

# Rockville Environment Commission 2018 Retreat Notes

**Thursday, January 4, 2018**

Mayor and Council Chambers, City Hall,  
111 Maryland Avenue, Rockville, Maryland

**Commissioners Present:** Chair John Becker, Sy Garte, Alicia Hosmer, Larissa Johnson, Clark Reed, Lea Rosenbohm, Monica Saavoss, Steve Sprague and Fedon Vayanis.

**Commissioners Absent:** None

**Council Liaison:** Mark Pierzchala

**City Staff:** Erica Shingara, City Manager Rob DiSpirito

**Guests:** Ben Parry, Stephanie Riddick

## Call to Order

Chair Becker convened the meeting at 6:30 p.m. and noted his additions to the Chair's Call to Order section of the agenda.

## Approval of Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Sprague moved and Commissioner Johnson seconded a motion to approve the December 4, 2017 minutes. The motion passed (7-0-2). Commissioners Hosmer and Rosenbohm abstained due to absence.

## Chair Report

Chair Becker reviewed the roster and noted two upcoming term limits. There was confirmation that two reappointment interest forms were submitted to the City Clerk's office; however, a schedule for appointments/reappointments is still pending. He reminded Commissioners about budget requests and the term limit for the chair position expires in March.

Prior to the meeting, Chair Becker emailed the Commission the City Attorney's opinion on the REvolv solar crowdfunding proposal and a request for the Commission to submit a Request for Advisory Opinion to the Ethics Commission to determine if the proposal complies with the City's Public Ethics Ordinance. Commissioner Johnson requested to table action on this item to the end of the meeting to allow further discussion.

## Introductions

The Commission welcomed City Manager Rob DiSpirito and the group provided introductions.

## 2018 Planning Retreat Purpose

Staff noted the Commission's last planning retreat was held in January of 2016. In the last two years, the Commission accomplished most of the retreat work priorities. Staff thanked the Commission for completing an online pre-retreat survey to help brainstorm and guide retreat prioritization discussions for 2018 events and initiatives and provide suggestions for new initiatives and improvement. Commissioners identified the following retreat goals:

- Prioritize Commission goals, events, and initiatives for 2018.
- Adjust the organization to best accomplish 2018 work plan goals.
- Identify ways to engage volunteers outside of the Commission and utilize resident expertise.

- Councilmember Pierzchala invited the Commission to identify suggestions for the upcoming Boards and Commissions Task Force to consider in their review of the purpose, practices and membership of each City Board and Commission.

### **Review of Commission Charter and Roles**

The Commission reviewed the following roles identified in the Environment Commission's Charter resolution (21-02) and the role assigned in the Sustainable Maryland Certification resolution:

#### ***Charter Resolution 21-02:***

1. *Recommend policies and programs relating to the environment, watershed stewardship and protection and promoting a sustainable community through initiatives relating to natural resources management and development, energy efficiency, pollution prevention and public education.*
2. *Provide feedback and recommendations on areas for improvement of the City's environmental programs and performance on an as-needed basis and at the direction of the Mayor and Council;*
3. *Maintain a list of expert contacts in the local community and act as intermediary in seeking assistance and expert advice from this contact group on topics and matters related to the environment that may be referred to the Commission by the Mayor and Council or staff;*
4. *Develop and advise Mayor and Council on elements of a "sustainable community" framework;*
5. *Help formulate and disseminate environmental education and outreach materials;*
6. *Provide input on the establishment of a web-site on environmental information for City residents;*
7. *Assist in the execution of an environmental award program including evaluating and recommending potential awardees;*
8. *Provide support at community outreach and education events, and provide support for proactive environmental activities and volunteer initiatives;*
9. *Prepare an annual report to Mayor and Council on relevant activities, recommendations, and proposed annual goals and objectives.*

#### ***Sustainable Maryland Certified Resolution***

10. *Authorizes the Environment Commission and its partners to serve as the Green Team to coordinate Rockville's certification action plan.*

Commissioners discussed potential Charter revisions:

- The Charter predates the creation of the Environmental Management Division and should be modified to support collaboration between the Commission and EMD.
- Suggested distinguishing roles that influence Rockville municipal government operations from those that influence the entire Rockville community (e.g., residents, businesses, etc.).
- Suggested the Boards and Commissions Task Force provide guidance on how the Commission should assess the costs and benefits of proposed environmental initiatives. Suggestions included an assessment template, rubric or criteria.
- Item #3: Suggested revising this item since the Commission does not currently maintain a list of local community experts. While each committee maintains a list of interested volunteers, it may be challenging to maintain a comprehensive expert list because of the wide array of environmental topics.
- Item #4: Suggested revising this item to reference the Commission's role in the Sustainable Maryland Certification program.
- Item #6: Suggested revising this item because the Charter predates the creation of the City's environmental webpages and this item may no longer be relevant. Staff noted that the City's

website will be undergoing a comprehensive update in 2018 and it may be helpful for the Commission to periodically provide recommendations on updated environmental pages. Commissioners also inquired about the Boards and Commission webpages and the Commission's role in other public information platforms, such as social media and Rockville Reports.

### **2016-2017 Main Accomplishments**

Staff highlighted the Commission's main 2016/2017 accomplishments:

- **Environmental Awards:** Recognized 4 award winners.
- **Community Wildlife Habitat Certification:** Achieved community certification, hosted the certification celebration, and submitted annual recertification materials to the National Wildlife Federation.
- **Solar Co-ops:** Coordinated with MD Sun/Solar United Neighborhoods to offer three residential solar co-ops.
- **Greener City operations:** The City purchased a Nissan Leaf for Parking Enforcement, installed an electric vehicle charging station at City Hall, and is working to improve recycling at Hometown Holidays.
- **Maryvale Stream Cleans:** Hosted biannual volunteer stream cleanups in October and April.
- **State and County Advocacy:** Recommended the Mayor and Council support the Maryland Fracking Ban, support the Maryland Polystyrene Ban, support the 50% Renewable Portfolio Standard/Maryland Clean Energy Jobs Initiative, oppose the relocation of the MCPS bus depot, and support the development of a Montgomery County Strategic Plan to Advance Composting and Food Waste Diversion.
- **Education and Outreach:** Hosted outreach booth at Hometown Holidays, provided neighborhood outreach for the Rainscapes Rewards program, and organized the Horizon Hill Stormwater Management Retrofit Tour.
- **Review of Rockville Ordinances, Plans and Policies:** Reviewed and made recommendations for Rockville's Polystyrene Ban, Building Energy Benchmarking Ordinance, Floodplain Ordinance, Public Property Naming Policy, NPDES Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System Phase II Permit, 2040 Comprehensive Master Plan, Rockville Pike Plan, Climate Action Plan preliminary review and stakeholder identification.

### **2018 Draft Calendar**

The Commission reviewed the following 2018 Calendar and recommended modifications:

- Add dates for Solar Co-op information sessions.
- Add deadline for Environmental Excellence Awards submissions and award date.
- Reschedule July 5th meeting to avoid conflict with July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday weekend.
- Check on availability for the April 14<sup>th</sup> date for the Maryvale Cleanup.
- Staff noted the Environment Management Division will host outreach tables at various public events throughout the year and invited the Commission to attend (activities noted as EMD outreach in calendar).

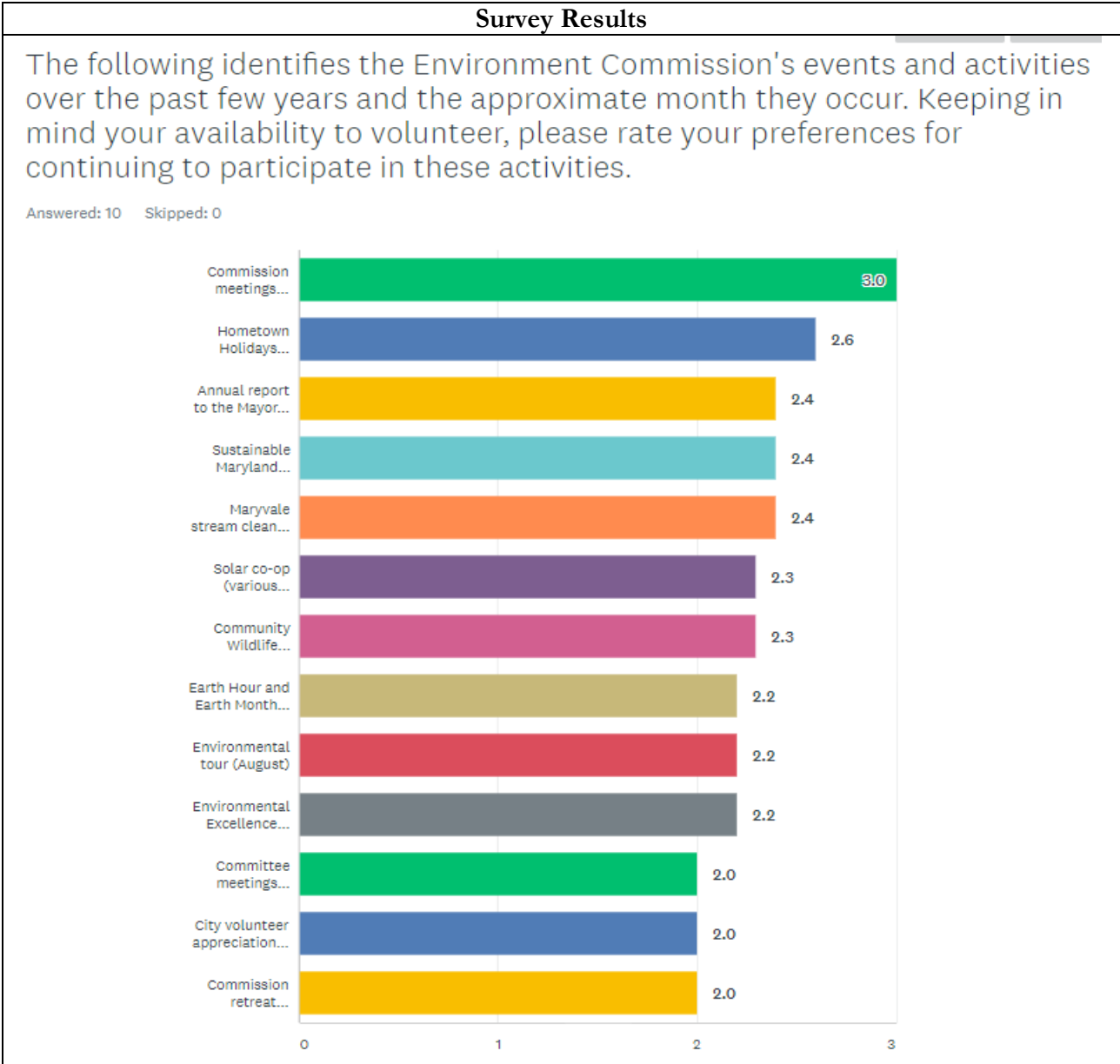
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		<b>OCTOBER (Solar Homes Tour and Energy Action Month)</b> October 4 - Commission Meeting (FY19 Budget) October 27: Maryvale Cleanup/MC Community Service Day																																																																																							
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**2018 Work Plan – Brainstorm**

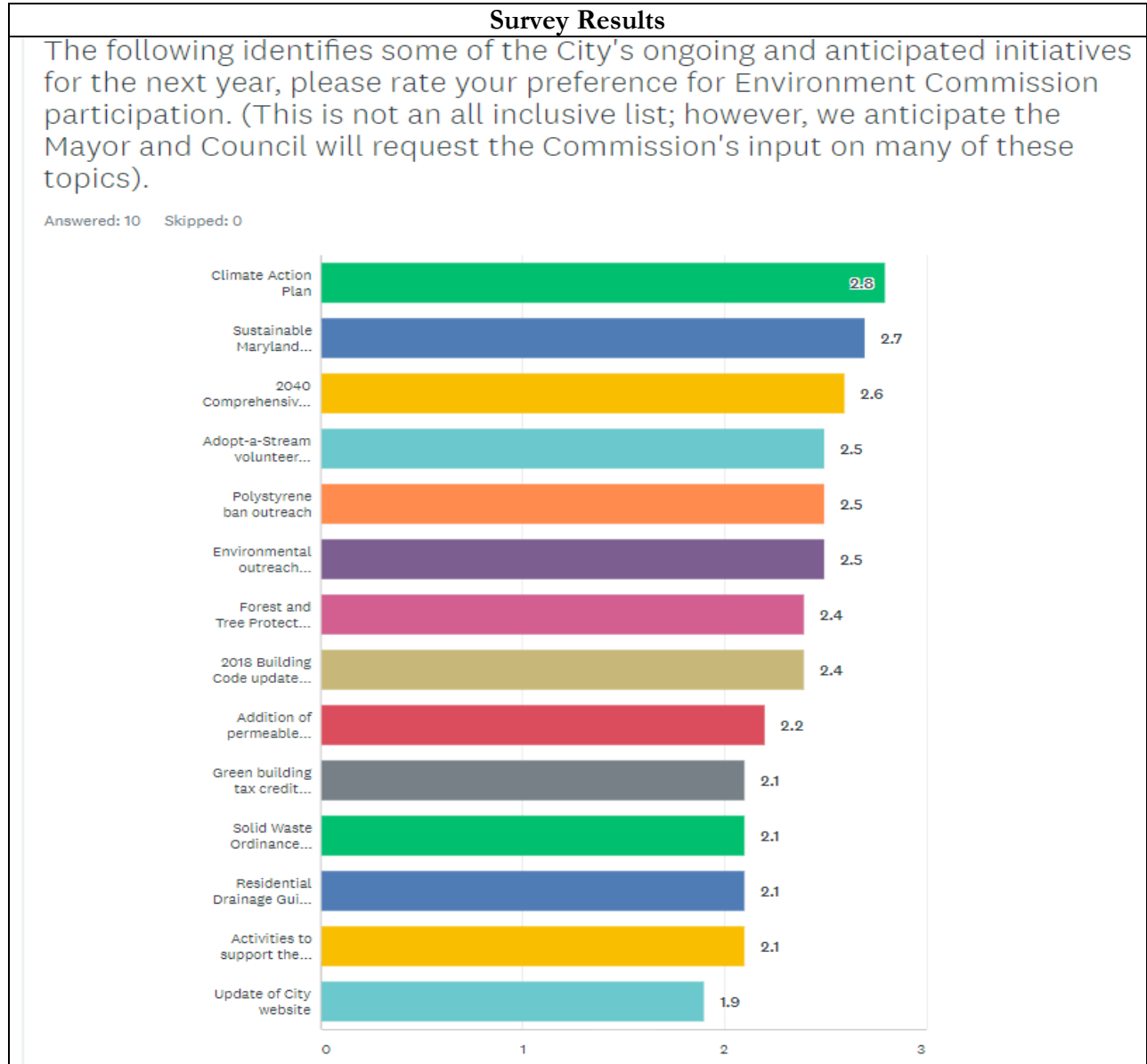
The Commission reviewed the results from the pre-retreat survey that rated collective preferences to: 1) participate in events and activities; and 2) coordinate on upcoming City initiatives.

The following tables are organized by the weighted averages that rank items from high priority (3), medium priority (2), to low priority (1).

**1. 2018 Events and Activities**



## 2. 2018 City Initiatives



### **Suggested New Initiatives**

Commissioners brainstormed potential new initiatives to consider in 2018:

- Commissioner Sprague suggested air emission reductions from traffic flow improvements. It was noted that this item may require coordination with the Traffic and Transportation Committee, Montgomery County, Maryland, and Federal government.
- Commissioner Hosmer suggested enrolling in the Mayors' Monarch Pledge.
- Commissioner Saavoss suggested encouraging Montgomery County Public Schools to offer Meatless Monday school lunches.
- Commissioner Reed suggested the RE-volv solar crowd funding project and community solar
- Commissioner Johnson suggested coordinating with other committees and non-profits, such as Habitat for Humanity, to encourage Rockville residents to take advantage of existing home weatherization programs.

### **2018 Work Plan - Prioritization Discussion**

Staff noted the inventory of potential 2018 events and initiatives includes more than 30 items; all receiving a medium to high priority. To help unify and focus Commission efforts and limited resources, Commissioners ranked their top three priorities for the year. The top three results of the group prioritization exercise:

1. Climate Action Plan (CAP) (14 points)
2. Sustainable Maryland Certification (SMC) (12 points)
3. Air pollution reduction from traffic flow (7 points)

Commissioners noted the top two priorities, CAP and SMC, correspond to the online survey results, are large in scope, and encompass many of the other topics and initiatives of interest to Commissioners and members of the committees.

### **Commission Organization and Suggested Modifications**

With these top priorities in mind, Commissioners were requested to review the organization and suggest modifications to accomplish these goals. Suggested topics for consideration include the role of the committees, meeting schedule, agenda structure, communication methods, chair term, partners, training needs and resources. The Commission identified several suggestions for potential modifications. The following summarizes general themes to be further deliberated at a future meeting:

- **Role of standing committees:** There was robust discussion on the merits and challenges of maintaining four separate standing committees. The committees provide an opportunity for more in-depth technical discussions, feed innovative ideas and projects, and provide better opportunities for volunteer participation. However, there were some concerns that committees compete for limited Commission resources and some have had variable monthly meeting schedules and attendance. It was suggested that committees should review the Commission's 2018 work plan priorities and discuss organization approaches to effectively accomplish these goals.
- **Communication:** There was interest in improving communication between Commissioners, committees, volunteers and the public. Suggestions included: using a platform for online communication other than email (e.g., a wiki, listserve) that allows for ongoing discussion, citations, documentation of ideas and improving public communication to better promote the Commission's accomplishments, projects, and

- events (e.g., Rockville Reports, annual report, social media, or Boards and Commissions website).
- **Engage volunteers:** The Commission discussed ways to actively engage new volunteers that serve on committees, have expressed interest in joining the Commission, or have shared contact information at outreach events. Suggestions included: encouraging committee volunteers to participate in the monthly Commission meetings; including a Community Forum section at the beginning of the agenda to allow volunteers the opportunity to participate and bring ideas forward; or assigning a Commissioner the role of overseeing volunteer engagement (e.g., meeting welcome and sign-in sheets, contact interested participants, share calendar of events and meetings, etc.).
  - **Coordinate with other entities on mutual issues:** Suggestions included coordinating with the Traffic and Transportation Committee on ways to reduce emissions from transportation sources or the Human Services Advisory Commission or non-profits on energy issues.
  - **Technical discussion and review:** Reiterated the importance of carefully reviewing reports and proposals, both created by the Commission and presented to the Commission.

#### Next Steps

- **Action Item:** All committees should notify staff and volunteers if they will meet in January.
- **Action Item:** All committees should review the Commission's 2018 work plan priorities and discuss whether to modify the standing committee structure (e.g., whether to meet monthly, ad-hoc, or to dissolve the standing committee) and to provide volunteer feedback on ways to engage with the Commission.
- **Action Item:** Any commissioner interested in serving as chair should email staff an expression of interest that can be shared with the Commission for consideration.
- **Action Item:** In 2018, the Commission will submit recommendations to the Boards and Commissions Task Force for changes to the Charter. Staff will upload the Commission's Charter to google docs to compile group comments and edits.
- **Action Item:** Staff will distribute an updated 2018 calendar.

The meeting adjourned at 10 p.m. The next meeting will be on Thursday, February 1, 2018 at 7 p.m. and will include a presentation from City staff and discussion regarding Parkland Acquisition Options and potential changes to the Forest and Tree Protection Ordinance.