

The City of Newark

Conservation Advisory Commission

Annual Report for 2022

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CAC Charge

City ordinance 77-56 created the CAC in November 1977, “to advise in the development, management, and protection of its natural resources with appropriate consideration of Newark's human and economic resources. The Commission shall concern itself with conservation in its broadest sense and may, among its activities:

- (a) Recommend to City Council a program for ecologically suitable utilization of all wetlands, valley streams, and flood plains and other land areas, the condition and use of which will affect the environmental quality of life in the City of Newark;
- (b) Shall file an annual report;
- (c) Maintain informal liaison with the Planning Commission, the Parks and Recreation Department, the City Manager, and the City Council, and cooperate with other public and private bodies organized for similar purposes;
- (d) In addition to the foregoing, carry out any other duties, tasks, or responsibilities, consistent with the objectives of this Commission assigned to it by resolution of City Council.”

Ordinance 77-56 gave examples of programs that may be considered by the Commission, such as street tree replacement; improved recycling; beautification plans for volunteer groups; guidelines for multiple use of open space and public areas; community gardens; energy conservation; and review of Zoning Code amendments to encourage conservation, and also stated that “the above list shall not, however, limit the program which the Commission may undertake or be requested to undertake.”

CAC Membership

The CAC has 9 members when all positions are filled, serving staggered 3-year terms. Volunteers who served during 2022 are listed below. Chair and co-chair were elected in February 2022 for a one-year term.

Appointment Type	CAC Member	Start Date	Term End Date
Mayor’s Appointment	Sheila Smith (Chair)	3/15/22	3/15/25
Mayor’s Appointment	John Mateyko	3/15/20	3/15/23
Mayor’s Appointment	Jean Hedrich	4/26/21	3/15/22 (resigned)
	Mahi Palanisami	7/25/22	3/15/24
District 1	Helga Huntley (Co-Chair)	3/15/19	3/15/25
District 2	<i>vacant</i>		
District 3	Andrew O’Donnell	3/15/21	3/15/24
District 4	Beth Chajes	3/15/20	3/15/23
District 5	Lauren O’Connor	6/27/22	3/15/24
District 6	Mary Clare Matsumoto	3/15/19	3/15/22
	Mikayla Rypkema	3/15/22	3/15/25

A list of current members is maintained on the City's website at: www.cityofnewarkde.us/DocumentCenter/Home/View/620 (pdf format). Secretarial services are provided to the CAC by a member of the City Secretary's office; Nichol Scheld and Philip Machado served as secretaries for the CAC in 2022. In addition, Jeff Martindale (Chief Purchasing and Personnel Officer) regularly attends CAC meetings as liaison to the City administration.

CAC Accomplishments 2022

The CAC's achievements in 2022 include the following:

Outreach

- **Newark Post Conservation Corner Articles by CAC**

Since December 2019 CAC members have penned and submitted articles to the *Newark Post* under the heading "Conservation Corner". These articles are intended to increase the public's awareness of conservation issues and to suggest actions that citizens can take to contribute to the City's sustainability. Articles were submitted monthly, with short breaks in the summer and fall. Conservation Corner articles are published both in print and digitally on the *Newark Post*'s website (www.newarkpostonline.com).

Topics covered in 2022 were:

January – Hillside Park and stormwater management – Helga Huntley

(https://www.newarkpostonline.com/features/conservation-corner-what-do-the-hillside-park-pond-and-your-rain-barrel-have-in-common/article_10be13ef-9abb-52c3-8970-eba0427babb4.html)

February – Carbon tax – Beth Chajes

(https://www.newarkpostonline.com/features/conservation-corner-what-is-a-carbon-tax-and-how-does-it-work/article_05b3a9e2-acc8-560d-ac62-727589a3cf22.html)

March – Box turtle conservation – Jean Hedrich

(https://www.newarkpostonline.com/features/conservation-corner-how-to-make-your-yard-a-suitable-habitat-for-eastern-box-turtles/article_1b6e859a-5055-5240-95a7-485ca0989d04.html)

April – Natural solutions for combatting a warming climate – John Matayko

(https://www.newarkpostonline.com/features/conservation-corner-green-up-to-cool-down-this-spring-and-summer/article_abf8eae6-bec4-5fd3-9126-7bfc8c2a8f05.html)

May – Habitat-friendly yard care – Beth Chajes

(https://www.newarkpostonline.com/features/conservation-corner-this-spring-embrace-a-new-meaning-of-lawn-care/article_5b56d6b9-c492-505b-a5b4-c536eecd334e.html)

September - State of Delaware ban on invasive plants – Sheila Smith

(https://www.newarkpostonline.com/features/conservation-corner-delaware-bans-the-sale-of-invasive-plants/article_338991c2-9baf-5448-a548-3387e34ec836.html)

December - Making holidays more sustainable – Mikayla Rypkema

(https://www.newarkpostonline.com/features/conservation-corner-tips-for-a-more-environmentally-sustainable-holiday-season/article_a7a14461-5291-5abe-b0ab-4682eda9798a.html)

- **Earth Day Collaboration with UD and The Newark Partnership**

Members of the CAC, The Newark Partnership and UD Students for the Environment shared a table at the University's Earth Day event in April. We promoted the *Lights Out Newark* program with bird taxidermy, a personal action plan handout, and a pledge signing. This collaboration began in fall of 2021. The *Lights Out Newark* program's goal is to reduce excessive lighting of streetlamps, as well as building interiors and exteriors, that contributes to wild bird mortality during spring and fall migration. Efforts to expand the initiative with the University are ongoing and will be coordinated with the new UD Office of Sustainability. (Sustainable Newark goal 3.3)

- **Newark Center for Creative Learning (NCCL) Kids' Greenfest**

This year the CAC sponsored (with \$1000), for the first time, NCCL's Greenfest, a celebration of all things conservation and sustainability, geared primarily toward families with children of the ages served by NCCL (a K-8 school). The CAC offered educational activities about recycling and provided the opportunity to see an electric vehicle up close and personal.

- **City of Newark Community Day**

The CAC hosted a display at the City's annual event again, after a 2-year hiatus. Topics shared with community members included *Lights out Newark* hand outs and energy-saving measures. A CAC member was also on hand to show off the City's electric vehicle.

Support of Sustainable City Operations

- **Tree Planting to Increase the City's Tree Canopy**

The CAC supported the Parks and Recreation's Tree Give-Away programs in the spring and fall of 2022. The CAC allocated \$10,000 to purchase 155 native trees and shrubs in the spring and \$4,000.00 for an additional 75 trees in the fall. The trees were offered to residents on a first come, first served basis, with roughly 160 households receiving one or two plants each. Remaining trees (~7 redbuds) were planted in City parks.

The CAC also supported, through marketing and volunteering, the City's Earth Day Reforestation project, which added trees to City parks and open space.

Moreover, the CAC allocated \$1,000 of its budget for plantings to screen the new solar field at the reservoir from view from Old Paper Mill Road. (Sustainable Newark goal 4.3)

- **Community Garden for Dickey Park**

The CAC allocated \$22,500 of its budget to support the construction of a second community garden within City parks. This one is specifically designed to serve the less wealthy community around Dickey Park. Community gardens are an effective way to help residents without the necessary space to grow their own vegetables for a healthier and more sustainable diet.

- **Feasibility Study for Solar Power Installations on the Municipal Building Parking Lot**

As the Municipal Building's parking lot is due to be repaved, the CAC agreed to fund – at \$7,500 – a feasibility study to determine whether it should be made “solar-ready” during this project.

- **Grant Application to Increase the City's Electric Fleet**

The CAC provided a letter of support to be submitted with the City's application for a \$500,000 grant from Energize Delaware, which would pay for several additional electric vehicles for City operations and the requisite charging infrastructure.

- **Greenhouse Gas Inventory**

The CAC funded the development of a GHG inventory by consultant AECOM. This was completed in June 2022, in spite of challenges obtaining City-specific data on gas usage from Delmarva Power. On the CAC's recommendation, AECOM was asked to develop next steps toward lowering GHG emissions. This process has been delayed by the illness and sudden passing of AECOM's chief liaison for this project, David Athey, in late 2022.

Recommendations to City Council

- [January 2022] The CAC recommends that City Council **opt into the “high-performance” option of the Efficiency Smart program** offered through DEMEC for the following reasons:
 1. Energy efficiency conserves resources, saves our electric utility's customers money in the long run, and reduces the city's infrastructure expenses by an estimated \$3.3 million over ten years.
 2. The City of Newark has committed to reducing energy usage through programs like Efficiency Smart as goal 3.2 of its sustainability plan.
 3. The program guarantees energy savings; in fact, over the preceding contract period, the stated goals will have been exceeded by 10%. thus, the program has a positive track record in our municipality.
 4. Efficiency Smart partners with local businesses, so that the investments flow back into the

local economy.

5. While DEMEC membership includes the “basic-performance” version of Efficiency Smart, the “high-performance” version promises twice the energy savings, twice the CO2-emissions reduction, and twice the avoided cost savings. It also includes a guaranteed summer peak reduction goal, unlike the basic plan.

6. The additional cost of the “high-performance” option at \$0.0005/kwh is minimal. (This assumes 2020 electricity consumption; if the City sells more electricity, the cost per kwh would be even less.) Plus, it is estimated that the City’s cost savings will pay for this program within less than two years.

The CAC recognizes the continued importance of energy efficiency, especially in light of the ongoing climate change crisis. Reducing energy usage has, in fact, been identified as one of the most cost-effective ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The proposed (and guaranteed) high-performance Efficiency Smart program will help the City achieve the emissions reductions it has committed to in the sustainability plan, although significant further actions will also be necessary.

(Declined by City Council)

- [June 2022] The CAC recommend that the City of Newark ask AECOM to use the remaining funds from the greenhouse gas inventory contract to complete the next steps toward **developing a climate action plan**, which should include forecasting emissions, establishing reduction targets, and evaluating scenarios as far as possible.

(Approved by City Council)

- [June 2022] The CAC recommends to City Council to **establish a Newark Energy Transition (NET) Task Force** with individuals experienced in renewable electricity generation, distribution systems, energy markets, and energy justice to work with the Conservation Advisory Commission (CAC) to advise the City on clean energy-related matters by the end of calendar year 2022.

(Not acted upon by City Council yet)

Other Efforts

- **New Member Welcome Packet**

In recent years, the CAC has seen significant turnover among its membership. To improve the on-boarding experience for new members, a welcome letter was put together that summarizes guiding principles and operating procedures. It addresses the CAC’s mission, membership, meeting schedule, governance, reporting duties, and FOIA responsibilities. The letter is supplemented by a list of current-year goals, drawn from the last Annual Report, and a list of current members, including short biographies optionally contributed by

individuals. The intention is to update it regularly, at least annually.

- **Monitoring of Progress on *Sustainable Newark* Goals**

Throughout the year, the CAC received updates from City staff on the continued efforts toward meeting the goals set out in the 2019 *Sustainable Newark* plan, including:

- Chief Purchasing and Personnel Officer Jeff Martindale, on behalf of City Manager Tom Coleman
- Parks and Rec Director Joe Spadafino
- Electric Department Director Bhadresh Patel
- Chief Planner Michael Fortner (on the Comprehensive Development Plan revisions)

The CAC also met with AECOM on the greenhouse gas inventory they prepared for the City.

- **Discussions for Potential Future Action**

The CAC hosted presentations on and/or discussed the following additional topics, for consideration for future action:

- Scooter-sharing program (presentation by Breanna Bledsoe, Spin)
- Restrictions on fossil fuel infrastructure (discussion with Planning Director Renee Bensley)
- Empowerment Grants from Energize Delaware that could provide energy efficiency or renewable energy assistance to low-income residents (presentation by Jim Purcell, Energize Delaware)
- Enhancements of the Efficiency Smart energy-saving purchase incentives (presentation by Tom Coyle, Efficiency Smart, and Scott Lynch, DEMEC)
- Solar canopies over City park parking lots (discussions with Chief Purchasing Officer Jeff Martindale)
- Food waste recycling/composting (presentation by Brigid Gregory, Zero Waste Delaware)
- Cider mill in White Clay Creek State Park reconstruction (presentation by Don Sharpe, UAW Community Action Program, and Desmond Kahn, Coalition for Natural Stream Valleys) – determined to be most likely outside the purview of the Commission.

CAC Goals for 2023

For 2023, the CAC is planning to:

1. Continue outreach efforts, including articles in the *Newark Post* and tabling at Newark's Community Day and other community events.
2. Continue to evaluate the City's progress toward achieving its Sustainability Plan goals for Newark.
3. Continue to develop collaborations with The Newark Partnership, the University of Delaware's Office of Sustainability, and other entities as appropriate.
4. Continue to support efforts to grow the City's tree canopy.

5. Continue to promote the use of electric cars by the City of Newark and by residents to reduce carbon emissions.
6. Urge City Council (again) to form the Newark Energy Transition task force, so that we can get serious about transitioning to carbon-free energy.
7. Work with AECOM to formulate intermediate goals toward net-zero greenhouse gas emissions based on the 2022 greenhouse gas inventory.
8. Establish next steps for the renewable energy program.
9. Determine appropriate actions to limit the future growth of fossil fuel infrastructure.
10. Continue to support community efforts toward sustainability, such as the community garden at Dickey Park.
11. Support low- and moderate-income households in achieving energy-efficiency improvements.
12. Identify actions to improve conditions for biodiversity within the City's boundaries.
13. Identify opportunities to implement nature-based solutions to address Newark's vulnerability to urban heating and flooding.
14. Maintain the welcome packet for new CAC members.