

Rockville Environment Commission

Minutes of the Meeting of Thursday, January 9, 2020

Black-Eyed Susan Conference Room, City Hall
111 Maryland Avenue, Rockville, Maryland

Meeting Attendance

Commissioner	Present	Absent	Reason, If Given
John Becker, Chair	X		
Scott Fazekas	X		
Susan Koester	X		
Clark Reed	X		
Monica Saavoss	X		
Steve Sprague	X		
Pavitra Srinivasan	X		
Ted Stauderman	X		

Council Liaison: Mark Pierzchala

City Staff: Amanda Campbell, Staff Liaison Sustainability Coordinator; Erica Shingara, Chief, Environmental Management Division

Guests: Danniell Belay, Joan Burton, Dave Stingecomb, Don Masters

Meeting Commencement: Chair Becker convened the meeting at 7:06 p.m. with all REC members present. Attendees introduced themselves.

Approval of Agenda: The agenda was approved.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: As the December meeting minutes were completed just before the meeting, the Environment Commission will take them up at the January meeting in order to allow time for review.

Community Forum: No community members participated in the Community Forum.

Chair Report

- Please submit nominations for the 2020 Environmental Excellence Awards by February 29 in preparation for the March 5th REC meeting discussion.
- Steve Sprague announced his resignation from REC due to time commitments. Everyone thanked Commissioner Sprague for his service on the Commission and looked forward to his participation in the committees as he is able.
- There will be a Solar Co-op this year! Details coming soon.

City of Rockville Website – Next Steps

Commissioners agreed that Ms. Campbell would compile the feedback from the last few meetings and share with the REC for their review and additional feedback.

Maryland Legislative Session – Preliminary Discussion

Commissioner Saavoss volunteered to compile the list of bills that the Commission may consider following and upload it into a publicly accessible Google docs format. Councilmember Pierzchala said that the Mayor and Council appreciate concise bill summaries.

Information was presented on community choice aggregation and electric vehicles -- issues that are likely to be introduced based on previous years' experience. Commissioner Reed presented highlights of his research on community choice aggregation (see white paper), which allows a municipality to pool demand for green electricity and negotiate better pricing. The program could be either 'opt in' or 'opt out'. Generally, the more households or businesses participate, the lower the cost. Maryland's Renewable Portfolio Standard requires 50% green sourced electricity by 2030, but chicken waste and black liquor are considered renewable sources. Community aggregation would allow a community to choose its electricity sources.

Commissioner Srinivasan presented highlights of her white paper on electric vehicle incentives. Many of the current electric vehicle incentives expire this year or next. The funds tend to run out due to high demand. Pepco has a 5-year program to install 5,000 stations and 250 free chargers. Maryland set a goal of reaching 300,000 electric vehicles owned in the state.

Ms. Shingara added that Pepco is installing two level 2 chargers and one DC Fast charger at Thomas Farm. A ribbon cutting will be held soon.

Committee Reports

Watershed Committee – No updates.

Climate Action Committee (CLAC) – The CLAC discussed Maryland proposed bills. CLAC meetings will be held on the 2nd Tuesdays of the month for the next few meetings.

Energy Committee – The Energy Committee discussed Maryland proposed bills (see previous agenda item).

Spring Outreach – Dates, Budget for Materials

Upcoming events:

- Earth Day Proclamation at Mayor and Council meeting March 2 [note: changed to March 23] – all REC encouraged to attend.
- Tree giveaway -- March 28, 8am-12pm, Senior Center – a couple volunteers needed.
- Green Happy Hour Campfire followed by REC meeting at Croydon Creek Nature Center, April 2, 6:30-7:30 (REC can start at 7pm). Need a volunteer to share a description of REC roles and accomplishments at the event.
- Potomac Watershed Clean up – April 18, one leader each at Maryvale and Lincoln park.
- Hometown Holidays, Saturday May 23, 12-8pm – tabling at event.

Save the date for other events if REC is interested:

- Spring Fest with the nature center – April 28
- Science Day – April 19, 12-5pm

Discussion

EMD staff proposed the idea of REC working with the nature center to record 1 minute educational videos on environmental matters for posting on channel 11 or social media.

EMD staff shared the educational booklets from <http://savingnaturenow.org/> that the nature center is considering purchasing as part of the 50th Anniversary Earth Day outreach activities. Commissioners liked the book as an engagement activity for elementary-aged students and considered purchasing a set for the nature center to distribute this year. Commissioners discussed identifying current middle or high school environmental sustainability projects that would warrant a nomination for the Environmental Excellence Award. Projects that are not yet completed but are 'in progress' would also be eligible.

Commissioners discussed changing the award criteria next year, such as focusing the awards on educational institutions, and awarding one elementary, one middle, and one high school.

The Commissioner Stauderman volunteered to examine RECs current inventory to inform the REC budget discussion as REC identifies the items it would like to purchase.

EMD Report

- Rockville is in the process of creating a local Weed Warriors group.
- Staff reminded the Commission to submit any items they would like to see highlighted in the Environment and Sustainability Newsletter.
- Ms. Campbell and Councilmember Feinberg attended the Maryland Climate Leadership Academy on January 7th.

Staff shared the new Earth Day image. The image will be printed on this years' volunteer T-shirts. REC voted unanimously to recommend that the City display the Earth Day anniversary image on Rockville Channel 11 in the chyron.

New Business

Councilmember Pierzchala shared his concerns about state plans to widen I495 and I270. The project will likely lead to 16-lane highways and would require re-building of bridges, ramps, and stretches of highway located within Rockville, with resulting pollution and noise. Construction may begin as soon as 2021: the project was one of many fast-tracked under by federal Executive Order. Some project funding is said to be available for transit enhancements but the corridor city transit-way is on hold. A bottleneck will likely occur north of the city since the extension to Frederick will not be built in this project. Rockville has depressed housing development, contributing to affordable housing shortages, inefficient sprawl, traffic congestion, and an increased demand for highway commuting infrastructure. Rockville could advocate for additional walls or other features to mitigate the local impact. There are few details available about the plan or process.

Several Commissioners expressed concern and wanted to know more about the issue.

Adjourn: Chair Becker adjourned the Commission by acclamation at 9:06 p.m.

The Next Commission Meeting will be held at City Hall on March 5.