

The City of Newark

Conservation Advisory Commission

Annual Report for 2023

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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 wet lands, 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 2023 are listed below. Chair and co-chair were elected in April 2023 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	3/15/26
Mayor's Appointment	Mahi Palanisami	7/25/22	3/15/24
District 1	Helga Huntley (Co-Chair)	3/15/19	3/15/25
District 2	Michael Cambron	11/13/23	3/15/26
District 3	Andrew O'Donnell	3/15/21	3/15/24
District 4	Savannah Sipes	3/15/23	3/15/26
District 5	Lauren O'Connor	6/27/22	3/15/24
District 6	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/17983 (pdf format).

Secretarial services are provided to the CAC by a member of the City Secretary's office; Nichol Scheld, Tara Schiano, and Jordan Herring served as secretaries for the CAC in 2023. In addition, Jeff Martindale (Chief Purchasing and Personnel Officer) regularly attends CAC meetings as liaison to the City administration.

CAC Activities and Accomplishments 2023

Recommendations to City Council

- [April 2023] NET task force:

“The Conservation Advisory Commission (CAC) recommends that City Council prioritize appointing members to the Newark Energy Transition (NET) task force, as envisioned by the Sustainable Newark Plan, adopted in November 2019. The NET task force shall work with the CAC to advise City Council on pathways to achieve the transition from fossil-fuel- based to renewable energy that is required in the next 10 to 20 years in order to maintain livable conditions on Earth. Such a separate task force will bring the necessary expertise in renewable energy generation, distribution systems, energy markets, and energy justice. The CAC recommends that membership of the NET task force not be restricted to volunteers residing in the City of Newark in order to benefit from the best expertise available in the region. To maximize the time available to achieve the clean energy transition, the CAC recommends that the NET task force be established no later than September 2023. The CAC will provide suggestions for the NET task force membership upon Council direction.”

Not yet scheduled by City Council for discussion.

- [April 2023] Fossil fuel infrastructure:

“Whereas the City of Newark is committed to mitigating its contributions to global climate change and has therefore set a goal of net-zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2060 in its Sustainability Plan,

Whereas the state of Delaware’s Climate Action Plan and Governor John Carney have committed to a 25% reduction of GHG emissions by 2025,

Whereas the United States has pledged to reduce its GHG emissions substantially to limit global temperature increases to 2 C by 2100 as part of the Paris Agreement,

Whereas stationary fuels, including natural gas, fuel oil, and propane, constitute the second largest source of GHG emissions (according to the City’s GHG Inventory Report for 2019),

Whereas requiring new construction to be all-electric is a common GHG reduction strategy cited in the City’s GHG Inventory Report,

Whereas reductions in the use of fossil fuels also leads to cleaner air (supporting the City’s Sustainability Plan Goal 4.7), reduced explosion hazards, reduced exposure to volatile fuel prices, and simplified home appliance options,

Whereas the City is committed to moving its electricity supply toward renewable sources, thereby ensuring a smaller GHG emissions footprint for electric infrastructure over fossil fuel-based alternatives,

Whereas many other cities across the US have already banned new fossil fuel infrastructure construction,

therefore, the Conservation Advisory Commission recommends that City Council ban all new fossil fuel infrastructure construction within the city limits.

Examples of new fossil fuel infrastructure include:

- New underground natural gas pipeline extensions
- New natural gas hardware in new building construction
- The installation of new natural gas furnaces, natural gas water heaters, and fuel oil boilers
- Construction or installation of new gasoline and diesel fueling stations, tanks, and pumps
- The installation of new propane tanks and burners;

and further recommends that at this time the replacement of existing fossil fuel infrastructure with similar items remain permitted, but that the City implement an incentive program for residents, businesses, and industry to replace fossil fuel-based HVAC and water heating systems with electric versions.”

Not yet scheduled by City Council for discussion.

- [October 2023] Dickey Park improvements

“We, the Conservation Advisory Commission, recommend to the City of Newark’s Parks & Recreation Department to pursue improvements to Dickey Park according to the opportunities for best practices outlined in the document provided by Joe Spadafino at our September meeting as well as to increase the pervious surface and reduce the lawn area overall. The overall goals should be to renaturalize the park, to improve climate resilience, and to achieve greater environmental justice for the surrounding neighborhoods and city overall. We would like this park to become a model for future park renovations.”

Not yet scheduled by City Council for discussion.

- [December 2023] Limitations of future gas station developments

“Whereas the City of Newark is committed to mitigating its contributions to global climate change and has therefore set a goal of net-zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2060 in its **Sustainability Plan**,

whereas the state of Delaware’s **Climate Action Plan** and Governor John Carney have committed to a 25% reduction of GHG emissions by 2025, increasing the number of zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs) on Delaware roads, and building out the electric vehicle (EV) charging network,

whereas the Delaware Department of Natural Resources (DNREC) and Environmental Control has finalized regulations to adopt the **Advanced Clean Car II program**, which requires automakers to send at least 43% of new vehicles to be ZEVs by 2027 and increases to 82% by 2032, joining 17 states, including Maryland and New Jersey,

whereas the reduced demand for internal combustion engines (ICEs) may eventually leave

underutilized gas stations as stranded assets, becoming the next **blight** in the city,

whereas the United States has pledged to reduce its GHG emissions substantially to limit global temperature increases to 2 C by 2100 as part of the **Paris Agreement**,

whereas **the Inflation Reduction Act** and **Bipartisan Infrastructure Law** created federal tax credits and rebates for ZEV and charging infrastructure,

whereas in 2019, Newark vehicles alone emitted over 84,000 metric tons of CO2 (according to the City's **GHG Inventory Report** for 2019),

whereas Delaware, and especially New Castle County, has dangerous levels of **ground-level ozone and particulate pollution**, both of which can cause premature death and other serious health effects such as asthma attacks, cardiovascular damage, and developmental and reproductive harm, particularly in children, older adults, pregnant women, and people living with chronic disease,

whereas proximity to gas stations **lowers home values**,

whereas reductions in the use of fossil fuels also leads to cleaner air (supporting the City's **Sustainability Plan** Goal 4.7), reduced explosion hazards, reduced risk of hazardous spills, and reduced exposure to volatile fuel prices,

whereas the City is committed to moving toward **renewable electricity supply sources**, thereby ensuring a smaller GHG emissions footprint for EVs over ICEs,

whereas the City of Newark is already served by a **dense network of gas stations**,

whereas there is a precedent in greater Newark of an existing successful service station that offers **only EV charging stations** instead of fuel pumps located at 274 E Chestnut Hill Rd,

whereas the City's primary revenue stream is from electricity sales and a single EV-only service station with 10 DC fast charging stations could generate approximately **\$0.5 million** annually in additional city revenue, becoming a net gain from visiting EVs instead of a net loss of local currency to petroleum companies,

whereas the **CAC's mission** enables it to recommend code changes related to natural resource preservation and usage (such as clean air),

whereas many **other cities across the US** have already banned new fossil fuel infrastructure;

therefore, the Conservation Advisory Commission recommends that City Council condition that all new service station construction be limited as follows within the city limits:

- Only EV charging stations may be installed
- No new fossil fuel infrastructure (gasoline and/or diesel storage tanks, pumps, pipelines, etc.) may be installed,

and further recommends that at this time the maintenance of existing fossil fuel service stations with similar items remain permitted but that the number of fuel pumps may not be increased beyond what is currently installed."

Not yet scheduled by City Council for discussion.

Outreach

As the CAC has become increasingly active in outreach events over recent years, it was decided to purchase a tent and branded table cloth, as well as shirts for CAC members with a logo on the front and “Working for a Sustainable Newark” on the back to support these efforts.

- **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. Conservation Corner articles are published both in print and digitally on the *Newark Post*’s website (www.newarkpostonline.com).

Topics covered in 2023 were:

February – Cooling strategies for Newark to adapt to climate change – John Mateyko
(https://www.newarkpostonline.com/features/conservation-corner-cool-newark-systems-neighborhood-habitat/article_968befd7-a9ed-5206-bb75-3e38a705ed3f.html)

March – Champion trees – Sheila Smith
(https://www.newarkpostonline.com/features/conservation-corner-a-look-at-newarks-champion-trees/article_fed9a325-f026-56ca-8cd9-1eb309bbe263.html)

April – Incentives to be green – Helga Huntley
(https://www.newarkpostonline.com/features/conservation-corner-incentives-to-be-green-in-newark/article_24738bf3-2823-591a-8166-0c9fbcbb563f.html)

July – E-bikes – Helga Huntley
(https://www.newarkpostonline.com/features/conservation-corner-e-ffortless--biking/article_70bfe439-91b3-50cf-92c5-41ccccf2f39e.html)

August – Climate change solutions – John Mateyko
(https://www.newarkpostonline.com/features/conservation-corner-new-climate-solutions-nature-equity-and-well-being/article_09c98076-40b5-11ee-9c4b-774e1f4dc19c.html)

September – English ivy – Sheila Smith
(https://www.newarkpostonline.com/features/conservation-corner-english-ivy---from-loved-to-loathed/article_f64588c4-5cbb-11ee-84a7-27f3b52d1a47.html)

November – Indigenous perspective on sustainability – Savannah Sipes
(https://www.newarkpostonline.com/features/conservation-corner-redefining-sustainability-through-the-indigenous-perspective/article_a142bc2a-76f6-11ee-a20b-4f77e364c3eb.html)

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

The CAC contributed \$1000 to sponsor 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 birds and light-pollution, as well as exhibits of several electric vehicles.

- **University of Delaware Earth Day Celebration**

Members of the CAC again participated in the UD Earth Day event, with a table to share information about the *Lights Out Newark* program. The goal of this program is to reduce excessive lighting of street lamps, as well as building interiors and exteriors, that contributes to wild bird mortality during spring and fall migration. Signatures were also collected for a petition organized by UD's Graduate Student Organization to ask the university to reduce its night-time light pollution.

- **City of Newark Community Day**

The CAC hosted a display at the City's annual event. Topics shared with community members included the Sustainability Plan, climate change preparedness, *Lights Out Newark*, native plants, and electric vehicles. Poor weather cut the event short, unfortunately, but a good number of visitors participated in the survey of important sustainability issues. The CAC also raffled off a tree for local planting.

Support of Sustainable City Operations

- **Increasing the City's Electric Vehicle Fleet**

The purchase of a new electric van to support the operations of the Parking Division was supported with \$38,000 of CAC funding.

- **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 2023. The CAC allocated \$15,000 to purchase 119 (spring) + 100 (fall) native trees and shrubs to be distributed to residents on a first-come-first-served basis, with a limit of 2 items per household per year. 210 households received plants; 6 plants were left over and planted in City parks (aside from the one raffled off on Community Day).

The CAC also supported a public tree planting event, through publicizing and volunteering, in Karpinski Park in April.

- **Dickey Park**

One of the City's most popular parks, Dickey Park was the subject of multiple CAC discussions.

To supplement its 2022 funding to support establishing a community garden in Dickey Park,

the CAC allocated an additional \$7,500 to fund the construction of an ADA accessible entrance. The community garden is an effective way to help residents without the necessary space on their own property to grow their own vegetables for a healthier and more sustainable diet.

Member of the public brought the issue of run-off from the street entering the gardening plots to the attention of the CAC. The CAC facilitated discussions with the Parks & Recreation Department to find a temporary fix while planning for a long-term solution as part of a large-scale investment into the Park.

- **Native Plantings**

The CAC funded the planting of native shrubs around the Newark Reservoir Solar Park with \$1,500, supplementing 2022 allocations. In addition to supporting the local ecosystems, the plantings were intended to shield the protective fence from the view of passersby and make the Solar Park more acceptable to nearby residents.

- **Light Pollution**

The CAC continued to monitor the City's efforts to reduce both its electric use and light pollution by dimming its street lights as much as possible, while providing adequate light for road users and crime prevention. Discussions were started to identify the ideal light spectrum (or "color") that would serve road users without unnecessarily impacting nocturnal wildlife. In addition, efforts were begun to determine whether very bright lights used in City parks could be reduced to support local wildlife without excessively impacting park users. Phillips Park was suggested as a potential pilot location for a "dark-sky" compliant space.

- **Newark Historic Train Station**

The City own the historic train station building, which currently hosts the local history museum, operated by the Newark Historical Society. At the end of 2022, the need for extensive and expensive renovations for the building was identified. The CAC contributed \$5,000 to partially fund energy efficiency upgrades to the building's windows, in support of the Sustainability Plan goal 3.3 to reduce its energy footprint.

- **Bikability**

The CAC participated in discussions of improving the City's bikability. In particular, it provided input for the planned improvements along Chrysler Avenue and initial comments on the Newark Bike Plan update.

- **Urban Composting**

A representative from Food Cycle Science presented his company's counter-top machines to dehydrate and cut up food waste. The company has partnered with other cities (mostly in Canada, and mostly in pilot stages) to subsidize the sale of these devices to encourage keeping food waste out of landfills. The CAC chose not to pursue a partnership at this time, but to reconsider it at a future time.

- **Traffic Island Beautification**

The CAC considered supporting the beautification of a traffic island on a city street. However, it was decided that this project was not sufficiently aligned with CAC goals of improving sustainability.

Other Efforts

- **Energy Efficiency**

The CAC designated \$10,000 of its budget to support a **super-rebate program**, doubling the incentives available through Efficiency Smart for the purchase of energy efficient window air conditioning units. This program was intended to assist low- to moderate-income home owners and renters with reducing their energy consumption.

- **Attempted Community NGO Partnerships**

The CAC discussed a collaboration with **Powering Our Future (POF)** to replace gas-powered lawn equipment with electric versions. The Commission approved funding in the amount of \$2,000 to support a leaf-blower exchange program. However, POF decided not to move forward due to logistic concerns.

The CAC invited the **Newark Housing Authority (NHA)** to implement a program, to be funded by the CAC with \$12,500, to improve the energy efficiency of the NHA's 16 rental units, reserved for low- and moderate-income families, through weatherization. While both parties agreed to the outlines of the program, the NHA did not follow through with a detailed plan submission, required to release funds.

Due to the City accidentally cutting down trees along a piece of land about to be sold to the **Newark Center for Creative Learning (NCCL)**, the CAC agreed to support replacement plantings of mostly native and no invasive plants in this area with \$3,000. The project did not come to fruition in 2023 and will be reconsidered in 2024.

CAC Expenditures 2023

City Council allocated \$100,000 in its 2023 budget for the CAC to support conservation and sustainability efforts. The CAC approved the following expenditures:

NCCL Kids' Greenfest	\$ 1,000
Newark Reservoir Solar Park native plantings	\$ 1,500
Tent, CAC-branded table cloth and t-shirts	\$ 1,500
Energy efficiency upgrades for the historic Newark Train Station	\$ 5,000
ADA accessible entrance to the Dickey Park Community Garden	\$ 7,500
Efficiency Smart super-rebate program for window AC units	\$10,000
Tree give-away programs (spring & fall)	\$15,000
Electric van for Parking Division	\$38,000
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>\$79,500</i>

Items below were approved but not expended:

[Powering Our Future electric leaf blower exchange	\$ 2,000]
[NCCL native plantings	\$ 3,000]
[Newark Housing Authority weatherization	\$12,500]

