

Sustainability Commission Meeting, April 7, 2025

Meeting Summary

SC Members in Attendance: Judy Nelson, Tracy Wallach, Justine Gallo

Others in Attendance: Bill Wilen, Connor Crislip, Samantha Lutton, Julie Morris

Judy Nelson called the meeting to order at 5:34pm and roll was taken.

Judy opened the Good of the Order/Open Comments section of the meeting, welcomed the guests and opened the floor for them to share. Both Connor and Samantha advised they are students from Kent State University visiting as part of a class requirement to attend a public meeting. Both noted they were interested in learning more about sustainability in Kent. Bill introduced himself and advised of his interest in the City's Climate Action Plan (CAP) and its solar efforts.

Judy opened a discussion related to Julie M.'s staff update and Julie M. provided information in response to items and questions that arose out of same:

- Julie M. provided background for the NOPEC Energized Community Grant, and advised Council has allocated the grant's 2025 funds to hire a consultant that will work with the Community Development department on the various aspects of locating, financing and administering a solar array in the community. Julie M. explained the next steps of the process and advised staff is working to draft the Request for Qualifications needed to hire a consultant. Members requested a copy of the RFQ once it has been completed to view more information about the project.
- Julie M. provided information about the EV Charging Stations at City Hall, noting she didn't know the exact date City Hall would be fully open to the public, which is required before the chargers can be used, but expected it to be soon. She also provided information about ChargePoint who provides the software to run the stations, expected charging rate information, and confirmed the source of the electricity for the charging stations to be Ohio Edison at this time. Discussion around the possibility of providing renewable energy options for the charging stations in the future was had.
- Julie M. provided context for her monthly meeting with Kent State's Sustainability Coordinator, Leah Graham and advised there wasn't anything more to share about this month's meeting beyond what was in the staff report.
- Julie M. provided context for her recent meetings with the Sustainability Coordinators from Oxford, Ohio and from Bowling Green, Ohio, noting they provided an opportunity to learn more about what other university towns are doing related to sustainability and share best practices around these efforts.

Judy moved the discussion to New Business. Tracy advised she had recently learned about a compost bin available at the Walls School Garden that can be used by residents as well. Tracy felt this could be a good topic to include in one of the future newsletters or Tree City Bulletin. Members continued to discuss regional residential compost options and businesses that currently provide same, as well as possible local business interest in composting. Julie M. provided a recap of the Compost Pilot Program initiative outlined in the City's CAP, which also included information about Kent State's Grind to Energy program. Members agreed they would do some more research on compost resources and bring that back to May's meeting for further discussion on whether to include information about it in a future newsletter or via other means.

Judy asked whether there were any other questions or comments for the Good of the Order or New Business. Hearing none, she moved the meeting to Old Business.

Justine and Judy provided an update from the Events Committee, advising Sustainability trivia questions and a Jeopardy tabling game are being developed by the Committee to add to the existing Sustainability Commission tabling and/or other community engagement activities. The questions are being developed out of Kent's CAP materials, other Kent sustainability related information, and general information about sustainability. The goal is to

provide engaging opportunities that will encourage people to stop by the Commission's tables and/or other events to learn more about local sustainability efforts rather than just brochures and information posters.

Discussion was had around possible prizes, handouts, and/or other incentives to encourage people to participate in the various trivia activities, which could include collaboration with local businesses. Julie M. noted she would have to check on the legality of receiving items of monetary value to be able to hand out and to make sure there were no issues with perceived favoritism of businesses or organizations.

It was noted the Commission's old no-sew T-shirt bag activity was going to be brought back as another interactive tabling activity and Julie M. advised she had located the instructions and single-use plastic bag facts handout that had been used previously. Julie M. noted it would need to be updated to reflect current figures and sources. Members discussed other possible engaging tabling activities, with Tracy sharing about past recycling activities she had developed for tabling booths to make the education component more interactive.

It was noted trivia activities will not be ready for the upcoming tabling events in April, and logistics for the upcoming events – Who's Your Mama Festival and Kent State's Earth Fest – were briefly discussed. Justine advised the pop-up Earth Day market she had originally thought would be held the same weekend as Who's Your Mama ended up being scheduled for the following weekend – April 26th and 27th. Justine noted she would not be present, but her associate would be able to help man a table during this market outside Justine's store where the Commission could put out CAP literature and have the no-sew t-shirt bags available.

Judy asked whether there were any updates for the second Old Business agenda item involving the discussion around carbon storage and fracking injection wastewater wells. Julie M. advised she does not have any new information to share and provided brief context about the issue for the meeting's guests. Julie M. clarified this agenda item includes the pending presentation and Water Treatment Plant (WTP) tour being developed by City Engineer Jim Bowling and WTP manager John Ellison to answer the Commission's questions related to carbon storage and fracking concerns.

Judy asked whether there were any further comments and hearing none, called for a motion to adjourn. Tracy motioned, Justine seconded, and the motion passed with unanimous approval. The meeting adjourned at 6:16pm.

Julie M. opened the Working Session and provided a recap for the guests of the Commission's By-Laws review and updating work being done.

Julie M. provided a handout featuring a summary list of ideas and suggested changes/updates generated out of the review work accomplished so far, and noted the review work had been left off with the last part of the Commission's origination ordinance dealing with the Commission's duties and responsibilities.

As a compliment to same, members were asked to review research provided to them about other area City Sustainability Commissions and/or Green Teams for any practices that might be worth considering for Kent's Sustainability Commission work. Judy noted items from comparison with the other Cities that stood out to her and members had discussion around same, with highlights as follows:

- Kent's Sustainability Commission lacks diversity and members from people in various positions of power within the City and community (i.e. Council members, heads of City departments, business and organization leaders etc.)
 - It was felt Kent's original commission creation ordinance appeared to have the intention of providing diverse membership as outlined in the appointment committee and duties sections of same and suggestions to bring this back could be considered
 - It was thought having a member of Council on the Commission would be helpful and a brief discussion of Tracy's past experience serving on Council was had
- Many of the other cities reviewed belong to regional Sustainability organizations such as Power a Clean Future Ohio
 - Julie M. advised the City had been receiving services via NOPEC's Resiliency and Sustainability Support Program and via ICLEI's Northeast Ohio Resilient Cities and Counties Leadership-and-Learning Cohort that were like some of the offerings provided by other area organizations

- Julie M. noted these services came to an end in December 2024 and the City is working to explore other possible collaborations and/or membership with other organizations in relation to fit with City sustainability needs
- It was noted that other city bylaws have examples of distinct roles and duties for the position of Chair, including the capacity for the Chair to represent the Commission and City out in the community
 - It was felt that clarifying this role for Kent's commission, in addition to clarifying the roles, responsibilities, and meeting procedures for the other members is a very important component of this review and update work
 - It was noted having regular or periodic review of the Commission's bylaws would be good to include in updated processes to accommodate future changes and needs in the Commission's work
- Brief discussion was had around the expected process of alerting Kent's Council to this review work and the updated bylaws/ordinance changes that are generated
 - Julie M. advised some of that will be dependent on what has been generated, and it would come at the end of the review process work, after all suggestions and associated documents have been agreed upon by Commission members, and vetted by staff and legal as needed
- It was reiterated identifying the gaps in expectations and practices that have arisen as the Commission's work has evolved over the years requires review of all the previous documents, in addition to supplemental research and other documents, which was noted as being very dry and tedious to do. This sparked a discussion around forming a separate committee to do the review work that consists of members interested in same with some details discussed as follows:
 - The Bylaws Review Committee could meet outside of the regular commission meetings and bring suggestions back to the regular meetings for discussion with the whole commission as an agenda item, much like the current Event Committee
 - Part of this report-back could include letting the other members know what parts of the documents were going to be reviewed at the next ad-hoc meeting, so that they could attend if there was a meeting devoted to a particular section of the documents that interested them that they would like to review in detail
 - Members liked this idea and suggested it be added to May's meeting under Good of the Order for further discussion with all members

Members ended the working session at 7:10pm

The next Sustainability Commission meeting will be held Monday, May 5, 2025, starting at 5:30 p.m. at the Overholt building.