

City of Ann Arbor Environmental Commission

October 22, 2015

Action Meeting

Washtenaw County Administration Building

220 N. Main St, Board Room

Call to Order:

7:05 pm

Roll Call:

Present – 12

Mike Anglin, Wayne Appleyard, Sabra Briere, Jason Frenzel, Chris Graham, Katherine Hollins, Susan Hutton, Jarin Morraco, Benjamin Muth, Allison Skinner, Bob Needham, and Wendy Woods

Absent - 1

Missy Stults

Open vacant position on commission

Quorum present

Staff Present:

Matthew Naud

Approval of Agenda:

Motion to approve moved by Commissioner Graham and seconded by Commissioner Skinner

Motion Approved on voice vote

Public Commentary:

Parma Karma talked about the danger of and possible policy solutions for wood burning stoves.

Presentation – Elementary Students Developing a Robot to Detect Methane at Landfills

Four students from the Ann Arbor Christian School presented about how they developed a robot that can detect, vacuum up, and use methane vapors as fuel. Students demonstrated the robot for the Commissioners. Councilmember Briere asked for more details about the project. Commissioner Graham asked about current methane levels at City facilities. Commissioner Morraco asked how the students decided on an actionable methane level. Commissioner Woods asked how long it took to build the robot and how many robots there would need to be for a facility as large as Ann Arbor's.

Presentation – Zoning Premiums for Downtown (Megan Masson-Mirroch)

Ms. Masson-Mirroch explained that premiums are incentives to allow downtown buildings to be bigger when community goods are included. In 2009, premiums were made available for the first time in Ann Arbor. All of the projects that have used premiums have used the energy efficiency qualification. None of the residential projects used affordable housing to achieve a premium. Only one project used historic preservation to achieve a premium. According to MI law, cities cannot require housing affordability, or set higher energy efficiency codes than the state. When the consultants asked the public what community goods were important to them, energy efficiency and housing affordability topped the list, but it was thought that good design

should be standard. The public also believed that the “bar should be higher” for premiums. The following are proposed changes to the premiums legislation: 1. disincentivize parking and 2. mandate that performance standards require 50% less greenhouse gases compared to other buildings of similar size and type. Premiums legislation should also be revisited every five years. Using LEED certification has been problematic since certification happens *after* a building is built. Looking to include a green roof incentive. Also, important to include workforce housing (30%-60% area median income), and require at least 400 sq. ft. for each of those units. The Planning Commission has a working session next week. The Full Council will need to approve any changes to the premiums legislation.

Commissioner Hollins asked whether the source of the materials is included in the greenhouse gas calculations. The answer was that it wasn't. Commissioner Graham asked if developers liked the proposals, especially since they are voluntary actions developers would need to elect to take. Commissioner Appleyard asked if the greenhouse gas numbers would be hard for lay people to understand. Commissioner Frenzel asked about whether the standards can automatically update. Ms. Masson-Mirroch replied that standards can only update to new laws, and that this is why it is important to revisit the premiums law every five years. Commissioner Frenzel also asked there are items in the LEED certification process that are not in ASHRAE (“a global society advancing human well-being through sustainable technology for the built environment”). Commissioner Graham asked about demanding design guidelines “with teeth” instead of using premiums. Ms. Masson-Mirroch replied that the public was in favor of strong design guidelines. Councilmember Briere asked about the City's design manual, and about building form-based guidelines that have been passed by other jurisdictions in Michigan. Ms. Masson-Mirroch asked for advice how a complicated subject such as building premiums could best be communicated to the average Ann Arbor resident. Chairperson Hutton replied “define all acronyms”, and Councilmember Briere suggested using visuals. Commissioner Muth replied that it needs to be made clear that premiums only apply to downtown projects that want more building space than is allowed by code.

Presentation –Organics Management Plan (Matt Naud)

Ann Arbor has maintained a compost site since 1988, and in 2011 contracted out management of the 24 acre compost site to We Care Organics. The site produces two products for public and commercial use – wood ground into mulch and compost. We Care owns the equipment at the site, which is open year-round. The University of Michigan has a side deal with We Care Organics to bring their compost to the site year-round. Currently, the site takes 1,000-1,500 tons of materials out of the waste stream, of which 10% is kitchen waste. The City collects compost only April through December due to a variety of causes.

In 1917, a law was passed to give the City permission to levy three mills to pay for trash, compost, and recycling. The Hedley Amendment later reduced the rate to 2.74 mills, which is the current millage. The millage brings in approximately \$11 million/year. The City strives to keep the compost cost (to consumers) even to or below the cost to landfill. Three trucks pick up compost during the year, with more rented during leaf season. In April/May, the City gives away up to six bushels of compost to each resident. Councilmember Briere asked about the Request for Proposals for Year-Round Composting. Staff Naud replied that there was only one bidder but new proposals are expected 12-4-15. Commissioner Moracco asked if the \$11 million millage covers the cost of recycling, composting, and landfill. Staff Naud replied that there is a fund balance, but that the recycling market has “crashed”. Commissioner Skinner asked about whether landfill costs would likely increase or whether the landfill is likely to be closed. Staff Naud replied that there are likely \$6 million in legacy costs for the closed landfill; that a new biodigester would likely keep costs down; and that the reserve fund balance can be used to deal

with any volatility in the recycling market. Councilmember Briere asked about the RFP for a new Drop-Off Station. Commissioner Graham requested more details about the economics of organics and compost.

Unfinished Business:

None

Review of Commission Workplan:

Chair Hutton postponed the item until January, and requested that staff send out copies of the latest workplan as early as possible.

New Business:

Commissioner Muth gave a short update on the new railroad station project.

Report from Committees and Chair:

Natural Area Features, Commissioner Graham

- Will be meeting 12-4-2015 to determine focus for committee

Energy Commission, Commissioner Appleyard

- Benchmarking ordinance
- Bringing new community solar to Ann Arbor, including roadblocks to implementation. Spoke about the group buy concept in Boulder, CO.
- Spoke about state laws/policies at the request of Councilmember Briere.

Planning Commission by Commissioner Woods

- Premiums legislation
- Accessory dwelling units
- Planning Director and Community Services Administrator positions still open

Parks Commission by Commissioner Briere

- PROS plan
- Tension between mowed areas and natural areas
- Long-term planning

Report from Staff:

Staff Update by Naud. Naud responded to questions from commissioners.

- Biodigester kick-off meeting in January.
- Working on Parks issues
- National Community Survey results for 2015
- Upcoming Sustainability Forums
- Jan 4th presentation to Council on the Climate Plan Update
- Washtenaw County is looking to regulate single-use plastic bags

Future Commission Items

- January working session

Items for Next Agenda:

None

Next Scheduled Meeting:

January 28, 2016

220 North Main Street, Board Room

Public Commentary:

None

Adjournment:

Adjourned 8:45 pm