

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS COMMITTEE

NOVEMBER 17, 2021 MEETING MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT: Aaron Wright, Chair, Ian Magnuson, Vice Chair, Joe Bower, Sharon Dever, Wayne L. Bond, Bobby Glasser, Rob Liekis

EXCUSED ABSENCES: Nicole Olween, Dr. Gail Walter, Eric Brown

UNEXCUSED ABSENCES: No unexcused absences.

STAFF: Malissa Drzick, Staff Liaison; Amber Jane Schneider, Recording Secretary; Don, I.T.

OTHERS: Jeanne Hess, City Commission Liaison; Lauri Holmes, Associate Member; Peter Kushner, Oakland Drive/Winchell Neighborhood Association President; Rick Welch, citizen volunteer with the Styrofoam Recycling program

CALL TO ORDER:

- The meeting was called to order by Mr. Wright at 4:36 p.m. after confirming a quorum of 7 out of 10 current members.
- Recording/Streaming of the meeting was confirmed, with community members joining via a link posted on the City's Facebook page.
- Members to adjust name on Zoom to include role for recording purposes.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

- There were no changes to the agenda.
- The agenda was approved with the following clarifications/comments:
 - The agenda is "packed as usual"
 - The Sustainability Plan is not a presentation, that will be (hopefully) on next month's agenda. The Plan on this agenda is a quick update provided by Mr. Wright.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

- The September 2021 minutes were approved as written.
- The October 2021 minutes will be further reviewed, and any additional corrections, additions or comments will be emailed to Mr. Wright and forwarded on to the recording secretary.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- Mr. Magnuson is volunteering at the upcoming Farmer's Market in Kalamazoo to begin the education campaign for the Sustainability Plan. Mr. Bond expressed interest in volunteering in the future.

NON-AGENDA COMMENTS BY OTHERS:

- Public Comment:
 - Cheryl Berea, City of Kalamazoo resident, opposes a deer cull, requests raw survey data become available publicly, and desires more green spaces for wildlife.
 - Tom Duffield, resident of Kalamazoo Township, opposes a deer cull, requests raw survey data.
 - Rebecca S. (last name?), City of Kalamazoo resident, opposes a deer cull.
 - Chelsea Vanker, City of Kalamazoo resident, opposes a deer cull, requests raw survey data.
 - Tom Kasinski, City of Kalamazoo resident, opposes a deer cull, is concerned about establishing a hunting season within City limits, is concerned with data management of the deer survey.
 - Iris Potter, City of Kalamazoo resident, is opposed to any deer management plan.
 - Michael B. (last name?), City of Kalamazoo resident, is opposed to a deer cull, requests raw survey data.
 - Mr. Wright noted he has received several emails from community members as well voicing opinions both for a deer management plan, against a deer management plan, and some against specifically a deer cull as a form of deer management. It was noted that these emails will be available in the ECC shared drive.

OLD BUSINESS:

- Sustainability and Climate Action Plan Update, Mr. Wright
 - Anticipating a first draft of the Sustainability and Climate Action Plan to be available to ECC members in December
 - City Staff and ECC members will be at the upcoming farmer's market to help promote the plan and to have citizens look at and provide public comment to the city regarding the plan.
 - The public comment period will continue through the end of December; uncertain how many in-person events will take place following the farmer's market
- Deer Survey and Ad Hoc Committee Report, Peter Kushner
 - Background on Mr. Kushner:
 - Lived in the City for almost 25 years and in Winchell neighborhood for more than 20 years
 - Has been a board member of the Oakland Drive/Winchell Neighborhood Association (also known as ODWNA) for 12 years and president of this association for 10 years
 - The purpose of the ODWNA board is to advocate (to the city) for neighborhood concerns
 - For the past 3 to 4 years, the ODWNA board has been notified, by residents, of an increasing concern regarding deer population:
 - Hurt and injured deer
 - Scat
 - Increased aggressive behaviors, especially during rutting season
 - Increased spotting of deer
 - Increased plant and property damage
 - Deer carcasses rotting and not removed
 - Mr. Kushner contacted the city, requesting the city address the issue of deer over population. City staff indicated they would not investigate or intervene (i.e., would not create a deer management plan) unless it can be shown that this issue affects more than just the Oakland Drive/Winchell neighborhood. City staff advised Mr. Kushner to investigate the issue and determine if the issue is city-wide.
 - Mr. Kushner, along with the ODWNA board, decided to form an ad hoc committee. Mr. Kushner desiring to conduct the research and investigation working with and with full knowledge of city staff. Mr. Kushner firmly stated that the ad hoc committee is not a city-based committee, nor was it commissioned by the city, rather a community-based committee and process.
 - Keeping the ad hoc committee community based, Mr. Kushner contacted each neighborhood association (and neighborhoods without formal associations) within the City of Kalamazoo, requesting a single representative to speak for and advocate for the desires of that neighborhood regarding deer population. The committee was limited to a single representative to keep it fair and unbiased, to prevent one neighborhood from having more weight than another.
 - Representative from 14 neighborhoods joined the committee, all 14 neighborhood representatives indicated that deer population was a concern in their neighborhood.
 - Additionally, Mr. Kushner contacted the Environmental Concerns Committee and asked for a representative, as this is a relevant concern for the ECC as well. Dr. Walter (voting member) and Dr. Melliush (then associate member) both became involved with the ad hoc committee.
 - The intent of the ad hoc committee was to provide an unbiased, fact-based approach to determine whether the deer issue was a city-wide concern, rather than an individual neighborhood's concern, and to provide *initial* data to this regard. The second goal of the committee was to detail ways to further evaluate community issues with the white-tailed deer. The third goal was to recommend possible next steps for the city to take that will address conflicts with deer.
 - The ad hoc committee also intends to provide the results of their research and investigations to the City Commission in an unbiased, objective manner. This means that all forms of management plans are considered and documented. The report documents a variety of deer management plans from 10 to 15 other communities throughout the nation, from the Michigan DNR, and documents how other Michigan cities have attempted to manage their deer. The committee has not, nor has it ever been, advocating for or recommending any specific type of management (i.e., a cull).
 - The draft report Mr. Kushner provided to the ECC members is not itself a proposed management plan; rather it recommends that the city first continues the investigation and recommends ways city staff could do so. In the report, the ad hoc committee recommends that the *city* develop a comprehensive, practical, effective, science-based, humane and community supported deer management plan. Any city-led development of a plan would be an open, transparent process that includes citizen feedback.
 - The draft report is a research and investigatory report that Mr. Kushner, and by extension all members of the ad hoc committee, feels accomplishes the tasks outlined above.
 - The survey was the ad hoc committee's way to *begin* this investigation: to understand how the community feels about deer, and how the community feels about potential long-, medium- and short-term management plans for managing deer.

- Mr. Kushner, and by extension the ad-hoc committee, feel that the report shows that the deer issue is indeed city-wide and not specific to the Oakland Drive/Winchell neighborhood. The report also provides initial data and recommends the city continue to investigate the issue. Mr. Kushner stated the ad hoc committee takes the stance that “inaction is not an option” and “something does need to be done.”
- The ad hoc committee hopes that upon providing this report (which is still in draft form) to the city, the city will then consider the issue and hopefully follow their recommendation(s) to investigate and ultimately develop a deer management plan.
- Mr. Kushner stated that at this early stage in the process, it seems irrelevant to discuss specifics of a single type of deer management (i.e. a cull), when the city has yet to begin the process let alone begun working on developing a deer management plan.
- The ECC role is to review and respond, providing feedback on the report to the ad-hoc committee prior to finalizing and then submitting the report to the City Commission. Mr. Kushner hopes to provide this report to the City Commission within the next few months. At that point, it is up to the city to take over the investigation and begin the process. All documents provided to the City Commission are publicly available.
- The ECC may provide a separate recommendation to City Commission regarding the report. It was discussed that ECC members may begin working on the wording by sharing a google document.
- The issue of fatalities was brought up. Mr. Kushner indicated that he’d recently heard of a fatality on US-131 resulting from a deer collision. Mr. Magnuson pointed out that fatalities were not included in the report. Mr. Kushner stated that information cited in the report was that deer/vehicle collisions have been increasing during the time period included in the report, and that deer/vehicle collisions are something that should be avoided for both humans and deer, regardless of if there’s a fatality or not.
- It was mentioned that citizens have brought up concerns related to deer to the ECC in the past. Many of these problems have been related to property damage, which is more nuisance than environmental issue. Many noted that the “deer issue” has been brought up at least once a year since each member joined the Environmental Concerns Committee.
- *Question:* Is it fair to say this was community-led committee? *Answer:* Yes. Some neighborhoods have more formal associations with the city, and thus receive federal grants, but not all neighborhood associations and not the Oakland Drive/Winchell neighborhood. The city does recognize all associations, even the “quasi” associations, and the city provides an avenue for neighborhoods to voice their concerns with the city.
- Mr. Glasser feels the deer are a nuisance, yes, but not necessarily a city problem. He is interested in data from communities that elected to do nothing regarding deer. He would like to see statistics of what other communities are doing, including “doing nothing”, and see how effective these are in those communities. *Question:* Is “doing nothing” an option that is considered for this report and can this data also be included? *Answer:* The Ad Hoc Committee recommends to the city that “doing nothing” is not an option. However, it is (now) up to the city to further investigate the existence of a deer problem with more resources than is available to a non-funded community-based ad hoc committee.
- Mr. Magnuson is concerned with wording of the survey, as he feels the survey was written with the premise that the problem already exists and therefore brings into question the data resulting from the survey. *Question:* who wrote the survey? And why is the survey written with the premise that there is a problem when the purpose of the survey is to determine if there is a problem? *Answer:* The committee did not start with the premise the City-wide problem existed, but rather the premise that it exists to the Oakland Drive/Winchell neighborhood and wanted to understand if this problem is city-wide. It was originally written by Mr. Kushner and was provided and reviewed by the entire ad hoc committee and others, including city staff. No one voiced concerns with wording prior to distribution of the survey. Ms. Dever noted that while taking the survey, she also felt the wording had leading questions and she feels the survey was biased.
- Mr. Bower noted confusion as to why the deer attract a significant amount of citizen input when other issues that have affected human lives in the past has not. This is the first issue that has garnered significant response within the community, whereas, for example the air quality concerns, have not had this type of response. Mr. Magnuson noted that these public calls have been continuous over the last few months, nearly all concerning deer.
- Mr. Bower agrees that there is a deer problem, not necessarily that they are causing problems but that their increase in population is a concern. He noted that everyone, always has biases when they come into something. Mr. Bower is concerned with the health concerns of deer spreading and carrying diseases/illnesses (including COVID) and does believe that the deer population will continue to be a concern in the future.
- Mr. Wright is interested in the biological, ecological, and social carrying capacity mentioned in the draft report. He is interested in seeing the results of a more formal/professional investigation if the city were to spend resources (time, money, and effort) to investigate these three issues. Mr. Kushner enthusiastically

agreed, that is the purpose of the draft report: to provide the city with preliminary information and to encourage the city to further investigate and design a deer management plan.

- It was requested that the draft report be made public and if the data behind the report will be public as well? Mr. Kushner reminded ECC members it is still in draft form, and once it is provided to the city it will be public. All the information in the draft report is cited and can easily be looked up as all the sources are available publicly. Mr. Kushner is happy to provide a data package if necessary and specifically requested.
- Upcoming MDHHS Air Quality Report, Mr. Wright
 - Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is still reviewing the long-term health concerns but otherwise the report is anticipated to be finished soon.

NEW BUSINESS

- Sustainable Food Production, Nicole Olween
 - Will be discussed at the next meeting as Ms. Olween was unable to attend this meeting.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS:

- ***Natural Features Protection (NFP) Review Board***– Mr. Glasser
 - The board is reviewing redevelopment of a property (former Lakeside property) next to the Kalamazoo Country Club.
 - Since passing the Phase II expanded NFP overlay, any properties within the overlay is subject to the review process for any proposed or planned redevelopment of such property.
- ***Air and Water Quality*** – Mr. Glasser, Mr. Wright
- ***Wildlife and Natural Resource Protection*** – Dr. Walter
 - Mr. Wright noted that Dr. Walter had shared an article about lime disease vectors through deer ticks. This article will be shared with the ECC committee.
- ***Waste Management/Litter*** – Ms. Dever, Ms. Hess, Mr. Liekis, Mr. Bond, Ms. Olween
 - Rick Welch, a volunteer with the Styrofoam Recycling program had a few comments/questions for the ECC
 - Question: How does the ECC feel about the program?
 - Answer: The consensus is that the pilot program has been a huge success
 - Question: If the program does get continued, will it continue to be at the ballpark or move to the farmer’s market?
 - Answer: Ms. Dever hopes that it will continue, and due to the success, that seems likely, but it will be ultimately up to city staff for that decision. Ms. Dever and Mr. Wright have and plan to address this with city staff, but Ms. Dever is uncertain of the continuation of the program at this time. Ms. Dever also agrees that the farmer’s market is an optimal location, and it has worked well.
 - Question: The trailer is an inexpensive temporary storage facility but is concerned with space and volume. What can be done if more Styrofoam is received than can be stored in the trailer?
 - Answer: It appears that the original understanding that there was extra storage at the ballpark is a miscommunication. The last Styrofoam event, there was a consideration of closing the event early. Ms. Dever doesn’t expect the same volume during winter.
 - Mr. Welch recommends placing the trailer in such a way that another trailer could easily back up to it. This would allow for easy transference of the items inside.
 - Mr. Welch expressed interest in adding additional drop off events – such as right after Christmas. Ms. Dever noted that she would love to see it happen more often if feasible; however, again this decision is up to city staff. Ms. Dever and Mr. Wright will work together to compose an email of questions and comments for discussion with city staff to prod the discussion along.
 - Mr. Welch noted that Friendship Village is now collecting Styrofoam on their own, with help from Mr. Welch and someone from Hope for Creation.
- ***City of Kalamazoo Planning Commission*** – Mr. Magnuson
- ***Tree Committee*** – Dr. Walter
- ***Asylum Lake Policy & Management Council*** – Ms. Dever, Ms. Holmes
 - The council was very excited about the water project with money appropriated for it, but when the plan went out for bid, the sole bid received was for twice the cost of the originally projected amount. The council is back to the drawing board.
 - The council voted in a new slate of officers, including Sharon Dever as vice chair.
 - There has been activity at the spillway relating to the beavers. The beavers have been busy blocking various cages which has caused the lake to rise to unprecedented height. Unblocking these cages has settled the lake back to normal level. However, the beavers reassemble (within 12 hours) each time they disassemble their builds.
 - There is an accumulation of “nasty” silt at the end of the lake, blocking the culvert between big Asylum Lake and the culvert that connects to little Asylum Lake. There are investigations and study underway into the

silt. The suspicion is that the accumulation of fine silt is the remnants of the spill from BTR2 a year or so ago, where the coarser materials settled but the fine silt didn't reach the bottom of the lake but floated to the end of the lake and will hopefully, eventually be removed because it is causing problems.

- **Parks & Recreation Advisory Board** – Mr. Liekis
 - Fairmont dog park is under review for rules and accessibility options, to be condensed and user friendly. There was a grill was causing concern due to proximity and dogs looking for scraps. There's been discussion of relocation.
 - Bronson Park has a big expansion planned: construction of a nature-based play area for the children.
- **Wellhead Protection Program Committee** – quarterly with Jean Talanda, City of Kalamazoo
 - Originally scheduled for December, but Mr. Wright is recommending bumping this due to time constraints in the December meeting.
- **Kalamazoo River Watershed Council** – Ms. Olween
- **Odor Task Force** – Mr. Wright
 - A meeting is scheduled for the beginning of December to review data. Mr. Wright shared the link to the city's website with ECC members previously. The data includes quarterly reports since 2019 showing hydrogen sulfide rates over time from the city's odor monitors. Graphic Packaging has more monitors than the city, but currently the data is only for the city's monitors. Mr. Wright is interested in seeing this data available for GPI's monitors as well.

NON-AGENDA COMMENTS BY OTHERS, additional:

- Public Comment:
 - April P. (last name?), a resident not in the city, but in Kalamazoo County, expressed concern that the discussion of killing deer even exists. She expressed an interest in educating citizens on how to exist with deer instead of killing them.
 - Tina McClinton, City of Kalamazoo resident, opposes a deer cull, recommends increased green spaces and other methods of deterring deer.
 - Richard Stuart, City of Kalamazoo resident, is concerned with placement/locations for emergency homeless housing and spreading of diseases, specifically parvo virus with pets. One possible location for these shelters is in an area known to be a place where dogs are walked and he is concerned with animals spreading parvo virus here if the encampment were to be placed here.

ADJOURNMENT:

- The meeting adjourned at 6:28 p.m.