

CONSERVATION ADVISORY COMMISSION
MINUTES

April 15, 2025

MEETING CONVENED: 7:02 p.m. Council Chambers

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mike Cambron, Helga Huntley, George Irvine, Andrew O'Donnell, Sheila Smith

STAFF: Jordan Herring, Administrative Professional I
Jeff Martindale, Assistant City Manager – Operations
Renee Bensley, Planning & Development Director
Katya Raskin, Planner I (*Virtual*)
Paula Ennis, Parks & Recreation Director
Herbert White, Parks Superintendent
Tara Schiano, City Secretary (*Virtual*)

Dr. Huntley called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MEETING HELD ON MARCH 11, 2025:

- Postponed until May due to the commission members not reading the minutes. Dr. Huntley pointed out they were sent well in advance by staff.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT:

- There was no public comment.

3. TREE INVENTORY – PAULA ENNIS/HERBERT WHITE (20 MINUTES)

- Parks & Recreation Director Paula Ennis and Parks Superintendent Herb White presented the CAC with an updated tree inventory funding request memo.
- Mr. Irvine and Mr. Cambron asked questions related to data collection, the existence of previous data, and the City's geographical information system (GIS). Mr. White explained that the data would be collected and stored in the City's GIS system, which can be used to maintain and produce the City's canopy goals in the future. Pre-existing data would be added and updated to the system. Mr. White has proposed that an outward-facing story map of the GIS would be available online, with incorporated filters that can be used to look for specific tree demographics collected in previous or current inventories.
- Dr. Huntley noted the last memo about this inventory was vague and appreciated the detail incorporated as a part of this revision. She asked how the totals were calculated, explaining the estimate comes to \$19,996.40 to 19,999.60, but when you look at the line items, they vary by \$6,000. She felt the range in the total cost should be more like \$12,000. Mr. White explained that a higher budget allows them to inventory more trees, more trees means that the cost per tree decreases because of the quantity. In addition, a lower budget would mean

using seasonal in-house staff, which would mean the data would need to be vetted by full-time permanent staff, ultimately leading to extra work. By using a consultant, it may cost more, but the data that will be gained will be more accurate and will be completed more efficiently.

- Mr. Martindale clarified in the estimate, the 2 – 3 land stewards are charged at \$17.71 per hour. The range is variable based on whether you use two or three land stewards and the number of trees inventoried. Utilizing two land stewards means you would use more contracted staff and inventory more trees, so you would take the first number in the total cost range for the land stewards and add it to the higher number in the contracted staff costs. This gives you the bottom of your range and you survey 944 trees. If you reverse those using three land stewards, and reduce the contracted staff and quantity down to 188 trees, you get the higher estimate with less trees surveyed.
- Dr. Huntley asked for an estimated timeline. Mr. White estimated the timeframe for getting the first round of data from this inventory would be 12 months. The current plan is to start with larger parks and adjacent trails. Part of the assessment will be to also identify high-risk trees.

MOTION BY DR. HUNTLEY, SECONDED BY MR. CAMBRON: THAT THE CONSERVATION ADVISORY COMMISSION (CAC) ALLOCATE UP TO \$20,000 OF THEIR 2025 BUDGET TO FUND THE TREE INVENTORY AS OUTLINED AND PROPOSED BY THE PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE: 5 TO 0.

AYE: CAMBRON, IRVINE, HUNTLEY, O'DONNELL, SMITH.

NAY: 0.

ABSTAIN: 0.

ABSENT: MATEYKO.

- Ms. Ennis added that the spring tree giveaway program would be on May 10th, with registration opening April 21st. The CAC provided feedback on potential questions to ask the residents as part of a subsequent survey, to which Dr. Huntley would compile and forward to the department.
- Dr. Huntley notified the department of her concern that live and healthy trees were being killed as collateral damage amid the department's removal of dead, infested ash trees along the Christina River. Mr. White explained this is due to the specific process used to remove trees infected by the Emerald Ash Borer.

4. UPDATE FROM THE CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE & 2025 BUDGET – JEFF MARTINDALE (5 MINUTES)

- Jeff Martindale shared that there was not much to report from the City Manager's Office. There has been no confirmation whether several previously discussed grants would now not be awarded, but that is currently staff's assumption. The City's lobbyist – James DeChene of Blue Hen Strategies – is working hard to convey this loss of grant funding to the State. However, the bill which would modify the City's charter to allow the City to charge the

University of Delaware a per capita tax recently passed the State House of Representatives and is moving to the Senate for approval. Mr. Martindale cautioned that if grant funding is unavailable for some of these initiatives, such as the climate action plan, staff may approach the CAC for financial support from their budget. For this reason, it would be prudent for the CAC to refrain from making any large budget allocations. Ms. Herring noted the CAC has allocated \$38,000 of their 2025 budget (all to Parks & Recreation) thus far, and should consider this when discussing how much the CAC may need to hold onto for future allocation requests.

5. ELECTRIC RATE STUDY STATUS UPDATE – JEFF MARTINDALE (5 MINUTES)

- Mr. Martindale explained that this process has two steps: a cost-of-service analysis and the actual rate study. While the first step was complete, staff identified a critical error made by the consultant and are waiting for their revision before completing the second step. He hoped there would be information about it posted online, if not discussed by Council prior to the CAC's May meeting.
- Dr. Huntley expressed concern that the CAC could not provide input on the upcoming ordinance. They wish to see the rate study prior to an ordinance proposal so they could give feedback to Council, but they could not give that feedback without seeing the rate study, which will not be released before Council's discussion. Ms. Smith wondered what the CAC could give feedback on in accordance to the rate study, to which Mr. O'Donnell and Dr. Huntley provided clarification on different aspects of the study, such as time of use rates (no longer being considered as part of this study) and charging for peak usage rather than total usage.
- Ms. Bensley noted the rate study would likely be discussed by Council first before conducting the ordinance process, to which a CAC meeting may be able to take place in between that time. Dr. Huntley requested the CAC keep an eye out for the upcoming discussion of the electric rate study, and intends to add for discussion on their next agenda.

6. DISCUSSION OF THE CAC RECOMMENDATION REQUESTING THE PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT TO COLLABORATE WITH THE CAC ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (15 MINUTES) – PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT REPRESENTATIVE ATTENDING

- Dr. Huntley stated this is a revised recommendation to City Council from 2024, for Council to set "working with the CAC on sustainable development" as a priority for the Planning & Development Department. Renee Bensley, Planning & Development Director, attended to provide insight and updates which have occurred since that 2024 recommendation which may affect this recommendation, such as ongoing projects within the department correlating to sustainable development. Such projects include making new housing EV-charger ready, potentially implementing EV chargers in areas with only street parking, and following the State regulations if they choose to standardize their various building codes to include the energy code.

- Ms. Smith expressed concerns that the CAC initially proposed this item in 2024 because they often found themselves in a position where it was too late to provide feedback as a public body on the sustainability of development projects brought to City Council for approval. Dr. Huntley noted this issue pertained to the overarching law rather than specific developers or projects, which led to the discussion with Ms. Bensley that the CAC should focus on fixing the law. Hence, the developer must follow approved sustainable guidelines rather than tackling each individual project.
- Ms. Bensley recommended approving a recommendation for this subject sooner rather than later, so it can be considered during Council's prioritization discussion.
- **(Final recommendation: [Attached here.](#))**

MOTION BY DR. HUNTLEY, SECONDED BY MR. IRVINE: THAT THE CONSERVATION ADVISORY COMMISSION (CAC) RECOMMEND THAT CITY COUNCIL INCLUDE ON THE 2025 PRIORITY LIST OF THE PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT TO IDENTIFY AREAS IN THE CODE TO IMPROVE THE SUSTAINABILITY OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE CITY.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE: 5 TO 0.

AYE: CAMBRON, HUNTLEY, IRVINE, O'DONNELL, SMITH.

NAY: 0.

ABSTAIN: 0.

ABSENT: MATEYKO.

7. ENERGY EFFICIENCY INITIATIVES – ANDREW O'DONNELL (15 MINUTES)

- Mr. O'Donnell noted his previous idea to buy renewable energy credits (RECs) with potential new funding that may become available to the City with the closure of the Indian River Power Plant. However, he believed this idea may not currently be the best idea. Instead, he proposed the idea to use what the City already has, specifically their affiliations with Energize Delaware and Efficiency Smart. He requested the CAC brainstorm potential free energy efficiency initiatives they can pursue in the future. Additionally, he suggested a potential induction burner rebate program or giveaway. Dr. Huntley asked if these could be added to Efficiency Smart's list of appliances. Mr. Martindale responded it could not, as the City's previous rebate program with Efficiency Smart utilized their existing program, with the City serving as a middleman between Efficiency Smart and the public. However, he would reach out to Chief of Community Engagement Jayme Gravell to discuss social media efforts for Mr. O'Donnell's first idea.

8. ENGLISH IVY REMOVAL – SHEILA SMITH (15 MINUTES)

- Postponed until May.

9. MONTHLY CONSERVATION ARTICLE WITH THE NEWARK POST – HELGA HUNTLEY (5 MINUTES)

- Ms. Smith stated two articles have been sent to The Newark Post, but have not yet been published. However, the Conservation Corner articles still have significant engagement. She was currently working on an article about Master Naturalists LLP.

10. OLD/NEW BUSINESS (5 MINUTES)

- Ms. Smith requested the CAC be sent City Council agendas at the time of their publishing. Ms. Herring noted the City Council's agendas are posted on the website 7 days before the meeting, and the website calendar lists all meetings throughout the year. Dr. Huntley believed it would be more beneficial if she were specifically notified whenever CAC items were scheduled for a Council agenda, rather than being sent every Council agenda published.

11. NEXT MEETING – MAY 13, 2025

MOTION BY DR. HUNTLEY, SECONDED BY MR. O'DONNELL: TO ADJOURN THIS MEETING.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:06 p.m.

Jordan Herring
Administrative Professional I

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