyond the scope of what was being talked about in the section. She asked what would happen if there was no Commission, no one like the members to communicate the need? She advised members should think about the section as if this is how the Commission gets created – not

about communicating skills. Mary advised she thinks members should be clear and short in their suggestions without going into all these details.

Julie M. stated that members do not have to have succinct suggestions or decide on anything at this point. She explained this portion of the review work is meant to ask questions, find areas where they want or need more information, and use it as an opportunity to get their initial or raw thoughts out about what they've read. Julie M. advised this is the chance to ensure everyone can get their thoughts out for each section and a future portion of the review work will be focused on evaluating the ideas, comments, suggestions and questions that have been generated during this initial review.

Judy noted now that the City has a Sustainability Coordinator, the applicants who apply to the Commission should be presented to the Coordinator for review and to give recommendations to City Council. Judy advised the Coordinator is the one who can assess what the needs are that will help the coordinator accomplish the goals that have been set out before them, and the Coordinator was hired to implement the things that Council has approved. Judy advised it is the Coordinator's job to make sure she has her "staff" – in this case the Commission members – to help accomplish the tasks Council has provided. Judy reflected on her experiences sitting in on various applicant interviews and appointments at Council meetings since 2016 and reiterated at a minimum, whomever applies, the needs and skills of applicants should be evaluated by the Coordinator.

Maryjayne advised she still feels this section is the responsibility of the Council. She feels it isn't the Commission's responsibility to come up with the committee, but she does agree with Judy's suggestion to have the Sustainability Coordinator review applicants.

Mary reiterated her position that this section should have been deferred until they had a copy of the Standing Rules. She feels the section should be left to the future Amendment of this section that aligns appointments to the Sustainability Commission with Council's Standing Rules and should not be conducted as stated in the original section with different committee members.

Judy noted the varied appointment committee might have been created to help address the wide variety of items laid out in the Goals document, which were broader than just environmental goals and included items within the economy and social justice areas of sustainability. She noted those goals weren't just about a CAP/emissions reductions.

Members wondered whether volunteers for boards were easier to come by in the past, or whether folks being paid might help generate more applicants. Julie G. wondered whether there are more applicants for boards where they have authority to make changes or vote on things like the planning commission for example. She felt maybe people would be more interested if they had some power like the quasi-judicial boards. Members noted that most likely, people are just too busy.

Judy noted the Commission did have some agency according to the ordinance and even in practice, back in 2017, they used to be able to go to Council and say they wanted to do something. Judy noted this was how action was taken to end up where the City is now with a Climate Action Plan, but she noted that kind of action isn't allowed now. Judy noted administration has advised this group to focus on implementing the CAP because it took a lot of work to get the CAP in place.

Mary advised she felt the CAP is already being implemented by the Coordinator, and she feels the Commission should be working on other things – issues like fracking or cutting down trees that are healthy.

Julie M. noted that despite her doing the work, she values and needs the Commission's input on same as it is reflective of their own expertise and experience or knowledges that provide additional perspectives.

Julie M. noted that the CAP work should have multiple perspectives involved beyond just her or the City's perspectives, and that is what the Commission members can help provide. Mary advised that Julie M. or the City may not like everything the members suggest. Julie M. noted it isn't a matter of liking, often it is a matter of what is legally possible, or feasible, but no matter what, the different perspectives are able to be heard and do have an impact on how the work is developed. Julie M. noted this is an important part of the democratic process.

Julie M. asked whether there was any further comments for Section 3. Hearing none, she moved to Section 4. Julie G. started the review asking whether members would like to discuss what was meant by the different areas listed in Section 4a, and whether there would be anything to add or remove. She would like to see Water Protection as an area added to the list.

Julie G. provided a few examples for the land use area of the list, referencing the recent issue of the nursing home development on South Water St. or when the trees were at stake on Main St. She noted those issues weren't brought to the Sustainability Commission. She feels that if there's a land use plan that has an open space issue or has some kind of rezoning that needs to happen, the Commission might want to have a say in same. Julie G. felt like a member from the Sustainability Commission could go to the applicable board or commission and communicate the Sustainability Commission's perspective on the issue. Julie G. advised the board or commission will do whatever they're going to do, but at least the sustainability perspective or suggestions etc. will have been provided.

Andy noted he had no comments on Section A – that the language “shall include but not be limited to” and the examples provided on the list are fine, unless folks wanted to identify specific characteristics for the areas. He feels it's a list of things the Commission might be involved with.

Judy felt the area list is extensive and is in alignment with the goals document the Commission had developed at that time. She noted that the members may look at something from a sustainability perspective, but their perspectives could conflict with legal perspectives. She noted some recommendations can't be realized due to constraints the City has, or lawsuits people would file- especially when related to private property.

Julie G. agreed with Judy but noted the Commission could be a messenger for people in the community who are worried about sustainability issues. Julie G. noted members wouldn't have to agree, but they could be informed about an issue. Julie G. suggested that part of the commission New Business agenda work could entail evaluating City plans from the sustainability perspective. She was not suggesting the Commission would have any legal standing with these perspectives, but members could provide their opinion as people who care about and have some expertise on the issues. Judy mentioned that Sections 3 and 4 of the ordinance tie together as, in order for the Commission to make legitimate recommendations, the members need to have the expertise to make them and an appointment committee as described in Section 3 can help assess whether applicants have those appropriate skills.

Julie G. noted that she agrees with Judy about the expertise. She also wanted to acknowledge that no one here has a PhD in Sustainability but there are plenty of people who care, who have been paying attention to the issues, who can provide a perspective. Julie G. advised while she may not have certain skills mentioned in the discussion, she does understand how land use affects neighbors, and the kinds of complaints people have about land use. She noted while each member has expertise in certain things, they are citizens who care about the environment and offer that as a lens through which one can see the world. She noted they can be advocates to bring the environmental perspective into the conversation.

Judy noted this was the intention of the Ordinance and for the Commission when it was created. Judy noted that in reading same, it literally says the Commission has the right to look at all legislation to

determine whether it meets sustainability criteria. Judy noted that currently practicing this would require Council to direct the Commission to always have a seat at the table. She noted it would have to be a priority for Council.

Julie G. asked why Council would have to be involved. Julie G. suggested that instead, Sustainability Commission members could each sit in at one of the other board or commissions meetings so that members pay attention to items on those agendas and can be there to help weigh in on issues that cross into areas of sustainability.

Mary asked for clarification on who the Sustainability Commission members would be talking to or communicating with in Julie G.'s example. Mary relayed her experience attending the Shade Tree Commission meetings to see what they do and advised that commission only meets every two months. Mary advised that during those meetings, they don't ever talk about Council, they just discuss maintaining and planting trees on the tree lawns and in public, as well as some collaborative efforts with the University. She noted their meetings consist of administrative decisions and there is a limited window for people in the community to come talk about tree issues they may be experiencing.

Julie G. provided more details for her example explaining that Sustainability Commission members could be asked to track one of the other board or commission agendas and then it is that member's job to report back to the other Sustainability Commission members during the Sustainability Commission meetings about what is on same. Sustainability Commission members could then discuss whether there would be anything about the item(s) they would want to look further into. Julie G. noted it would be a clear task and duty for the members. Mary noted members could review the minutes of other meetings to find out what is being discussed. Julie G. noted she didn't know how feasible it would be, but it is a thought she had while reading through this ordinance.

Judy reiterated that this ordinance demonstrates Council's intention at the time to have the Commission very involved in a variety of City work, but she noted the folks that created the ordinance and goals, and who presented it to Council were different than the folks actually on Council – that the ordinance wasn't created by Council just as the Climate Action Plan wasn't created by Council. Judy clarified that these were items that were brought to Council for discussion and approval.

Members questioned despite the Ordinance providing broad powers whether or not the intent was for the Sustainability Commission to actually have power. Members noted they remain an advisory committee which allows them to provide suggestions for Council to consider but only Council has the authority to hear the suggestions and make decisions on those suggestions. Maryjayne provided the example of the new City Hall construction and the decision by Council to not include solar panels on same. She felt that reflects discrepancies in what they say they want – sustainable development but then it either costs too much or can't be done for one reason or another. Maryjayne noted that Council will do what they're going to do regardless of the suggestions being made, especially when the economics of doing something sustainable don't work out.

Judy noted this is why the studies and analyses of the CAP work being done are important – to show where the addition of solar will provide the most impact for the money spent and in this case, having it on the Fire Station might provide a better impact.

Maryjayne reiterated her question about why the City is continuing to build new buildings in the old ways and is frustrated by same. Julie G. noted that their commission work should be helping normalize sustainable practices by continuing to provide suggestions and feedback regularly so that sustainability can be considered in projects as time goes on.

It was noted the next review will resume with Ordinance 1995-103 Section 4a so that Mary has a chance to voice her thoughts about same.

Andy noted he will be unable to attend the December 2nd meeting due to an event conflict with his son. December will be his last meeting before rotating off and members verbally noted they would be available to reschedule the Commission meeting to Monday, December 9th instead.

Members ended the working session at 7:10pm.

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