CITY OF NEWARK
DELAWARE

CONSERVATION ADVISORY COMMISSION
MINUTES

May 8, 2018

MEETING CONVENED: 7:00 p.m. Council Chambers

MEMBERS PRESENT: George Irvine (presiding), Jason Kramer, Kismet Hazelwood, John Hornor, Bob McDowell, Ajay Prasad, Sheila Smith, John Wessells

ABSENT: Kass Sheedy

STAFF: Sarah Campanelli, Secretary

Mr. Irvine called the meeting to order at 7:11 p.m.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MEETING HELD ON MARCH 13, 2018

Mr. Prasad pointed out that McKee should be McKees.

MOTION BY MR. WESSELLS: THAT THE MINUTES FROM THE MARCH 13, 2018 MEETING BE APPROVED AS AMENDED.

MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Caitlin Olsen introduced herself as a member of the Community Relations team at the University of Delaware. She shared that she worked with Mr. Irvine on the Community Engagement Council. She was at this meeting to observe.

3. GREEN ENERGY FUND LIGHTING PROJECT – CREEK ROAD TRAIL CONNECTOR

There was no update on a cost estimate from Mr. Filasky. Mr. Irvine said the CAC was in no position to judge the merit of putting Green Energy funds toward the project without that information. He noted this may have to be pushed to the next fiscal year.

4. NEWARK SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIP DISCUSSION

Mr. Irvine asked how McKees Solar Park was financed. Ms. Smith knew that the public had made donations. Mr. Prasad had a document called "Financing Recommendations for McKees Solar Park" on the CAC Drop Box. It stated that the base project cost was $626,750. The Green Energy balance was $92,362 which was the amount of funds available through the Green Energy Fund. The next item was Green Energy receipts net from May 2013 through construction period which was $67,778. Mr. Prasad calculated that the total financing requirement was $466,610. The CAC had stepped in and provided 2 chunks of money: one was $150,000 from the 2012 budget allocation and the other was $100,000 from the CAC 2013 budget allocation. The net amount to be funded was $216,610 which was preferably self-financed from existing electric fund capital reserves. Mr. Irvine noted that the CAC put up the majority of the $626k. Mr. Prasad pointed out it was more than 2/3. Mr. Irvine asked what the electric capital reserves were now. No one was sure.

Mr. Irvine stated the reason he wanted to know this was because last month, Drs. Byrne and Chajes had discussed 3 finance models. They were self-finance (which was done at McKees), SEU (a low-cost loan) or a purchase power agreement in which the City would not front any of the money, but a company would own the power and provide it to the City at a much-reduced rate. Mr. Kramer noted this was similar to how people rented solar panels for their roof. Mr. Irvine explained that this would be wholesale not retail. The company would come in for the existing tax credits at the state and national level. The company would sell the electricity at a fixed amount that would be negotiated. Mr. Irvine thought that using McKees as an example, the City may be most comfortable with self-financing. Mr. Hornor noted that based on the referendum, the City wanted to get away from that and use loans. Mr. Irvine thought this put the 2nd and 3rd options in play. Mr. Irvine felt it was the CAC's job to educate themselves and make a recommendation. He thought the presentation was convincing that for a modest investment over a period of time, the City could reduce its carbon footprint, produce electricity for less than it was currently purchasing from DEMEC and potentially pass that savings on to citizens. He noted this would at least handle the City's own electric needs.

Mr. Prasad noted that compared to McKees, the cost of this project was only 30% more but produced 100% more in terms of power. He felt it was much more cost-effective. Mr. Irvine asked if that was due to the falling cost of solar. Mr. Prasad said that the install cost of McKees was about $3 per watt and this project was proposing under $2 per watt. Mr. Irvine had been trying to find holes in this project. He thought the political lift would be harder than the numbers. Mr. Irvine was not prepared to make a recommendation at this meeting. He asked members to look at the proposal and find holes in it so that next month the CAC may be in a position to draft a recommendation to Council to consider this project. He felt that the prospect of producing their own energy for less than they were currently buying from DEMEC and controlling their destiny for a ¼ of the power they produced was convincing. Mr. Kramer asked if the City was locked into a minimum purchase with DEMEC. Mr. Irvine said with a PPA they were. Mr. Kramer wondered if this project would break an agreement with DEMEC. Mr. Irvine did not think so because this was only producing ¼ of the power in the City. Mr. Irvine thought this was a smaller project to show the validity of the idea and aim for more in the future. Mr. Irvine noted a problem was that they did not know anything about these buildings and the condition they were in. Ms. Smith asked whether Drs. Byrne and Chajes had only looked at whether the roofs were flat. Mr. Irvine said they had also considered orientation and size.

Mr. Irvine asked whether anyone had spoken to their Councilmember about this. No one had. Mr. Irvine noted there was some town and gown friction historically about how much power the City sold to the University. Mr. Irvine warned that this could be a political minefield because the City financed most of itself off the sale of power. The CAC was proposing to produce and sell it for less which could cause the City budget to go down. Mr. Prasad felt that with this plan, the City could be generating revenue for itself instead of paying DEMEC. Mr. Irvine agreed this was a benefit. Mr. Wessells suggested that instead of passing the savings on to the residents, the savings could help pay for the referendum. Mr. Irvine thought this was a clever idea. Mr. Kramer agreed that the City could keep selling at the current price and use the difference to pay on the debt faster. Mr. Kramer noted that last year there was a big conversation statewide about various municipalities funding their budget from the sale of electricity and that it resulted in some reductions. Mr. Kramer thought that in the future there would be increased pressure on the electric revenue. Mr. Irvine agreed this could be getting ahead of that issue. Mr. Irvine shared that the CAC's idea of UD and Newark going into business producing power had ruffled feathers at the City-level and University-level. Mr. Prasad asked if any

Councilmembers were familiar with this proposal. Mr. Irvine knew the Mayor and Councilman Hamilton were. Mr. Hornor shared that Dr. Chajes had said that he had a meeting with Acting City Manager Tom Coleman next week to discuss this.

5. A BETTER NEWARK AWARD

Ms. Smith recalled that the BNA was award to 812 Rock Lane. She would share photographs with the group via email. The owner offered for anyone to come see the yard but would not be present to get her award until July. Ms. Campanelli said that she would let the CAC know when she heard from the owner. There were no other applications over the last month.

Ms. Smith felt that the Better Newark Award needed revamping. She was thinking about forming a new, quicker award for more immediate things. She gave the example that Grain Restaurant had done a public event addressing the problem of plastic waste. They had shared a film and had a speaker. Ms. Smith felt that instead of giving them a Better Newark Award, which pertained more to a house, they could give a smaller award of recognition and commendation. She thought this could be as simple as framing a certificate of thanks from the CAC. Ms. Smith thought the Better Newark Award was too clumsy and burdensome and that the CAC was not getting much participation in spite of their efforts. Mr. Prasad thought this had been done in the past that the Better Newark Award had been given to a business. Mr. Wessells thought a letter of appreciation would be simple to do. Ms. Smith thought that the businesses or people could be nominated by CAC members. Mr. McDowell liked the idea. Mr. Irvine did not think this would require a change in the CAC's bylaws. Mr. Irvine asked Ms. Smith to draft a letter to Grain.

6. PLASTIC BAG RECYCLING RESEARCH

Mr. Irvine felt that the CAC had not done much with this issue recently. Mr. Kramer suggested that plastic straws be added into this research. Ms. Smith noted that Mr. McDowell had looked into Home Depot. Mr. McDowell said that he was not making much progress with Home Depot. He had suggested that each CAC member ask a large retailer about their plastic bag recycling. He stated that according to the law, they were supposed to have records available to DNREC about recycling of bags. Mr. McDowell has not gotten information from Home Depot and had the feeling that it was not being done. Mr. McDowell said he had not gone to DNREC yet. Ms. Smith offered to call DNREC and ask about this issue.

Mr. Irvine stated the other angle was to use some of the Green Energy funds to buy reusable shopping bags. Mr. Wessells said they were $1.87 each for the bags from his vendor. He said he would get the numbers for a large purchase. Mr. Irvine thought that the CAC should buy a good amount and just provide them when available. Ms. Smith asked if the reusable bags were made of plastic. She thought it would be better to give away decomposable bags. Mr. Wessells said they were made out of recycled plastic. He said he would look into different options. Mr. Irvine noted that the Downtown Newark Partnership was being reconstituted and the new group may be interested in this.

Ms. Smith recalled that Michelle Bennett from University of Delaware may be interested in having her students research Main Street's interest in trying something different as far as recycling. This could be an environmental project for them that addressed a real problem. Mr. Irvine thought the Earth, Ocean and Environment students in Lewes may have an interest in this as well. They had done research and made a policy recommendation, but the CAC had never seen their presentation. Ms. Smith said she would reach out to Ms. Bennett. Mr. Irvine offered to reach out to the Earth, Ocean and Environment professor.

7. REFORESTATION DAY DISCUSSION AND PLANNING

Mr. McDowell advised he had spoken via conference call to Joe Spadafino, Parks and Recreation Director, and Tom Zaleski, Parks Superintendent. Reforestation Day was scheduled for Saturday, September 29. Mr. McDowell shared that some students had brought him trees from Ag Day that were sold by Bartlett Tree Experts. He reached out to Bartlett asking if they would be willing to donate some trees and the company had offered 100. He was not sure what kind would be provided yet. Mr. McDowell felt that even if they were non-native, it was fine as long as they were not an invasive species. Bartlett had suggested giving the seedlings to diligent people to raise until they were large enough to be planted. Mr. McDowell thought it would be great to foster out the little trees to people and have people volunteer on Reforestation Day to get their tree for free. The Parks and Recreation Department was still trying to determine what area would be used for Reforestation Day. Mr. McDowell noted that because Newark was a National Wildlife Federation community habitat, they could also get trees through that organization. He also wanted to have an educational component to the event. Ms. Smith felt that the letter Mr. McDowell had written to the mayor could easily be turned into a handout.

Ms. Smith was very opposed to planting non-native trees. Mr. McDowell said this was a part of the education. He thought it was important people knew what to plant. Mr. McDowell would also prefer to plant native trees. Mr. Irvine suggested making a list of organizations to reach out to. There was some discussion about who would reach out to the various groups. Mr. Irvine asked if Parks and Recreation had staff to man this event. Mr. McDowell thought they did. Mr. Irvine noted that a budget for the event should also be drafted. Mr. Wessells shared that his vendor may have some items that would work for the event. He said he would share the link with everyone. Mr. Irvine summarized that the goal was to have this event at a City area with booths for education and the opportunity to plant trees. He thought the event should be a rain or shine event for a certain set number of hours.

Mr. Irvine asked how many trees they needed. Mr. McDowell was not sure. He thought it depended on the number of volunteers they could get. Mr. Kramer noted it also depended on the size of the plot they were planning to use. Ms. Smith shared that she had participated in a tree-planting event that had 300 trees and only 100 volunteers. She stated that the event had been set up so that the holes were already dug. Mr. McDowell thought if the City was willing to pre-dig the holes, they could plant a couple hundred trees in a couple hours. Mr. Irvine asked what tools were needed. Mr. McDowell hoped that the City could bring compost mulch to the site. Mr. Irvine asked whether the City's insurance would cover this event. Mr. McDowell thought it would. Mr. Irvine suggested they set up a subcommittee for Reforestation Day. The committee would be led by Mr. McDowell and would include Mr. Irvine, Ms. Smith and Ms. Hazelwood.

8. REVIEW OF PLANNING/DEVELOPMENT REPORTS

There was no comment.

9. OLD/NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Irvine passed out 3 RFPs that the City had received for the Sustainability Plan that Mike Fortner, Planner, had presented to the CAC. Ms. Smith was a member of that committee and had brought these requests for proposal offerings. Ms. Smith explained that these 3 organizations had submitted proposals to write the sustainability plan. Drs. Byrne and Chajes had submitted an RFP as a part of their work with the Center for Energy and Environmental Policy. These RFPs had an introduction to the companies, resumes, recommendations and records from the work they had done in the past. The committee would be interviewing each firm. They had certain checklists and standards. The committee would then pick the company that would get the DNREC money to write the sustainability plan for Newark. This was approximately $80,000. Ms. Smith had wanted to bring these proposals to the CAC and get their opinions and questions for the interviews.

Ms. Smith said that she had scored the RFPs according to her own system and had come up with one that was 20 points higher than the others. She had based this on projects they had already done. Ms. Smith had chosen AECOM. She noted that AECOM had done work in the past and was currently working with the City of Philadelphia on smart cities. She felt they had more experience not just with proposing sustainable ideas but with implementing them. One of the other firms was geared largely toward water projects. She liked the other firm's model and work with energy but felt that AECOM had more experience with application. Ms. Smith noted they had also gotten points because they had a much larger team and they were local and accessible to the City. Ms. Smith had given them points for diversity as well.

Mr. Irvine asked if they had been given rubrics. Ms. Smith said that was correct and they were given a scoresheet. Mr. Irvine felt that sometimes having more people on a project, like AECOM was doing, added cost. Mr. Irvine noted that they were not producing anything but research and ideas at this stage. Ms. Smith thought they may have put their whole company on the proposal regardless of whether they would be on the project. Mr. Irvine pointed out that AECOM was a global engineering consultant. Mr. Irvine noted that they could eat the cost of having more people on it to win the contract. Ms. Smith explained that the rubric included capacity to meet project requirements, expertise in public and planning outreach, experience and reputation, familiarity with public work and geographical location. Mr. Kramer noted that DelDOT was using AECOM for the Main Street project. Ms. Smith thought that was another benefit. Mr. Irvine suggested asking how the firms determined what constituted an actionable plan for Newark. Mr. Irvine thought that a problem with the Comprehensive Development Plan was that it was not very actionable. He felt it was more of an inspirational plan than a plan to be implemented. Mr. Irvine thought it was important that the firm writing the plan needed to make sure it could be seen to fruition. Ms. Smith thought AECOM had more experience with this.

Mr. Irvine suggested asking the firms for an example of a plan they had written and implemented. Mr. Irvine suggested that if there was anything on the proposal that caused Ms. Smith to have a question, she should probe them on that. He warned that RFPs can be written to hide weaknesses of the firm. Ms. Smith noted that all committee members would be asking questions. Her focus would be on sustainability. Mr. Irvine asked when the interview was. Ms. Smith said they had not been told. Mr. Hornor noted that the implementation did not have to awarded to that group. He thought one group could write the plan and another could implement it. Mr. Irvine had suggested to Mr. Filasky that the City should do the plan in-house, but Mr. Filasky had not agreed. Ms. Smith pointed out that the partnership plan was with the University of Delaware. She thought the two might dovetail if the University was to get the money to develop the plan.

Mr. Kramer shared that the State rebate program for electric car charges ended June 30. He had contacted the State and they expected the program to renew next year but did not have dates. Mr. Kramer had also asked whether the charger had to be installed and functioning or whether it just had to be bought to get the rebate. The State had answered that the City just had to buy the charger. Mr. Kramer asked whether the CAC wanted to make the recommendation to Council to try to buy the charger this fiscal year. Mr. Irvine did not see it happening this fiscal year. Mr. Irvine also thought there needed to be more discussion on where to put the charger. Mr. Kramer said he would speak to Mr. Filasky about the possible location of a charger.

Mr. Wessells thought it was time to start discussing Community Day which would be on September 16, 2018.

Mr. Wessells asked if there was an idea for the survey. Mr. Irvine suggested plastic bags, but Ms. Smith pointed out they had already asked that. Mr. Kramer suggested they asked where people would like to see the City plant more trees. Mr. McDowell noted that this was 2 weeks before Reforestation Day so there could be a sign-up list or handouts. Mr. Kramer liked the idea of showing different trees and asking people to identify the native trees. Mr. McDowell said he could put some things together. He also thought the CAC should have the same size booth as last year. Mr. Irvine suggested talking about the sustainability plan and solar power production. Mr. Prasad suggested asking whether people would like to see the City installing solar panels on City buildings. Mr. Irvine thought there could be a survey question about electric cars and chargers. He also brought up discussing community gardens. Mr. Wessells said he could buy more t-shirts and pens. Mr. McDowell offered to bring an LED light display. Mr. Irvine thought it would attract attention to bring a solar panel.

10. NEXT MEETING

The next regularly scheduled meeting is June 12, 2018.

11. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

Sarah Campanelli
Secretary

/sjc