

Minutes of March 13 2023 Meeting of Allentown Environmental Advisory Council

Members Present: Tinku Khanwalkar, Jennifer Swann, Julie Thomases, and Maria Ocasio

Non-members Present: Jonathan Zeller, Kyle Ropsky (I believe I saw him in the room but am not sure), Becky Kiss, Faran Savitz, Gabriela Sampaio (Muhlenberg intern), Maggie Wallner (LCCD), Laura Hopek (LCCD)

Approval of minutes of Special Meeting held February 27, 2023: Approved

Letter of Support for Allentown Resilience Park

Maggie Wallner and Laura Hopek of the Lehigh County Conservation District gave a presentation on their grant request to the Lehigh Valley Greenways Organization for funding to construct a pocket park with natural play features and an edible plant garden to be located off Pittston Court next to the Trout Creek. This is the same site at which the Allentown EAC conducted a community-based cleanup in 2021. Maggie and Laura requested the Allentown EAC to support their grant request. **Tinku Khanwalkar made a motion for the Allentown EAC to submit a letter of support for the project. The motion was seconded by Jennifer Swann and unanimously approved.**

Update on Plastic Bag Ordinance:

Julie Thomases provided an update on AEAC's goal #3 (plastic bag ordinance). She described the extensive research she has conducted to date and contacts that she has made. She believes that City Council will be willing to pass a plastic bag ordinance similar to the model ordinance developed by PennEnvironment (and used by the City of Bethlehem's EAC in its proposed ordinance). However, she has identified several issues to be further thought through including which establishments should be covered, whether a bag giveaway program can be incorporated, whether styrofoam should be included in the ban, and whether any exemptions should be granted for WIC and other low-income customers. She will be meeting with Ann Saurman, head of the City's Department of Recycling and Solid Waste, to obtain her input and is planning on holding some focus groups in the next month or so. Tinku Khanwalkar complimented Julie for all the work she has done and noted that obtaining buy-in from City administration is critical to successful implementation of the ordinance.

City Request for AEAC assistance on grant application under Municipal Assistance Program:

Tinku Khanwalkar reported that she was contacted by Clary Peralta-Colon seeking AEAC support for a grant application under the DEP's Municipal Assistance Program to develop a sustainability master plan for the City. Jennifer Swann asked who would lead the effort on behalf of the AEAC. This would need to be determined before the AEAC could support the City's request. Tinku Khanwalkar will obtain further input from Clary on the scope of the request and report back at a future AEAC meeting.

Update on AEAC Goal # 1 and #2:

Tinku Khanwalkar reported that substantial progress has been made in obtaining data from the City and requested Jonathan Zeller to provide an update on his review of the data. Jonathan reported that he and Kyle Ropsky will be meeting to review the data together and identify next steps, including field trips, to specific properties for the energy assessment.

Update on Goal #4:

Tinku Khanwalkar reported that James Wynne (Muhlenberg intern) has been working diligently on a report and recommendations for the City to effectively use the money allocated to it under the DOE's Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant Program. Another Muhlenberg intern (Gabriela Sampaio) has been working on a report and recommendations focused on solar. Gabriela gave a brief update, explaining that she is in the process of developing a step-by-step guide for people to understand how to install solar on their properties and access financing for it.

Additional New Business:

A.) Salisbury EAC Clean up Day!

B.) AEAC Support of Allentown's Earth Day Event

C.) LV EAC Network event on June 7 (Event update).

D.) AEAC Annual Report to City Council: Maria will be presenting the AEAC's annual report to City Council on 03/22. She has been working with Mike Hanlon in getting this set up and heard from Mike that some council members have asked whether the presentation would include a recommendation for a plastic bag ordinance. Maria will include a brief update on this in her presentation. Maria also noted that the Mayor recommends including in the report a strong case for a sustainability manager.

E) Tinku Khanwalkar reported that the Mayor requested the AEAC to update its by-laws to reflect the changes in the authorizing ordinance made last year and clearly state the roles of chair, vice chair and past chair. Tinku Khanwalkar offered to make those revisions for AEAC approval later this year.

F) Tinku Khanwalkar noted that goal #4 needs to be revised to reflect the broader energy equity effort being undertaken by the AEAC including the report and recommendations for proceeding with the DOE EECBG grant and water equity work being undertaken in conjunction with ACEEE. Tinku will revise the wording of the goal for approval at the April meeting,