

City of Ann Arbor Environmental Commission – Meeting Minutes

June 23, 2011

G.C. Larcom, Jr. Municipal Building
301 E. Huron, Ann Arbor, MI

Call to order:

Chair, John Koupal called meeting to order

Roll Call:

Present:

10 – Christopher Graham, Carsten Hohnke, John Koupal, Rita Loch-Caruso, Gwen Nystuen, David Stead, Valerie Strassberg, Kirk Westphal, Jamie Woolard, David Wright

Absent:

3 – John German, Susan Hutton, Margie Teall

Staff Present:

Jamie Kidwell
Matthew Naud

Approval of Agenda:

Motion approved

Motion by Commissioner Westphal, seconded by Commissioner Hohnke

Approval of Minutes:

None to approve

Public Commentary:

None

Unfinished Business:

None

New Business:

Environmental Indicators

- Environmental Coordinator Naud presented new data on Ann Arbor's environmental indicators and suggested that each environmental commission meeting highlight one or two or the City's 60 indicators associated with the State of Our Environment report (a2gov.org/soe)
 - Data related to the indicators is published on Ann Arbor's website
- *Overview of First Indicator – Total Tons Recycled*
 - Six months in two the new recycling program and have seen a 13% increase

- Good trend with this indicator
 - Potential for Sustainable Communities Working Group to evaluate indicator
- Commissioner Loch-Carus: Suggested that total tons recycled is not the best indicator, but instead indicator should show reduction in tons sent to landfill
- Naud: Total tons recycled is just one indicator linked to recycling and waste. Also look at total tons composted, percentage of waste diverted, total waste per capita, and total tons land filled. 43% waste diverted from the landfill in 2010.
- Commissioner Hohnke: What is the waste diversion goal for the City?
- Naud: Waste diversion goal is 60% in the Solid Waste Plan but not sure if this goal includes residential and commercial.
- Commissioner Koupal: Could the increase in tons recycled and waste diverted be attributed to single-stream recycling?
- Naud: Suggested this question be directed to Solid Waste and Recycling Coordinator Tom McMurtrie
- Commissioner Nystuen: Total tons recycled level in 2010 similar to that in 2001. Inquired if this was linked to more commercial recycling.
- Naud: Indicator accounts for the total amount recycled. Single-stream recycling started last year and the values for this indicator use year-end numbers. City does not yet have fiscal year-end numbers.
- Commissioner Westphal: Suggested commission should think about how we present the data. Do the trend arrows fully capture the data? Does the one-page State of Our Environment Report capture enough information?
- Naud: Philadelphia Greenworks (http://www.phila.gov/green/greenworks/pdf/MOS_AnnIRprt2010.pdf) hit 18% diversion which is four times better than four years ago. Ann Arbor's diversion rate has been over 20% for 20 years. Ann Arbor sets high bar.
- Commissioner Stead: What is the baseline that we should be comparing to?
- Commissioner Westphal: Confusion over the direction of the arrow in the State of Our Environment Report. The arrow pointing upward means the trend is improving, but with indicators, such as greenhouse gas emissions, the upward arrow may be confusing. The upward arrow may be interpreted as increasing emissions.
- Commissioner Koupal: State of Our Environment Report as a template to assess indicators and evaluate whether to make changes to indicators.
- Commissioner Stead: Inquired if proposed idea is to look at one or two indicators each meeting.
- Naud: Yes, if this is a valuable exercise especially at televised meeting.
- Commissioner Koupal: This is a valuable exercise if accompanied by a formal presentation and Sustainable Communities Working Group should prepare ideas on metrics.
- *Potential New Indicator – Stormwater Utility Credits*
 - 1,500 parcels claiming to be Riversafe homes
 - 832 rain barrel credits
 - 167 rain gardens or cistern credits
 - Will bring this data to Sustainable Communities group to see if it is a valuable indicator for stormwater
- Revisions to State of Our Environment Report
 - Reworked format and distributed copy by email to commission
 - Summary page enlarged
 - Now includes QR code to help drive people to the website

- Minor content updates to recent initiatives and awards
 - Commission should provide feedback for any changes or new additions
- Commissioner Koupal: Asked Naud to explain to graphs associated with the stormwater credits.
- Naud: First graph shows credits given out to residents, single-family homes. Second graph shows 5 years of data with credits and detention basins. It shows combined data and the trend over time.
- Commissioner Stead: Suggested commission put together a schedule to review indicators.
- Naud: Send preferences for order to help build a schedule.
- Commissioner Hohnke: Should look first to indicators is poor condition and that are continuing to trend downward. This would provide basis for new policy recommendations to council.
- Potential Indicators: Particulate levels, single occupancy trips, car pool commute trips, structures in floodplain, greenhouse gas emissions, vehicle miles traveled, electricity use, natural gas use, urban forest diversity
- Policy initiatives to moving forward to address these indicators: new urban forestry plan and new floodplain initiatives and ordinances

Reports from Staff:

PACE Update from Naud

- Draft report that is required under state law is complete
- Internal review complete and now distributed for external review (banks, commercial property owners, property managers, green architects, and environmental commission)
- Starting to collect feedback
- Includes process and general summaries
- Bring comments to Naud or to Wendy Barrott (wbarrott@a2gov.org), the lead contact on PACE
- Resolution to City Council in August and program set to start in October
- Commissioner Wright: Concern over the cost test for PACE. Idea is for PACE to become a funding mechanism for renewables and energy efficiency. Requirement now to have cost savings that exceed the expenses. Businesses downtown that participated in DDA program may not qualify because of the payback period.
- Naud: Ten-year payback may be set in state law. Will double-check with state PACE law.

Sustainability Framework Update from Kidwell

- Produced a collection of one-page summaries from each
- Not intended to replace plans, but to put plan goals in a central location
- Share this summary with council, commissions, and public to communicate city goals
- Each one-page summary includes ten goals per plan and three objectives per goal
- Collection is first lens to look at the plans and the foundation for considering how to organize city goals
- Looking for feedback on this tool
 - Does the layout and format work?
 - Is this a useful tool?

- Commissioner Hohnke: Useful to have all of this high-level information in one place. Expressed interest in sharing this with council once completed. What is the difference between master plans and council-approved plans since master plans are also approved by council?
- Kidwell: Tried to make a distinction between master plans and others.
- Naud: Summary collection is a tool to organize and pull together the City's 28 plans. Environmental commission is the first external review of this document. How can we make this tool more helpful for the commission, new commissioners? Council resolutions, like green energy goals, not worked into this yet. This is meant to be a living document with a web component.
- Commissioner Loch-Caruso: Need to define groupings of plans.
- Kidwell: Please provide any other feedback on supplemental information for this document.
- Commissioner Koupal: Should this document look at progress towards goals?
- Kidwell: May be a component for the website and not the printed document.
- Commissioner Stead: Need to link this to the State of Our Environment Report and point to the initiatives that we are working on, such as idling ordinance.
- Naud: First question is how to organize plans and plan goals. Staff is creating a database of all plan goals and objectives. Kidwell, Naud, and Wendy Rampson are working to bring together a meeting of planning, environment, and energy commission on September 27th to review the framework and drive the sustainability action plan.
- Kidwell: Trying to get staff to look at plan goals in relation to our environmental goals.
- Commissioner Westphal: Reduce approvals size and include map or visual.
- Commissioner Nystuen: Title does not communicate purpose of document. Concerned with legal entity of the master plan.
- Naud: Document tries to recognize the hierarchy of plans.
- Commissioner Graham: Should include Capital Improvements Plan and should refer to where plans originated (council-driven, citizen-driven, etc.).
- Kidwell: CIP is on list to include. Working with staff to complete summaries so this draft does not include all the plans yet.

Idling Ordinance Update from Naud

- Aim is from idling ordinance to go to council as a communication item on July 18th
- Council will decide how to take action
- Spoke with Councilmember Teall to strategize for council

Reports from Committees:

Update of Transportation Committee by Matthew Naud

Review of Green Fleet Policy

- Commissioners Hutton and German met with Tom Gibbons, fleet manager for Ann Arbor
- Policy is outdated in terms of tier emission standards
- Currently collect hours of use per vehicle instead of mileage
- Kidwell working with data to explain trends and patterns
- Next step is to synthesize fueling data (from last four years) for detailed analysis
- Group will reconvene second week in July

Biofuels

- Suggested by Commissioner German that City of Ann Arbor should not support biofuels produced from food sources
- Should we take closer look at the City's biofuel policy
- Commissioner Wright: Most alternative fuels are bio-based, so this would limit our options severely.

Update of Water Committee by Commissioner Loch-Caruso

Planning for invitations for council of watershed groups

- Craig Hupy from City of Ann Arbor supportive of this initiative
- Help the City in response to non-point source pollutant permit requirement
- Intent is to use water committee with quarterly meetings as a mechanism for integrating effort and interest across the watershed

Green streets

- Bring Washtenaw Area Transportation Study (WATS) into the conversation
- Attended WATS public meeting and meeting was not well attended
- WATS charged with determining how federal dollars can be spent on roads
- WATS interested in pervious pavement and transportation safety issues

Sylvan Street

- Installed pervious pavement and is doing well
- Commissioner Strassberg doing pro-bono work to monitor how pervious pavement is functioning

State of Our Environment Report Indicators

- Committee intends to look at indicators

Update of Sustainable Communities Committee by Commissioner Westphal

- Still trying to set up a meeting
- Planning Commission looking at R4C and R2A zoning
 - Includes mainly student housing and private residences around the downtown core
 - Neighborhoods recommended for down zoning
 - Looking to make recommendations for building form and scale and for new construction
 - Looking at unit types and occupancy in the zoning code
 - Unit type and occupancy language may encourage larger units and the focus should shift to creating more of a balance of units

Update of Natural Features Committee by Commissioner Graham

Update of Natural Features Map

- Jason Tallant at NAP has intern using existing imagery and software to model the improvements in our natural features maps

- Previously based on data from 1990
- Information is needed to improve stewardship of natural features

Parks Millage

- Concerned about vulnerability of millage
- Combined with natural areas program
- Parks harbor majority of City's natural features

Update of Parks Advisory Commission (PAC) by Commissioner Nystuen

Pool Operations and Senior Center

- How to improve efficiencies and keep operations

Fuller Road Station

- Plan did not come to parks until already planning
- Impact on parks and border-to-border trails not yet completed

Stormwater

- West Park opened with stormwater provisions
- Inquired about using more porous pavement
- Porous pavement installed at Leslie Science Center

Energy Efficiency

- Parks working to reduce energy required for park operations

Update of Solid Waste Committee by Commissioner Stead

Update to Solid Waste Plan

- Staff looking to kick off update on plan and looking to see how this new plan fits relative to the city budget
 - Will be a five-year plan
 - Current plan spans from 2002-2007
- Commissioner Hohnke: Should aim to complete this plan before the city council retreat in January

Update of Energy Commission by Commissioner Wright

PACE

- Wendy Barrott to give presentation at July meeting

DTE Solar Currents Program

- 29 residents in Ann Arbor enrolled
- Looking to find ways to continue program

Update of City by Matthew Naud

Net Zero Home Tour

- Participated in tour of oldest net zero home in the country

Urban Sustainability Leadership Academy

- Funded by the Rockefeller Foundation
- Wendy Rampson, planning manager, and Matt Naud to attend in July in Washington, DC

Climate Adaptation Planning

- Laura Rubin at Huron River Watershed Council and city staff working with University of Michigan to look at watershed planning
- Looking at how to plan for climate change

Items for Next Agenda:

Next agenda will be a working session on July 28.

- Naud: Will aim to have Jen Lawson or Eli Cooper present for a stormwater and non-motorized update. Will move meeting to council chambers for public presentations.
- Commissioner Nystuen: Concerned over maintenance and signage of bicycle lanes.

Scheduled meeting on August 25.

- Naud to query group as to whether to hold this meeting

Public Commentary:

No public commentary.

Next Scheduled Meeting:

Work session: 7pm, Thursday, July 28, City Hall Council Chambers

Adjournment

Adjourned

Motion by Commissioner Stead, seconded by Commissioner Graham