

CONSERVATION ADVISORY COMMISSION
MINUTES

March 14, 2023

MEETING CONVENED: 7:01 p.m. Council Chambers/Microsoft Teams Hybrid

MEMBERS PRESENT: Sheila Smith (Presiding), Beth Chajes, Helga Huntley, John Mateyko, Lauren O'Connor, Andrew O'Donnell, Mahi Palanisami, Mikayla Rypkema

STAFF: Herb White, Parks & Recreation Superintendent
Jeffrey Martindale, Chief Purchasing & Personnel Officer
Nichol Scheld, Deputy City Secretary

Ms. Smith called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM FEBRUARY 14, 2023:

MOTION BY DR. HUNTLEY, SECONDED BY MR. O'DONNELL: THAT THE COMMISSION APPROVE THE FEBRUARY 14, 2023, MINUTES AS SUBMITTED BY THE SECRETARY.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE 5 – 0.

AYE: HUNTLEY, MATEYKO, O'CONNOR, O'DONNELL, SMITH.

NAY: 0.

ABSTAINED: CHAJES.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT:

None.

3. ARBOR DAY VOLUNTER OPPORTUNITY– HERB WHITE

Herb White, Parks and Recreation Department Superintendent, informed that Arbor Day and the 2023 reforestation event would be held on Friday, April 28th, 2023, at Karpinski Park starting at 9:30 am and requested volunteers from the Commission. The event would be in partnership with Delaware State Forest Service, which also donated trees and a tree match program in 2022, and 18 trees were estimated to be planted near the bottom of Karpinski Park along White Clay Creek. Mr. White described the park as a downward sloping grassy field off Old Paper Mill Road close to the solar park. He added that there was more to the park than what could be viewed from the street, including a circle path and woodland trail along the White Clay Creek. He informed that six dead ash trees would be removed ahead of the project to ensure that old trees would not fall upon new trees. The project would also include structures for wildlife cover, mulching, and removal of some invasive vegetation.

Dr. Huntley wanted to know the number of trees and their maturity. Mr. White advised that the trees were in 7-gallon pots with a caliper average of one to two inches and would have protective mesh to prevent rubbing from deer. The plan was to plant between fifteen to eighteen trees varying between

red maple, swamp white oak, eastern white pines, and black chokeberry. Mr. White offered to plant any other offerings provided by the Commission.

Ms. Smith asked Mr. White to describe the lot. Mr. White stated the shape of the park was irregular and there was more space that he wanted to reclaim later but the immediate work would be concentrated in the lower left corner. Ms. Smith if any corporations or businesses had signed up to volunteer. Mr. White explained that the event was announced earlier in the week, and he was only aware that the Delaware Forest Service was committed to helping.

Dr. Huntley asked if more trees would be planted in the future or if the plan for the park was finished. Mr. White said he was new to the City and was following a long tradition held by Tom Zaleski but felt most of the park was maintained and settled. He did not believe additional plantings would be needed after the event.

Mr. Martindale asked Mr. White to address the planting plan for the Reservoir Solar Park. Mr. White informed that an Earth Day event was scheduled for Saturday, April 22nd, 2023, and he would be out with some volunteers to mow, mulch, and plant ten or eleven low-growing evergreens to hide a fence.

Dr. Huntley asked for a high overview of future plantings for the remainder over the next year to two years. Mr. White informed that all the plants being sourced were mostly native and should fare well in the coming years. He acknowledged concerns with the removal of three Ginkgo trees which were in the middle of a traffic island at the five-point intersection at Cleveland Avenue and North Chapel Street and informed there were plans to replant several islands throughout the City, but the five-point island might not contain 100% native plantings as the site itself provided a challenge with growth.

Dr. Huntley asked the location of other focus areas for new plantings. Mr. White advised that there were areas he wanted to revisit as some of the previous attempts at reforestation were not as successful as staff hoped. He informed there had been re-planting along Paper Mill Road, Phillips Park, Kells Park, and Lewis Park so far in 2023.

Ms. Smith asked if the Commission could help in anyway. Mr. White requested that the Commission come out to help and support the parks. Ms. Scheld asked which Commissioners were volunteering and Ms. Palanisami, Ms. Rypkema, and Ms. Chajes volunteered.

4. NEWARK HOUSING AUTHORITY – JEFF MARTINDALE

Mr. Martindale introduced Maureen Jordan, Executive Director of the Newark Housing Authority (NHA), to provide a brief update regarding conversations with Energize Delaware related to funding opportunities. He continued that Energize Delaware's Empowerment program provided weatherization and other energy efficiency project grants to low- to moderate-income households which the NHA was eligible to receive for distribution to its qualified participants. He explained that the NHA qualified for grants with or without the financial support of the City and confirmed that the NHA qualified for a large five-figure amount soon (including and excluding City contribution).

Mr. Martindale listed questions the Commission should consider if granting additional funding:

- If funds are provided to Energize Delaware for a grant to the Newark Housing Authority would there be an actual value added by adding a "pass-through" organization?

- If the Commission funds a housing authority grant directly, what administrative burdens would be added to City staff in terms of confirming work completion and processing invoices?
- What precedent would be set by the Commission to begin providing funding to non-profit entities on a case-by-case basis and how would that determination towards other organizations in the City be made moving forward?

Ms. Jordan provided a summary of recommendations if the NHA was chosen to receive grant assistance and noted that the NHA had an energy audit completed by Energize Delaware Sustainable Energy Utility which generated several worthwhile recommendations from the data obtained during the study. She highlighted several suggestions to improve the quality of housing currently being offered to qualified participants:

- Replacement of existing windows
- Replacement of front and rear doors as well as those door frames
- Add additional insulation if possible and as needed in external walls
- Add additional insulation in attic spaces
- Replacement of hot water heaters with electric water heaters
- Add insulation into ductwork

Dr. Huntley requested more information as to Ms. Jordan's role with the NHA and the group's endeavors. Ms. Jordan explained that the NHA was 100% federally funded by the United States Housing and Urban Development (HUD) with funds administered to programs for low- to moderate-income families. The NHA maintained a waiting list for various programs, such as a voucher program or low-income housing program, and each had a set of eligibility guidelines. She explained that the NHA owned and managed 54 public housing units throughout the City: 36 single-bedroom units designated for seniors and 16 rental properties which were currently occupied by low- to moderate-income families. She revealed that some units had oil heat and were not energy efficient, but the NHA attempted to convert the homes to electric heat pumps. She acknowledged that funding had been provided for capital improvements, however, part of the HUD allocations was for the NHA to make capital improvements based on the number of units it maintained. She continued that there had been a "back log" of verified qualifications for numerous housing authorities by HUD and annual capital funding generally did not cover the total cost of quality improvements. She explained that the NHA gained ownership of its properties some time in 1980's with few energy improvements but the NHA had made capital improvements to modify electricity, heating, kitchen remodeling and roofing.

Dr. Huntley requested clarification on Federal funding and grants from other sources. Ms. Jordan advised that the NHA was permitted to apply for other grants to help offset some of the lack of funding but was very dependent on Federal government assistance. Dr. Huntley questioned if the NHA already received funds from Energize Delaware. Ms. Jordan confirmed the NHA applied for \$98,000 to help with the conversion from oil to electric heat pumps and believed the grant was approved for \$75,000; she hoped the Commission could help to close the gap to help with capital improvements.

Mr. Mateyko asked when the energy audit was performed, and Ms. Jordan confirmed the audit had been within the last four or five months. Mr. Mateyko asked if DNREC or any other state agency were

holding funds from an infrastructure bill. Ms. Jordan was not aware. Mr. Mateyko advised Ms. Jordan to research where funds from a particular bill were distributed. He asked if the roofs were “reflective”, and Ms. Jordan believed the roofs to be rubber or tarp. Mr. Mateyko asked if the roofs were dark colored and Ms. Jordan was unaware and reminded the conversation was regarding the NHA’s townhouses, not its apartment complex.

Mr. O’Donnell requested clarification as to what type of water heater was recommended. Ms. Jordan read from the review which did not specify a particular type of water heater beyond recommending the replacement units to be more efficient than the existing units.

Ms. Chajes asked if the tenants paid for their own utility usage. Ms. Jordan confirmed and revealed that in some cases, there was a “utility allowance” which provided tenants assistance with lower rent but did not match dollar-for-dollar for utility usage.

Dr. Huntley requested more detail regarding the “utility allowances”. Ms. Jordan explained that the allowances were updated yearly through a third-party per guidelines set by HUD. The allowances factored in the City’s water, sewer, and electric rates, as well as Delmarva’s rates. Generally, the allowance did not cover the entire utility bill so each family would receive the same allowance based on bedroom size. She added that the voucher program had been designed to assist families who could be removed from the waiting list because they became eligible to participate in an active program which would be considered as a third-party partnership between the NHA, the landlord, and the qualifying participant. She pointed out that vouchers issued by the NHA expired after 60 days, but participants could request an extension prior to the expiration date; vouchers were good for 120 days per HUD guidelines. She explained that vouchers issued by the NHA were limited to City boundaries but if a participant resided within City limits during the time of application or eligibility timeframe, the participant was not restricted to City limits. The voucher allowed for moving but the public housing program did not because the NHA owned and managed the public housing units.

Ms. Smith clarified that the grant written for the heat pump replacement was separate from the recommendations for improvements from Energize Delaware. Ms. Jordan stated the NHA focused on four units for heat pump replacements and the homes chosen to receive replacement heaters historically had higher utility burdens on the tenants because the existing heating systems depended on oil. She added that some of the recommendations would also be covered under the grant for the four units. She emphasized the NHA was seeking assistance with the remaining 12 units not heated by oil and without the additional funds from the Commission, the NHA would only be able to complete the recommendations from Energize Delaware and replace the heating units in four homes.

Mr. Martindale and Ms. Jordan agreed to return with more information as well as a dollar amount for consideration.

Dr. Huntley was interested in the idea and requested a more concrete proposal with a dollar amount. She added that the Commission should also consider whether to offer a partnership with Energize Delaware to assist low- to moderate-income household homeowners.

5. NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS PROJECT SUGGESTIONS – JOHN MATEYKO

Mr. Mateyko stated that the Synthesis Report was still being finalized in Geneva and was the final report for the process of material; other reports had been accepted by 194 countries. Mr. Mateyko

advised that he had not performed a fact check but believed almost every governmental basis for action for existing was to protect the public health safety and welfare, also known as the “Police Towers”. He informed that there had been pathways identified which detailed solutions against the “bad” things and “bad” people that have happened and were happening according to the 194 countries including the United States. These newly identified pathways were believed to be radically different from the 2022 iteration. He felt change needed to come for a democratic discussion level and not a technological or institutional discussion to help future generations. He stated that three key pathways were all places that operated at the local neighborhood and city level.

Mr. Mateyko suggested the City add a requirement into its Code that property owners capture any water that fell upon the property for return to the soil and not shipped away downstream to become a problem; he believed water should be kept as an asset for cooling as it was a natural coolant. He also suggested allowing fallen leaves to be left for habitat and nutrition for the following year’s growth. He called to have the City begin to “de-pave” in the spring and summer in small locations around the City and to evaluate the pros and cons of the process to improve the process moving forward to larger areas. He claimed certain information was not readily available to consumers to make informed decisions due to institutions’ shortfalls and strategic lack of distribution of information and the discussions needed to be with increasing family and human wellbeing according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Ms. Smith understood that the presentation was to advise on actions that could be done as an experiment on a small scale in numerous areas of the evapotranspiration concept. She indicated there had been several properties throughout the City that turned front yards into miniature forests which also helped to mitigate runoff.

Mr. White noted how the science behind the concept could be technical as well as controversial depending on which group provided the data. He stated that the area onto which everyone could connect was discussions regarding the impact of adding nature to the communities as well as the mental health, physical health, and social health of the community.

6. TRAFFIC ISLAND BEAUTIFICATION VOTE

Ms. Scheld suggested that the Commission sponsor a traffic island as way to transform its conversation into action. Ms. Smith asked for the cost and Ms. Scheld stated the cost was \$650 for the first sign. Ms. Smith asked if there were any vacant traffic islands. Ms. Scheld confirmed availability but informed there was no way to choose a specific island. Dr. Huntley questioned where the funds would be applied, and Ms. Scheld believed the funds would be applied to staff time for upkeep and maintenance.

Mr. White advised that the funding would be applied to maintenance, supporting staff and equipment used for the island. Dr. Huntley asked how a traffic island would be maintained without sponsorship. Mr. White stated existing funds would be spread out thinly to all traffic islands.

Ms. Chajes wanted to know the number of unsponsored traffic islands. Mr. White advised there were four islands without sponsorship with eight to ten island sponsorships available; four sponsors discontinued support since the beginning of the pandemic. He advised that staff had made some improvements over the last year by adding a number and color to each island though using native flowers, some lighting, and mulch. He informed the City planned to complete a much larger installation throughout all the traffic islands and there were over 310 plants being planted in the islands from the Library to the new Elkton Road Extension near Home Depot.

Ms. Smith called for a vote to fund the sponsorship of a traffic island. Ms. Scheld reiterated that the sponsorship amount would be \$650. Dr. Huntley requested to postpone the vote to add it to a “larger” conversation regarding the CAC’s budget.

Ms. Smith requested Ms. Scheld to add the vote to the next agenda.

7. GOALS

Ms. Smith went through the goals for each member to comment if they wished to keep, modify, or delete:

- Continue outreach efforts including Newark Post columns and tabling public events as possible.
 - Keep: Smith, Huntley, O’Connor, Mateyko, Palanisami
 - No comment: O’Donnell
- Continue to develop collaboration with the Newark Partnership and the University of Delaware on environmental and educational initiatives.
 - Keep: Mateyko, O’Donnell, Palanisami
 - Modify: O’Connor to add the Office of Sustainability Director of the University of Delaware to create a connection; Huntley suggested to broaden to cite the Newark Partnership and the University of Delaware as examples of collaborations
- Track and regularly evaluate the City’s process towards achieving its sustainability plan goals for Newark.
 - Keep: Huntley, Mateyko, O’Donnell, Palanisami, Rypkema, Smith
- Continue to support the efforts to grow the City’s tree canopy.
 - Keep: Huntley, Mateyko, O’Donnell, Palanisami, Rypkema, Smith
- Explore nature-based solutions to address the City’s vulnerability to Urban heating and flooding.
 - Keep: Huntley, Mateyko, Palanisami, Rypkema, Smith
 - Modify: O’Donnell suggested to change the word “explore” to “look for opportunities to implement”
- Promote the use of electric cars by the City of Newark and by residents to reduce carbon emissions.
 - Keep: Huntley, Mateyko, O’Donnell, Palanisami, Rypkema, Smith
- Promote open space in Newark.
 - Keep:
 - Delete: Huntley
 - Modify: Rypkema, Smith
- Develop and maintain a welcome packet for new CAC members including FOIA compliance

and training opportunities.

- Keep: Smith
 - Modify: O'Connor suggested to remove "develop"; O'Donnell, Smith
 - Delete: Huntley
- Investigate actions to improve conditions for biodiversity within the City's boundaries.
 - Keep: Huntley, O'Connor, O'Donnell, Smith
 - Urge City Council to form the Newark Energy Transition Committee.
 - Keep: Huntley, O'Connor, O'Donnell, Smith
 - Use the forthcoming Greenhouse Gas Inventory to formulate intermediate goals towards net zero to propose to City Council.
 - Modify: Smith change "forthcoming"; Huntley change "forthcoming" to "work with consultant AECOM to formulate intermediate goals"
 - Establish the next steps for the renewable energy program.
 - Keep: Huntley, O'Donnell, Smith

Ms. Scheld stated the modifications were being noted and would be voted on in April or May to finalize to have the goals presented to City Council.

Dr. Huntley agreed to work on the wording for Mr. O'Donnell to add a goal pertaining to a recommendation to City Council to ban future fossil fuel infrastructure within the City.

The group agreed to work on the wording for the last goal to change the renewable energy program to an "opt-in" instead of an "opt-out" for all residents.

Dr. Huntley asked if another goal should be added to address supporting sustainability efforts at the community level. Ms. O'Connor suggested that since the group participated in Community Day, it could be a Community Garden. Ms. Scheld questioned if the goal would be supported under the promotion of the green space goal. Ms. O'Connor suggested the goal be titled: Continue to support community efforts for sustainability. Ms. Smith added that the community garden would stand as an example.

Dr. Huntley suggested adding a goal to support low- to moderate-income families in their efforts to become more energy efficient. Ms. Smith questioned if the goal could be considered as a community effort project towards sustainability.

Ms. Scheld stated that a compiled list would be emailed to each committee member and a vote would be held at the April meeting; she requested that any modifications to be emailed directly to her for compilation.

8. CAC SWAG DESIGNS – JEFF MARTINDALE

Mr. Martindale met with the City's purchasing team regarding possible "swag" and worked to make sure the logo conveyed that the City and the Commission were one group working together. Mr. Martindale provided examples of the brand logo as well as the link to show the polos currently utilized by

Parks and Recreation.

The committee discussed shirt and tablecloth options and would advise Mr. Martindale.

MOTION BY DR. HUNTLEY, SECONDED BY MR. O'DONNELL: ALLOCATE UP TO \$1,500 OF THE CAC'S 2023 BUDGET TO PURCHASE BRANDED GEAR FOR CAC EVENTS.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE 7 – 0.

AYE: HUNTLEY, MATEYKO, O'CONNOR, O'DONNELL, PALANISAMI, RYPKEMA, SMITH.

NAY: 0.

ABSTAIN: CHAJES.

9. FOSSIL FUEL BAN – ANDREW O'DONNELL

Postponed.

10. MONTHLY CONSERVATION ARTICLE WITH THE NEWARK POST – SHEILA SMITH

- February - Tree Canopy (Oak Trees) – Sheila Smith
- March – Greenhouse Gas Inventory – Beth Chajes
- April – Green Incentives – Helga Huntley
- May – Tick Species in Delaware – Lauren O'Connor

Ms. Smith's article was published in March and Dr. Huntley's would be published in April.

11. OLD/NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Smith suggested adding to the next agenda for the Commission to either write a resolution or funding to begin shading down lights also known as Dark Skies.

Ms. Rypkema wanted to add UD Earth Day to the next agenda.

12. NEXT MEETING – APRIL 11, 2023

The Commission reviewed the draft April agenda.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:07 p.m.

Danielle S. Mapp-Purcell
Administrative Professional Paralegal

/dmp