City of Ann Arbor

Meeting Minutes - Draft

Environmental Commission

301 E. Huron St.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
http://a2gov.legistar.com/
Calendar.aspx

Thursday, April 22, 2021 | **7:00 PM** | **Electronic Meeting**

This meeting will be broadcast live on CTN Cable Channel 16, ATT Channel 99, and online at a2gov.org/watchCTN. To participate at public comment, dial 1 213 338 8477 or 888 788 0099 (Toll Free) or 877 853 5247 (Toll Free) Enter Webinar ID 997 3412 6347

CALL TO ORDER

Meeting called to order at 7:05pm

LAND HERITAGE STATEMENT

ROLL CALL

Present: 11 - Christopher L. Graham, Allison Skinner, Lisa Disch, Shannan Gibb-Randall, Kathy Griswold, John Callewaert, Stephen C Brown, Jonathan Overpeck, John Mirsky, Rita Mitchell, and Marie Gabrielle Buendia

Absent: 2 - Robert Needham, and Lily Faris

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The Agenda was re-arranged to allow the first Public Comment prior to the Special Presentations, for this and subsequent meetings.

Approved with changes

SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

Ann Arbor Supports Pollinators

21-0802

Ann Arbor Supports Pollinators
Mr. Charles pointed out the importance of pollinators in our environment to support viable seeds for food and how native plants contribute to green infrastructure in the city, such as storm water management. He identified educational and contractual opportunities for people and businesses in the city to support native plantings and pollinators. Mr. Charles sent additional advice to the Commission, prepared by the Xerces Society, on yard and garden over wintering actions to support pollinators: https://xerces.org/publications/fact-sheets/nesting-over wintering-habitat Commissioners noted that native plants, shrubs, and trees better survive the local weather conditions. Willows are especially important sources of pollen in early spring.

Washtenaw County Master Rain Gardener

21-0818

Rain Garden Pollinators
Ms. Kellman described how rain gardens collect storm water on-site, infiltrate it, and prevent excess water from flowing into the storm water system. Plants used in rain gardens are important as their roots help to infiltrate soil to allow spaces for water to flow, which helps the plants and helps the storm water system. The County program has facilitated 380 rain gardens on private properties. Installations at schools and businesses have resulted in over 1,000 rain garden installations in the county. Host plants support pollinators. Seeds provide food for birds. Plants provide habitat for wildlife. All aspects help to stabilize the environment. Rain gardens are beautiful, attract pollinators and can help solve water management problems. Diversity of plantings benefit the environment. Sources for rain garden plants are local vendors and plant swaps. See https://www.washtenaw.org/647/Rain-Gardens for great sources.

Questions from Commissioners: how can apartment complexes get involved? Condo groups can propose rain garden installations to their Boards. Consider adding information on the A2gov.org rain garden page to support apartment dwellers and condo residents to get rain garden support.

Stewardship and Pollinators

21-0801

NAP staff act to support pollinators every day, by removing invasive species, scattering native seeds, and organizing volunteer activities to support management of the city park natural areas, along with training and organizing Park Stewards. Management methods include use of Integrated Pest Management to control invasive plants by pulling, cutting, burning, to obtain the greatest benefit with least impact on off-target species. NAP staff work to minimize use of chemical herbicides. Additional projects include guidance to attract birds and support species diversity. Staff assess site plans provided by developers and assist with minimizing impact on natural areas. NAP also supports Citizen Science via the Kalamazoo Butterfly Network recording data in a national database. Staff use NAP's web site, Twitter and Face Book to spread enthusiasm about pollinators. NAP supports activities related to the Mayor's Monarch Pledge at the level of Leadership Circle, and provides a yearly report on pollinator activities. In coordination with the National Wildlife Federation, NAP worked with Wolf Pack members to establish a pollinator Garden at West Park.

Multiple Environmental Commissioners stated acknowledgement of NAPs excellent presence in the community as an important community resource. Thank you NAP

PUBLIC COMMENTARY

No public comments

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approved as presented

21-0820

Approved by the Commission and forwarded to the City Council due back on 5/17/2021

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Discussion: Ann Arbor City Code: Chapter 40, Trees and Other Vegetation

21-0819

CITY CODE CHAPTER 40 TREES AND OTHER VEGETATION DISCUSSION
Commissioners gave comments on means to reduce turf grass in residential lawn extensions and potentially on private property. Discussion directed follow up on modification of Chapter 40, with direction to focus on education of neighborhoods and enforcement staff on alternatives to turf grass, introducing information on how to establish plantings that support pollinators, reduce turf grass, and support management of storm water. Safety with respect to sight lines will be addressed along streets with speeds of 25, 30, and 35 MPH. The major goal will be to support a different aesthetic with respect to lawn and garden plantings that supports the goals presented to the Commission. For lawn extensions, Commissioners specifically recommended herbaceous plant height limited to 36", and disallowing woody shrubs. Commissioner Mitchell and Council Member Griswold will continue to develop materials, in consultation and conjunction with the Office of Sustainability and Natural Area Preservation, as well as pollinator ally groups such as Wild Ones and Washtenaw County Master Rain Gardeners.

NEW BUSINESS

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES, OTHER COMMISSIONS, COUNCIL, AND CHAIR

Natural Features, Commissioner Christopher Graham: Work continues on UDC amendments addressing protection of native forest fragments. Most native forest fragments are in parks, or should be. Use the NFFs as anchors/guiding posts in the neighborhoods to increase the sustainability of a neighborhood landscape.

Pollinators WG, Vice Chairperson Rita Mitchell: The subcommittee is reaching out to pollinator ally groups. Suggestions are being compiled to present to NAP for updating its web site. Commissioner Shannan Gibb-Randall suggested working with Parks to consider piloting lawn alternatives, such as clover or other plantings, to test some on city land that people can visit and walk barefoot. Such an approach could help people to assess and understand maintenance of alternative lawns, where to get seed and plants, and care issues.

Solid Waste WG, Chairperson Stephan Brown: RFPs are being developed for solid waste management in downtown alleys. Steve is working with city staff to move an ordinance forward on Construction & Demolition materials.

Zero Waste WG, Council Member Lisa Disch: The subgroup is considering a zero waste goal with a time line, including researching re-usable food containers for carryout. The team is working on a concept of a reusable container that can be brought to any restaurant for take home food. Some restaurants are interested. The subgroup is also working on a grant for Nextcycle with metrics for a circular economy. Most measures are related to diversion from landfill. A difficult issue is how to track avoiding waste. Sustainability Ambassadors are working on composting food waste.

Planning, Commissioner Shannan Gibb-Randall: Planning Commission is working on Transportation Corridor-1 zoning, and getting close to a proposal. The plan is to bring a resolution to Council in June. The Commission will be looking for feedback from the community. There will be a GIS tool to show setbacks, etc.

Parks, Commissioner Mike Appel: Absent

Energy, Commissioner John Mirsky: The Energy Commission's last meeting included a discussion of how the Greenbelt could support

renewable energy generation. Less than 2% of a Greenbelt property's area is allowed for use for buildings and other structures, which limits energy installations. Additionally, energy generated on-site cannot be transmitted across property lines unless it's coordinated with DTE. The Energy Commission is working on updates to the State energy code, with the process likely to result in an increase in base efficiency. A goal is an appendix that municipalities can adopt that targets net zero on a property.

Council Report, Council Member Kathy Griswold: Reported on the Gelman plume and confirmed that a dual process of EPA Superfund action and judicial hearing on the plume is feasible and allowed by EPA. A concurrence letter was sent on April 12, by Liesl Clark, Dir of EGLE, representing authorization by Governor Whitmer to request EPA involvement. Congresswoman Dingell has been important in moving the EPA process forward. The hearing with Judge Connors and local elected interveners in the Gelman case, is under preparation for a hearing in early May.
Council Member Lisa Disch: Council approved $100,000 for year-round maintenance of bike lanes. First hearing for rezoning for Valhalla project was passed, the project is planned to be all-electric apartments/condos.

Chairperson Report, Chairperson Stephen Brown:
-Governor Whitmer said state facilities will use 100% renewable by 2025.
-Michigan House Budget Committee recommended that EGLE budget be reduced by 25% and adjusting it quarterly. Will make cleanup of pollution more difficult. Suggestion: Contact State legislators to recommend improved funding for the EGLE.
-DTE & OSI came to an agreement on voluntary green pricing. https://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/2021/04/ann-arbor-comes-to-agreement-with-dte-over-carbon-neutrality-programs.html

REPORT FROM STAFF

Report from Staff, Joshua MacDonald:
-Energy, 1MW solar RFP going out soon, a selection process will be initiated soon.
-Energy audits on city buildings, mostly Parks/Rec, looking at energy efficiency and electrification (ex:Senior Center) prime location for air-air heat pump, can be a demonstration site. May 12 heat pump workshop, online with OSI. Demand is building, more contractors interested.

ACTION ITEMS

ITEMS FOR NEXT AGENDA

Action Items:
1) Suggest staff update city website re Pollinators and IPM
2) Council Member Kathy Griswold and Vice Chairperson Rita Mitchell will work on Ch 40, with return to Commission
3) Pollinator Work Group will work with staff to add info on A2gov.org rain garden page to support apartment dwellers and condo residents
4) Vice Chairperson Rita Mitchell will contact Parks to suggest contact the new UM Matthaei Botanical Garden Director Tony Kolenic to explore partnerships.
5) Commissioner Chris Graham will present on work from the Natural Features group

NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING

Next meeting on May 27th at 7pm

PUBLIC COMMENTARY

No public commentary

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 9:48pm

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