

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS COMMITTEE

May 17, 2023 MEETING MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT: Ian Magnuson, Co-Chair; Sharon Dever, Co-Chair; Dr. Gail Walter; Steve Romanelli; David Benac; Joe Bower; Bobby Glasser; Dr. James Melliush; Rob Liekis; Rachel Jondle

ABSENT: Thomas Dewhirst

STAFF: Karen Rutherford (recording secretary)

OTHERS: Jean Hess
Brian LaBelle, COK
Anthony Ladd, COK
Jean Talanda, COK

ROLL CALL:

- The meeting was called to order by Co-Chair Magnuson at 4:30 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 (5/17/32)

- Co-Chair Magnuson asked to make an amendment to the Agenda. He asked to move the Forestry Service Grant under New Business to the beginning of the Agenda.

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

NEW BUSINESS

- US Forestry Service Grant – Dr. Gail Walter introduced Anthony Ladd, Public Works Division Manager and Brian LaBelle, Forester, from the City of Kalamazoo. They have an opportunity to apply for the US Forestry Grant for the City of Kalamazoo to enhance the tree canopy. She noted she sent out information to the Committee so they would have an opportunity to get familiar with it prior to the meeting. They are seeking support from the ECC.

Mr. Ladd thanked the Committee for allowing them to come to the meeting. He stated when they were made aware of this grant, getting support from the community and subject matter experts was important to them. They want to show what their intentions are and how that aligns with the goals and the City's Master Plan. The funding opportunity and the ability to do work for our urban forest has not always been matched, funds with needs. We have over 27,000 trees in the City's right of way. The City's right of way is their area of focus. We have a forestry crew with one supervisor and

currently six staff members. We are limited to do emergency work along with other work the crews are required to do. Fortunately, the last few years we have received FFE funding for tree planting, tree maintenance, and tree removal. A tree inventory that was performed in 2021, which was funded by FFE, and allowed them to see where the needs existed, where the trees are located and their relative condition. When this grant became available just a few weeks ago we knew this would be a great opportunity for the City to do some of the work that is needed. Based on the inventory, the GIS work, and the work that Mr. LaBelle has done, they were able to put together a coherent plan together for multiple years with this grant opportunity. The bulk of their task is tree planting, tree trimming, and tree removal within the right of way. This is our greatest need. In addition to this we want to include work to be done in our City parks. With an inventory of the trees in the parks we will be able to determine what work needs to be done. The parks department has even less money to do their work than our Forestry department. This is a good opportunity for them as well. Part of this grant highlights the desire to have educational opportunities. We have included a line item for a youth program to be funded. This would be similar to a junior forestry ranger type program, something with an environmental focus. This program already exists through KRESA.

Mr. Ladd noted another part of this grant provides an opportunity to provide assistance to single family homes (private property). To administer this, we have partnered with our Community Planning and Development Department (CP&D). The funds cannot be directly administered to the private residence. It will be facilitated through CP&D.

The area of focus for this grant is what the US Census Data shows as a Disadvantage Census Tract. We have been able to outline what areas of the City fall under this category which is where these areas will be focused entirely.

Mr. Ladd stated we are making a pitch to the USDA Forestry Services to accomplish in five years what would take us 20 years to do if we had sustained funding which we currently do not have. Our current funding is on a year-to-year basis. There will be a lot of tree work being done and we want to provide understanding of what we are trying to accomplish. We also have a line item for stump grinding. We want to get the stumps removed so we can increase the amount of space we have available to grow a healthy forest.

A question was asked to Mr. Ladd who mentioned the work was being done in the Disadvantaged Census Tract. Is all work being done there or will it be done across the City? Mr. Ladd responded for this grant all work will be done in the Disadvantage Census Tract. Separate from that we intend to keep applying for special request funds every year to continue the same forestry operations that we have been doing. We would focus those funds on areas separate from the Disadvantaged Census Tract areas.

Co-Chair Dever asked if they know what areas they would be focusing on. Mr. Ladd responded the US Census does not divide by neighborhood. The Census Tract overlaps into some areas. The neighborhood where this work will be done is the Northside, Edison, Eastside, Vine, Stuart, Westnedge Hill, Southside, Knollwood, Downtown CBD, South Westnedge, the Eastern Section, and Burke Acres.

Co-Chair Magnuson asked what share is going to be focused on planting, trimming, educational program, etc. Where is the prioritization of these efforts? Mr. Ladd responded the majority of this work will be in tree planting, trimming, and removal. The biggest costs are tree planting and tree removal. Discussion ensued.

Metrics are required in the grant and will be provided.

It was asked how many cities are applying for this grant and what makes Kalamazoo uniquely qualified? Mr. Ladd stated we have had success in obtaining forestry grants. We received a DNR grant to review the City's Tree Ordinance and to provide a City Tree Guide. This is a state-wide grant. Mr. LaBelle stated this grant is the largest grant ever for urban areas and it's a pool of over a billion dollars, country-wide, and it covers the next five years. Mr. LaBelle stated one way we are showing that we can do the work is showing that we have had success with prior contracts. We had a survey done and we know what needs to be done, we know how to do the work, and we have shown that we can do the work. We will be including a line item for Contract Administration.

When is the grant due? What are the total dollars? Mr. Ladd stated they plan to apply at the end of this month. Applications are due June 1st. The rough estimate would be around \$8 million dollars over the five years.

Does the grant application specify that you will be only planting native species? Mr. LaBelle stated it does not. Mr. Ladd stated the narrative does not include species. It is important and it is something they want to pursue. Mr. LaBelle stated it has been difficult to obtain native trees. There are a lot of trees we do not plant and for the most part we try to plant native trees. Discussion ensued.

Dr. Walter read the draft letter for support of the US Forestry Service Grant. Committee was impressed with the numbers and success in the past. Discussion ensued.

A motion was made to approve to the letter of recommendation as written for City's application for the Inflation Reduction Act Program Letter. With a voice vote the motion was approved with 9 - 0 with 1 abstention.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES (4/15/2023)

The approval of minutes from April 15, 2023 was not discussed. This will be added to the Agenda for the next meeting.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- Individual/Announcements
 - Co-Chair Dever stated the Natural Feature Protection Review Board meeting is Tuesday, May 23rd, 4:00 P.M. to 6:00 P.M. They will be reviewing additional zoning codes changes that affect natural features and the original intention of the natural features protection overlay.
 - Co-Chair Magnuson announce next month will be his last ECC meeting. He will be stepping back. He has been part of ECC since 2019. The Committee will need to think about who the Chair or Vice Chair will be.

- There is a Town Hall Meeting tomorrow regarding the air quality issues at Mt. Zion at 5:30 P.M.
- The City has hired a Sustainable Coordinator.
- News/Educational Items
 - Bike Month Events – <https://kalamazoobikeweek.org/>
 - Asylum Lake Community Gathering May 20th, 12:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M. with a tour of plants at 1:00 P.M., a tour of the history at 2:00 P.M., and a tour about birds at 3:00 P.M. <https://www.asylumlakepreservationassociation.org/events/a-special-community-gathering>

COMMENTS BY OTHERS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

- None

PROCEDURAL ITEMS (AS NEEDED)

- Shared Drives – Confirm Access
 - Co-Chair Magnuson asked if anyone was able to gain access to the shared drive files. The response was no. He will continue to look into this to get everyone access.
- Account Management Guide
 - Co-Chair Magnuson stated he distributed the Account Management Guide that included technical support information.

ON-GOING BUSINESS

- Asylum Lake/Zoning Update
 - Co-Chair Dever stated the second draft for the zoning update will be coming out soon. She suggested it be placed on the agenda for next month. We may want to have another statement once we see how it has been revised.

Co-Chair Magnuson stated the City has decided not to be proposing the zoning change from residential to commercial. This does not mean the risk is over.

Co-Chair Dever stated the two specific parcels were removed in a public statement from the overall recommendation of re-zoning process. They could be brought up for that process by the developer at any time.

Co-Magnuson stated he heard that it may be recommended that car washes be required for industrial zoning. The Planning Commission is interested in this.

- MDHHS Air Quality Report
 - Co-Chair Magnuson stated the report came out last week. It has sort of confirmed some of our suspicions. It only covers one gas. There are others. There are at least 12 organic compounds that have been released and are tracked in this report. The average air quality concentration for hydrogen sulfide is 19 ppb for 2020. The safety level is 1.4 ppb. For as long as they have been tracked they have failed to be under the safe level. There is a Town Hall tomorrow with MDHHS and City leaders.

GPI is talking about some recommendations they want to do, some of which is problematic for the City. If you want to know what is going on, look at the monitors between 1:00 A.M. and 5:00 A.M. They are always over 20.

Co-Chair Magnuson stated the range of the report was 2019 through 2021. The City is operating in good faith with how much they are trying to manage the wastewater treatment plant. He stated it seems it is Graphic Packaging that is causing this. The City has spent millions of dollars and the problem has gotten worse.

A question was asked if there any other cities in Michigan that have paper manufacturers that have similar issues? The best analog is Fox River in Wisconsin. They have gone through a lot of this. Not sure what the status is today. The company was forced to do a cleanup. This was a few years ago.

Air Quality of EGLE would be the one to make an environment enforcement. MDHHS has the authority to take action if it is determined a public health hazard. Discussion ensued.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

- ***Natural Features Protection (NFP) Review Board***– Mr. Glasser reported he was not at the last meeting; he was in Indianapolis. There is a meeting this coming Tuesday. He noted in regard to the zoning proposals for particular parcels, they are looking at the intent of what the NFP is, what they are supposed to do, and the authority NFP has when petitions come along. Generally, they make recommendations and tell applicants if they are out of compliance with the rules set forth for the overlay. Discussion ensued.
- ***Air and Water Quality*** – Mr. Glasser reports he has not heard anything in regard to water issues.
- ***Wildlife and Natural Resource Protection*** – Dr. Walter stated the Peregrine chicks are getting bigger. They are getting banded Friday morning.
The Fish and Wildlife Service has requested some revisions and clarifications. In regard to the Urban Bird Treaty, she is waiting to hear back from them on clarifications. They noted it was a very good application and were on the fence in regard to approving it and then asked for some revisions and clarifications.
- ***City of Kalamazoo Planning Commission*** – Mr. Magnuson stated since he is leaving, someone else will need to take this over.
- ***Tree Committee*** – Dr. Walter – nothing more to report.
- ***Asylum Lake Policy & Management Council*** – Ms. Dever reported the celebration is coming up. They did some buckthorn removal recently. They are focusing on birds and other things that are part of the land management plan.
- ***Parks & Recreation Advisory Board*** – Mr. Liekis reports Milham Park is applying for a Trust Fund Grant to do restoration of the upstream portion of Portage Creek. If approved, they will start work next year. The Adopt a Park Program is taking off. Their initiatives are gardening in the park and cleanup. Regarding alcohol consumption in parks in Kalamazoo, the State of Michigan does not have a ban. Municipalities can restrict it and the City of Kalamazoo has restricted alcohol consumption in the parks unless you are in the commons.
- ***Kalamazoo River Watershed Council*** – Mr. Benac reports the Kalamazoo Watershed met on Monday. They discussed planning and the budget. Nothing much to report. They are doing a Canoe the Kazoo event on June 17th.
- ***Wellhead Protection Program Committee – Quarterly*** - Jean Talanda – quarterly
- ***Odor Task Force – Quarterly*** – Mr. Benac reports they met on April 12th.

CHECK PHONE LINES AND STREAMING FOR COMMENTS:

No phone call. The streaming was on mute for the entire meeting.

Public Comment

- Mr. Theo Selant stated he grew up in the Winchell Neighborhood. He is a student at Western Michigan University studying biology, chemistry, and climate change studies. He asked how right of way trees affect roads. He asked why don't they plant more prairies?

Committee member responded after receiving permission from the City, they are installing a kind of prairie in a green space in their neighborhood.

Committee member stated that most tree roots grow below the road surface, although there are some that have shallow root systems.

Co-Chair Magnuson stated if he was interested in joining the ECC he suggested he come to the next meeting.

- Tom Howes asked about the land on Stadium Drive between Rambling and Howard, is there any long-term development plans for that stretch of property. Is that strip of land considered residential and commercial? It's a great wooded area and walking area. He would like more people to be aware of it.

Dr. Walter stated these questions should be presented to the Zoning Committee. Someone mentioned it probably is in the NFP overlay due to the continuous woodland and slope. Someone suggested he get the Winchell Association to look into it.

- Co-Chair Magnuson reported the Michigan DNR added animals to the nuisance law where you can kill them on your property with no permits. It included squirrels, raccoons, rabbits, beavers, and opossums. This is a state-wide decision.
- Mr. Glasser reported the City of Kalamazoo was host of the Annual Michigan Recycling Coalition at the Radisson last week. It was a state-wide event.
- Earth Day was great. The weather did not cooperate but whenever the rain stopped a new group of people showed up. They had games that made it interesting and fun. The neighborhood association helped them make connections and they picked the music.

ADJOURNMENT

- The meeting adjourned at 6:02 p.m.