

Rockville Environment Commission

Draft Minutes of Thursday, May 7, 2020

WebEx Meeting

Meeting Attendance

Commissioner	Present
John Becker, Chair	X
Scott Fazekas	X
Justus Getty	X
Susan Koester	X
William McClain	X
Clark Reed	X
Monica Saavoss	X
Pavitra Srinivasan	X
Ted Stauderman	X

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

Councilmembers: Monique Ashton, City Council Liaison

Meeting Commencement: Chair Becker convened the meeting at 7p.m. and welcomed attendees.

Approval of Agenda: The agenda was approved with no changes.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: April meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

Community Forum: No comments.

Chair Report

- Chair Becker shared that the funding for the Lincoln Park Community Center interior lighting efficiency upgrades is moving forward in the City budget.
- Nominations for chair: Monica Saavoss and Clark Reed were nominated for Chair. Elections will be held at the June 4 meeting.
- The stream cleanups are postponed until the fall. The Potomac Watershed cleanup is also postponed until the fall.

Staff Report

- The City is projected to have revenue reductions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A decision on the FY21 budget is expected at Monday’s Mayor and Council meeting. Leadership is planning to revisit the budget in the fall.
- The public electric vehicle charging station at Thomas Farm that the city installed in partnership with Pepco opened. It contains one DC fast charger and two level II chargers.
 - The Montgomery County solar Co-op opened for participant sign-ups on May 4. Rockville’s information session will be held online on June 24, 7-8pm. A short introduction will be posted on Facebook via live stream.
www.mygreenmontgomery.org/2020-4th-solar-coop

Discussion: Commissioners asked about additional charging stations available in Rockville. Several companies have charging stations in Rockville. Locations can be found here: <https://www.plugshare.com/>. Home chargers are not posted unless owners choose to make them available to the public.

Parks and Open Space Strategic Plan

Commissioners discussed the comments that were added to the public Google document prior to the meeting. Below is the draft set of comments resulting from the combination of those comments and the verbal comments made at the meeting:

page 5, Key Findings	No mention of expansion of parks, maintenance and repairs following environmental and sustainable practices
page 85	Parks and Facilities Conclusions: no mention of Environmental/Sustainable best practices regarding maintenance/operations/repairs.
Pg. 27, first bullet	The city standard of having all residents living within ten minutes of walking to a park be maintained.
Pg. 52, Program priority	Number one program priorities includes Farmers Markets, based on several studies the expansion of local markets has a positive impact on how residents view their community and that it improves the economic life of a community. I'd like to suggest that the city take special care to expand farmer's markets in lower income areas of Rockville.
Pg. 65, Volunteer Management Activities	As a way to promote sustainability, I'm encouraging the city to consider working with MCPS on developing a volunteer program with students.
Pg. 75, Funding Sources	Many funding programs or grants suggested in the study are tied to private organizations and foundations, those that have specific criteria tied to the grants, should pass sustainability criteria developed by the city.
	The following 3 comments address the top 2 programs w/the highest number of households that had unmet needs, as determined by the citywide surveys:
Open Streets Initiative	Open Streets improve the quality of life for people by providing communities with accessible, free recreation, leading to improve public health. They are exercises in social integration, connecting neighborhoods and allowing all residents to meet in the street as equals. Local businesses are provided the opportunity to showcase their wares to new potential customers, without the outside vendors that often accompany street festivals and events.

	In 1965, Seattle started Bicycle Sunday, the first documented Open Streets initiative in the world. The idea spread slowly across North America, as cities began to open their streets to people. Now there are over 100, in cities and towns of all sizes. In 2013, new initiatives popped up in San Diego, Indianapolis, Salt Lake City, and Buffalo.
	Open streets should not be confused with block parties or street fairs like HomeTown Holidays because the core objectives are fundamentally different. While street fairs provide positive community benefits, they do not explicitly support physical activity or the broadening of transportation alternatives. Additionally, street fairs are usually one-off events whereas open streets are part of a broader ongoing municipal effort (e.g. Bicycle Sundays) to promote and extend the benefits of associated with active participation.
	For more information see www.openstreetsproject.org
	Possible Next Steps: Rockville could create a citizen task force to examine the best organizational model for an Open Streets initiative in our city. Explore potential routes that meet the needs of key stakeholders. Develop a marketing strategy, and work with partners and volunteers to increase capacity.
	https://www.msn.com/en-us/lifestyle/lifestyle-buzz/seattle-to-permanently-close-20-miles-of-streets-to-cars-to-encourage-residents-to-get-healthy/ar-BB13Off0?li=BBnb7Kz
Expand Farmers Market	Move the Farmer’s Market to Town Center and expand the number of vendors allowed to include arts and crafts. Make it easy for residents to get access as a seller.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Increases the economic activity of Town Center stores
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Expands attractiveness of farmer’s market to beyond food
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · More space for the market allows the expansion of vendors and opens new opportunities to local artisans and musicians.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · More parking options than current site allow people to stay longer.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · A more vibrant farmer’s market strengthens ties to local farm communities, giving them a larger market. It also gives city residents another food option when national supply chains are shrinking due to the pandemic.
Urban Food Forest	Existing city parks could have a portion of them planted with an edible landscape including tree fruits, berries, and vegetables.
	London, Seattle, Ashville, Glendale OH, Madison WS, Boston, LA, Philadelphia, and Austin have urban food forests.
	www.resilience.org/stories/2014-08-01/20-urban-food-forests-from-around-the-world/
Paths and Trails	Use environmentally sensitive designs and construction in the implementation of walking trails and paved paths. Currently, 30% of federal transportation funds are required to be put towards motorized transport infrastructure. Look into ways of making this work more sustainable.
Metrics	Use key performance indicators such as energy efficiency, water use, etc. to show sustainability targets and progress.

	Very little mention of sustainable practices in updating the parks, specifically the concern that there is no specific call out of development of non-porous walkways, use of indigenous plants or pollinator plants in the updating of parks. My overall comment is that there should be some specific guideline that all updates to open spaces in Rockville include consideration of sustainable practices and support of the local habitat.
Landscaping and Natural Areas	Prioritize native plants in landscaping. Use perennials rather than annuals. Incorporate pollinator host plants and nectar plants.
Integration with the Environmental Priorities in the Comprehensive Plan	Lack of connection to the Comp Plan. Was it reviewed by the consultant? Plan is disconnected from other priorities and plans. Does not articulate context in Rockville.
Environment/Sustainability	We have entered the third decade of the 21st Century and all Plans considered by the City of Rockville should have a strong vibrant discussion of best practices related to the environment, sustainability, and follow Mayor & Council Initiatives.
City of Rockville Comprehensive Plan	The Parks Strategic Plan should make reference to and follow Rockville's 2040 Comprehensive plan (which is progressing toward a final document). This policy should be adopted for the Parks Strategic Plan and all future planning contracts involving the City and the consultants they contract for any Plans.
Sustainable Facilities, Landscaping, and Natural Resource Management Chapter	Sustainable facilities and landscaping management needs. Impervious surfaces on trails, native species, renewable energy, water bioretention and considering reducing mowed areas. An environmental sustainability chapter in the plan. How will parks be environmentally sustainable. Maintenance, repairs, HVAC, etc.
Classification of funding sources	The list of grant opportunities for funding includes several high-quality grants that promote environmental improvements, but there is no distinction between those that help meet specific environmental goals/policies from the Comprehensive Plan (e.g. the WWF innovative grants promotes Policy 13 under Goal 6 in the Environment section of the Comprehensive Plan) and those that have no environmental conditions. It is a missed opportunity not to highlight these opportunities, and to identify highest quality funding sources with limited negative hang-ups.
Outdated/no longer available grants	External funding sources under Section 5.1.4 includes outdated and no-longer available grants, e.g. the Coors Pure Water 2000 grant (cannot find any new information about this since 2001, the 2001 article included information that the grant was being used in EPA action to counterbalance pollution by Coors. Adolphus Coors Foundation currently has no environmental grants, focuses only on Colorado, and priorities policy that promotes free market solutions, limited government, and "traditional American values"). The American Greenways Eastman Kodak Awards also seems to no longer be in operation, although the Conservation Fund still offers other funding sources.
Mismatch between detailed park summaries and detailed capital improvement plan	The capital improvement plan and detailed park summaries include several references to severe and worsening erosion, but cannot determine if erosion repair and prevention is included in detailed capital improvement plan found in Appendix H.

Approval of final plan comments was moved to a conference call on May 21.

Pesticide Ban

The discussion on the pesticide ban was postponed to a future meeting to allow more time for Commission members to compile an outline of pesticide ban research findings.

Committee Reports

Watershed Committee – No update. The WS committee continues to follow the RedGate master planning process.

Climate Action Committee (CLAC) – No update. Some members shared that the Pedestrian Advisory Committee also discussed the benefits of open streets programs.

Energy Committee – No update.

New Business

The Commission members voted unanimously to support the awarding of a solar charger (that the Commission had previously purchased) to a resident, selected randomly, that registers for the Solar Co-op information session on June 24.

Adjourn: Chair Becker adjourned the meeting at 8:30 p.m.