

# ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS COMMITTEE

## March 15, 2023 MEETING MINUTES

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Ian Magnuson, Co-Chair; Sharon Dever, Co-Chair; Dr. Gail Walter; Steve Romanelli; Rob Liekis; Emily Demorest; David Benac; Joe Bower

**ABSENT:** Bobby Glasser; Dr. James Melliush

**STAFF:** Karen Rutherford (recording secretary)

**OTHERS:** Jean Hess  
Lauri Holmes  
Darren Riley (via zoom)  
Jean Talanda  
Cameron Rowe (student from WMU)

### **ROLL CALL:**

- The meeting was called to order by Co-Chair Magnuson at 4:38 pm, after confirming a quorum was met.

### **ASSURANCE OF LIVE STREAMING**

- Recording/Streaming of the meeting was confirmed, with community members joining via a link posted on the City's Facebook page.

### **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

- The following amendments were made to the agenda:
  - Co-Chair Magnuson added Environmental Justice to the agenda under New Business.
  - Dr. Walter stated the Pod Location under News/Education needs to be moved to New Business.
  - When Graphic Packaging is discussed, Mr. Benac would like to discuss a potential recommendation.
  - Under Unfinished Business, remove the Community Sustainability Plan.

**A motion was made to approve the Agenda, and was supported, as amended. With a voice vote the agenda was approved unanimously.**

Because the Committee has received several comments regarding tree trimming issues in the City, a recommendation was made to add Tree Trimming Discussion to the next meeting agenda.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES/REPORT (2-15-2023)**

- The Committee did not meet quorum last month. A report of the topics discussed was written and presented today.

**A motion was made to approve the Minutes/Report, and was supported. With a voice vote the minutes/report was approved unanimously.**

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

- Individual
  - Dr. Walter stated the application for the request for the Bird Treaty has been submitted to the Fish and Wildlife Service. It will be 6–8 weeks before we hear anything back from them.
  - Dr. Walter will be presenting to the Oakwood/Winchell Neighborhood Association and she presented at Friendship Village yesterday.
  - Laura Crossman, a student with Kalamazoo College, will be presenting at Green Drinks at the State Theater on Tuesday, March 28<sup>th</sup>.
  - The Kalamazoo Energy Collaborative reached out again. Blake Lajiness stated they do not have any houses of worship signed up yet to do the energy bench marking. If you have connections with anyone who has a commercial building with more than 20,000 square feet within Kalamazoo County, please email [blake.lajiness@cmsengery.com](mailto:blake.lajiness@cmsengery.com).
  
- News/Educational Items
  - Graphic Packaging International – EGLE Citation.
    - Mr. Benac stated last week, he had to place a call, because three days in a row, while waking his dog, he got a headache. He stated it is the worst it has been in the 10 years that he has lived here. He noted people have been raising concerns to the City for over 20 years. The ECC first picked up the issue in 2018. Odor Task Force was created as part of this. There was an effort in late 2019 where the ECC was going to make a recommendation to City Commission. The City asked to have time to work things out and the ECC dropped it. That was four years ago. The City approved a massive expansion at Graphic Packaging, and the situation is worse. He has two recommendations:
      - The City reinstate and fill the position of Public Health Officer. That was a City staff position until 2012.
      - The City should reinforce its Nuisance Ordinance regarding hazard toxicants, pollutants, and contaminants. The City has the authority to deal with this. The City Manager, in our City Charter, is authorized to go into any private business/resident and fix it, if the owner will not, and bill the owner. The owner has to pay it. If it goes more than a year, they pay it with interest. And then it becomes a lien on the property. The City has every authority to act. Discussion ensued.

Mr. Liekis stated the rules to enforce are there but the measures that allow the rules to be enforced are not in place. That is one of the things that is stalling the State from acting as he understands it. Discussion ensued.

Co-Chair Magnuson asked Mr. Liekis to distribute some of the resources he has found and give the Committee time to think about it. He will add this to the April agenda for further discussions.

- Environmental Justice – Mr. Romanelli stated this action item can be found in a folder in google drive and it is based on environmental justice. There are about 5 PDF articles that discuss the topic. There is video links as well. They are coming up with grant money and he plans to research this further. He encourages the Committee to check it out.
- GPI – Flood Barrier Installation – Nothing to report.
- Climate Emergency Month Events
  - Co-Chair Dever stated you can check out this event on: <http://www.kalamazocrisis.org/climateemergencymonth>  
She noted she is interested in the Ann Arbor people coming to the library this Saturday, at 3:00 p.m. She will let the Committee know if it is being streamed.
  - New Email Account: Co-Chair Magnuson stated we have a new email account for this Committee: [environment@kalamazocity.org](mailto:environment@kalamazocity.org). This will help people to be able to contact us. Most of the Committee files are in a google drive that can be hard to access. He plans to move these files to this account which uses Microsoft. He wanted to emphasize if someone emails to this account, it is not the same as coming to a meeting or calling into a meeting.

Ms. Hess suggested we should add, “If you have an immediate need during business hours, please dial 311.” It was suggested we put information in there if they are wanting to report bad air, etc. Co-Chair Magnuson will put something together.

  - The Willow Project was approved this week by the Biden administration that is extremely detrimental to the environment.
  - There are on-going protests for the Atlanta Forest.
  - After years of fighting for protection for an area of prairie in Illinois, the protection failed. Dr. Walter stated habitat loss is a huge loss for birds and environmentally. She suggested the Committee think about how they can position themselves here to mitigate habitat loss.- Next Saturday is Global Earth Hour. At 8:30 turn off your lights for one hour to raise awareness for light pollution. Dr. Walter stated she has a link she can send to everyone from a conference that happened last month on Light Pollution. It is very informative.

### **COMMENTS BY OTHERS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS**

- None

### **PROCEDURE ITEMS (AS NEEDD)**

- Bylaws – discuss updates from Clerk and City Attorney

- Co-Chair Magnuson reviewed the new version of the bylaws. There are three main changes:
  - Under the member section we maintained associate members. According to the Ordinance, we cannot do that.
  - Member attendance: If you miss 50% of meetings in a year, then you are no longer a committee member. It was not clear if that is a calendar year or 12-month consecutive period. We cannot distinguish between excused or unexcused absences. Co-chair Magnuson stated he fills it should be 12-month rolling cycle.
  - Indemnification of directors and officers: this absolves the Committee from the responsibility for decisions that the Committee makes. The City Attorney said this was above the authority of the Committee. He deleted the section.

**A motion was made to accept the new By-Laws, and was supported. With a voice vote the new By-Laws was approved unanimously.**

### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS/UPDATES/DISCUSSION**

No Updates

### **NEW BUSINESS**

- “Just Air” Presentation on Pilot Program – Darren Riley (CEO)
  - Mr. Darren Riley stated he is the Co-Founder of Just Air. He resided in Detroit and is originally from Houston. He did a lot of his career at Carnegie Mellon and he did tech work. He landed in Environmental Justice work in 2020. One reason he made this choice was due to him being diagnosed with asthma about 5 years ago. That opened up his eyes to inequities around health disparities in the environment. This is how he started Just Air. He explained Just Air is a platform community. They acquainted community air quality monitoring platform. Their work starts at the community, understanding the priorities and awareness that a community may have. They offer a transparent dashboard giving real-time data access to community members on air quality monitoring. Discussion followed. Their website is JustAir.co and their second domain is JustAir.app. Discussion followed.

Ms. Demorest asked if they could have ECC neighborhood-based meetings to give more access to the community. Co-Chair Dever stated they have already set the schedule for the year for this meeting, but she likes the idea of possibly having a sub-committee where we could do this.

Committee member stated he would like to know more about the monitors Just Air is using. There was an air monitoring project in the City last year and they used a laser-based measurement system. They are good for particulate matter, but they will not measure NO<sub>2</sub> or H<sub>2</sub>S.

- Homeless Pods – Dr. Walter stated she has been seeing updates from the City about the proposed homeless pods. The pods would be placed on Alcott Street near the County Health and Human Services office. This raised environmental concerns because Portage Creek runs through this area. This river flows to Reed Street area where they plan to do the Flood Mitigation and restoration with

native plants. It is her concern as to how we ensure the waterway is protected. What to the people who are staying in the pods do for washing, cooking, etc. Ms. Hess stated they are looking at this area, but she is not sure if it will be a possibility with the environmental contamination of the site. Housing Resources (HRI) is in charge of the pod community. This is a Brownfields site and within a neighborhood. For concerns, the Committee can write a letter to Assistant Manager, Rebecca Kik, or to the City Manager's office regarding the impact this will have on the environment.

- Draft Bills for the State of Michigan – Co-Chair Magnuson stated he has not seen much in the environment space. Senator McCann is the Chair of the Environmental Committee. He has not received any updates since January.

The EPA is setting a standard for PFAS pollution. Discussion ensued.

Public comment is now open for EPA on particulate matter from coal power plants. Michigan Climate Action Network is doing some organizing of this. The Committee was encouraged to check it out.

### **SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT**

- **Natural Features Protection (NFP) Review Board**– Mr. Glasser – nothing to report
- **Air and Water Quality** – Mr. Glasser, Ms. Dever – nothing to report
- **Wildlife and Natural Resource Protection** – Dr. Walter – nothing to report
- **City of Kalamazoo Planning Commission** – Mr. Magnuson – nothing to report
- **Tree Committee** – Dr. Walter – nothing to report
- **Asylum Lake Policy & Management Council** – Ms. Dever – Asylum Lake Land Management Plan is under review for public comment tomorrow at 5:00 P.M. at Western University.
- **Parks & Recreation Advisory Board** – Ms. Demorest and Mr. Liekis – Ms. Demorest stated they were reviewing an application with the State for funding but she did not make the meeting. She will follow up on that.
- **Kalamazoo River Watershed Council** – Mr. Benac – nothing to report – Mr. Benac stated the Kalamazoo River Watershed Council is looking for board members.
- **Wellhead Protection Program Committee – Quarterly** - Jean Talanda – quarterly
- **Odor Task Force – Quarterly** – Mr. Benac (quarterly)

### **CHECK PHONE LINES AND STREAMING FOR COMMENTS:**

None – Co-Chair Magnuson stated for public comment they can email [environment@kalamazoo.org](mailto:environment@kalamazoo.org). It will not count as an official comment, but it will make the Committee aware of the concern.

### **ADJOURNMENT:**

- The meeting adjourned at 5:48 p.m.