

Sustainability Commission Meeting, July 7, 2025

Meeting Summary

SC Members in Attendance: Judy Nelson, Maryjayne Stone, Julie Grant, Justine Gallo, Tracy Wallach

Others in Attendance: Bill Wilen, Julie Morris

Judy Nelson called the meeting to order at 5:37pm and roll was taken.

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

Tracy advised she had learned about a program in Switzerland where solar panels were being installed in the spaces between train tracks. Tracy suggested the City look into this as a possibility for the ABC Railroad-owned tracks (the higher of the two tracks running through Kent).

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:

- Judy asked for more information about the City's solar project Request for Qualifications (RFQ)
 - Julie M. advised the RFQ was completed and made available for public bid on 7/3/25, noting same will run through 7/29/25
 - Members were provided a hard copy of the RFQ and reviewed where it is posted on the City's website in order to direct others there to view same if asked/needed
 - Julie M. noted the project being explored would be sited at the 800 Mogadore brownfield and provided an overview of the scope of work being requested of the consultants and next steps
 - Per member's request, Julie M. provided background and context for how the decision to move forward with a solar project at this site came about
 - Julie M. recapped the property's history and reiterated that given the contamination onsite, even after the NFA under the VAP MOA is received from Ohio EPA (as discussed at the March 2025 Sustainability Commission meeting), the property will never be able to be used for anything related to "heads and beds", meaning the site will never be acceptable for housing, commercial, or retail development, including any kind of park use
 - It was noted a solar project onsite helps return the land to productive use and helps meet climate action goals
- Julie M. noted she has been asked to give a presentation to Council, most likely in October, that provides an update on the City's sustainability work.

Judy asked whether there were any other items for Good of the Order and hearing none, moved the discussion to New Business. No items were on the agenda for New Business, and no one had anything to add, so Judy moved the discussion to Old Business.

An update from the Events Committee was provided, which also ended up including a related discussion of the Dark Skies and bird migration initiatives agenda item.

The discussion began with possibilities related to having the Mayor issue a Proclamation designating October as Sustainability Month. Julie M. provided hard copies of a past Sustainability Month Proclamation for members to review. Judy noted she had worked with the previous assistant to the City Manager, Harrison Wicks, and the Mayor in 2017, 2018, and 2019 to have October designated as Sustainability month during those years. Judy noted at the time, the Proclamation was related to collaborative work she and the Sustainability Commission had been doing with Kent State during their Campus Sustainability Month (also held in October) to organize participation in the ASUS Solar Tour and Transportation Cruise-In events, among other activities.

Discussion was had about broadening the Proclamation so that it possibly references the international sustainability-related days held in October, more local/regional items, and possible highlights around what the City has been doing with its Sustainability/CAP work. It was noted, if there was to be a Proclamation, there would need to be a final draft that has been reviewed and approved by mid-September to have it ready for October.

Concern was expressed about Staff's note that the Davey Tree SEED Campus tour might replace September's Commission meeting in that there may not be enough meeting time for members to review and approve the drafted Proclamation in time to get it to the Mayor. Julie M. noted she would discuss same with Bridget, and noted the tour is tentative at this point. Members also requested Julie M. confirm whether the intention of the City to designate October as Sustainability Month can be shared with community members before the Proclamation is issued so that there can be some pre-emptive encouragement of the community to plan events/initiatives etc. that could be held in October. Different methods for sharing about the designation ahead of time, if it turns out to be possible, were discussed.

Discussion was had about whether Sun Day events might be able to be integrated into any Sustainability Month activities. Bill advised KEC is organizing speakers for their Thursday lecture series in September to support Sun Day activities and members discussed whether the Sustainability Commission should have a speaker present to either discuss the solar RFQ & and/or provide information about the October Proclamation/any October events being organized. Julie M. noted the City most likely couldn't commit to speaking about the Solar RFQ in any depth at this time as it is still very early in the process but noted she would discuss same with Bridget as well.

Maryjayne suggested a possible book display at the library as a possible October Sustainability Month activity. Members also discussed different ways beyond the Sustainable Kent e-newsletter that the community could be sharing what sustainable initiatives they are working on, particularly highlighting this during the month of October, or even creating a special edition of the newsletter during this time focused on same.

Julie M. and Julie G. recapped some of the information that had been provided by Kent Environmental Council's Todd Cartner and Kent State's Sustainability Coordinator, Leah Graham regarding research and resources related to Dark Skies, Lights Out, and animal migrations. Members continued discussion around holding quarterly, monthly, or even more frequent events (i.e. meteor showers in August, or planetarium events etc.) as part of a possible year-long campaign of Dark Skies or Lights Out activities, or a possible education campaign around the larger issues same could address. Members considered ideas for dispelling myths of perceived safety issues caused by dark skies or lights out initiatives. It was decided that Julie G. would continue to research what is required of a Dark Skies rating and would look for examples of Lights Out events held by other cities.

There was brief discussion and a recap of the fountain that has been installed in the Cuyahoga River at the Kent dam to help aerate the water until the dam's pumps can be fixed. It was noted that the fountain has a bright white LED light and concerns about its contribution to light pollution were expressed.

There was brief discussion regarding the noise, light, and other pollution/issues generated by fireworks displays and suggestions were made to have the Heritage Festival event planners consider looking into drone light shows as an alternative.

It was reiterated there are no immediate event items happening and the Events Committee will be working to take the suggestions generated during tonight's meeting and review them all as part of their next committee meeting.

Judy advised there were no updates from the Ordinance and By-laws review Committee at this time. It was noted the Committee has met, with the next meeting scheduled for 7/9/25. It was advised that Committee members will complete their review of the documents before providing a complete list of suggestions to Commission members for discussion.

Judy asked whether there were any updates regarding member research related to composting. Julie M. recapped her discussion with Bridget advising there would be legal and health code issues to address. Additionally, Julie M. noted the focus right now for the City's climate action work is on stationary energy and transportation initiatives as these sectors contain the largest areas of emissions. It was noted that it doesn't mean the CAP's suggested compost pilot program or other composting initiatives can't be explored. Julie M. noted she is working to stay connected to conversations happening in the community around same to help inform a possible future pilot program. Judy reiterated that composting in one's own backyard is allowed (noting if it becomes a nuisance, that will create an issue), and residents or businesses are able to subscribe to services like what is offered by Rubber City Reuse.

Judy asked whether there was any update regarding the discussion around carbon storage and fracking injection wastewater wells. Julie M. advised she had reached out to Jim Bowling and John Ellison to provide the Commission's feedback from April's meeting about having a smaller presentation and discussion at a future Commission meeting instead of tour of the Water Treatment Plant. She advised she has continued to follow up, and noted she is still pending their response. She noted she will discuss the issue with Bridget for next steps.

Judy asked whether there were any further comments and hearing none, called for a motion to adjourn. Justine motioned, Julie G. seconded, and the motion passed with unanimous approval. The meeting adjourned at 7:01pm.

The next Sustainability Commission meeting will be held Monday, August 4, 2025, starting at 5:30 p.m. in the City Hall Community Room.