

Rockville Environment Commission

Draft Minutes of Thursday, February 9, 7pm - 9pm

WebEx Meeting

Meeting Attendance

Commissioner	Present	Commissioner	Present
Hande Apaydin	X	Clark Reed, Chair	X
William McClain	X	Monica Saavoss	X
Justus Getty	X	Pavitra Srinivasan	X
Susan Koester		Ted Stauderman	
Sasha Mushegian	X		

City Staff: Amanda Campbell, Staff Liaison; Erica Shingara, Chief, Environmental Management Division (EMD); Rob Orndorff, Horticulturist; Paula Perez, City Forester; and Shaun Ryan, Planning Supervisor.

Councilmembers: Councilmember Monique Ashton

Meeting Commencement: Chair Reed convened the meeting at 7:03 p.m.

Approval of Agenda and Prior Meeting Minutes: The agenda was approved with no changes. Prior meeting minutes were approved with two changes to the 6 Taft Court and building code section.

Community Forum: No guests.

Residential Rooftop Solar and Street Trees

The Commission was joined by several City staff from Department of Recreation and Parks, Community Planning and Development Services, and EMD to discuss solar and the Master Street Tree Plan. The Commission received a request from a resident for the City to consider flexibility within the street tree program for situations in which a planned new tree planting would result in significant shading of a planned or installed rooftop solar system. The resident asked if in such cases, the City would allow an option to plant an alternative smaller tree species, and if a smaller species would still shade the roof, consider, in rare cases and under certain circumstances, not planting in that location.

Staff provided background on the Master Street Tree Plan and Maryland Roadside Tree Law. The plan was approved in 2000 and has been changed in a few circumstances over time. Any appeals for tree species coming from residents need to be approved by a consensus with neighbors. The Recreation and Parks Advisory Board reviews and decides whether to approve or deny appeals to make changes to the Master Street Tree Plan. Most appeals that go to the Recreation and Parks Advisory Board are denied. Some changes in species have occurred due to disease or pests. The City typically owns about 15 ft. of space between curb and yard. On streets with above-ground wires, smaller tree species are planted on the side of the street with

wires. Otherwise, streets are assigned a large canopy species to promote tree canopy, provide shade and a uniform streetscape.

Chair Reed clarified that no one present was proposing the removal of healthy street trees for solar, only the flexibility to plant smaller species at the time of replanting. He presented an approach to balance solar and trees based on a California city that matched maximum tree height by species based on the height of the roof. Several native smaller tree species could provide enhanced habitat benefits while allowing solar.

The Commission and guests discussed the broad community benefits from canopy trees and solar renewable energy production. Trees reduce the urban heat island effect, absorb air pollution, and reduce energy use of nearby shaded buildings. Trees also provide wildlife habitat, water quality benefits, and improve property values in the neighborhood. Solar reduces greenhouse gas emissions and air pollutants produced from non-renewable electricity sources and helps the City do its part to prevent the worst effects of climate change. Solar also shades the roof and can provide a return on investment over time. Staff noted that off-site community solar can serve as a viable off-site renewable energy source, but it is unknown how much rooftop space is critical to offsetting electricity demand given other factors are at play. More research is needed to analyze the costs, benefits and trade-offs of balancing these environmental goods. Ultimately, this topic would involve a broader discussion with community, neighborhoods, other boards and commissions, and City leadership. Chair Reed suggested that the Commission look more closely at this issue and the decision-making process.

Chair Report

- Environmental Awards nominations are due February 17
- Earth Day Proclamation and Earth Hour introduction at the March 6 Mayor and Council meeting
- Stream Clean-up dates: April 15 and 22
- Commissioner video spotlight – if anyone is interested in volunteering to share their perspective as a city volunteer
-

Mayor and Council Report

Complete the community priorities budget survey <https://www.rockvillemd.gov/951/Budget-Financials> Public hearings will be held March 6 and April 17.

Committee Reports

Energy Committee is working on natural gas leak detection white paper and reviewing four potential bills before the Maryland legislature: building performance standards, community solar, Maryland climate equity act, and zero emissions trucks.

Climate Action Committee discussed the types of legislative priorities that the committee wishes to track in the coming year. Also discussed was education and outreach materials for the Farmer's Market outreach, and potential citizen science projects.

Watersheds Committee: Steve Chesterton is replaced by Ted Stauderman as chair. The Committee continues to monitor Maryland General Assembly for bills related to curtailing salt

applications. The group is planning a salt testing event for March 12 and supporting the two stream cleanups in April.

Maryland General Assembly — Environmental Legislation

The group discussed potential bills that touch on Commission priorities including Building Performance Standards, Climate Equity Act, Zero Emission Trucks, Empower Maryland program updates, Wind Power, and making the community solar pilot a permanent program. After discussion, the Commission voted unanimously to recommend that the Mayor and Council support the Community Solar legislation (HB 908/ SB 613), especially considering the trees and solar discussion.

Staff Report/Climate Action Plan Progress Update

- The City received over 240 responses to the EV Surveys, and 103 needed charger locations were identified on the crowd-sourced map.
- MEA awarded the City \$394,000 solar canopy and EV charger grant which will contribute towards a power purchase agreement (under development).
- [City FY24 Budget Development Process](#) schedule and survey posted
- Climate Action Plan 2022 progress report has a tentative Mayor and Council date March 20.
- City now leasing a total of 12 electric fleet vehicles, and another 6 are expected to be delivered soon.
- Earth Month events will be posted and shared in the next Environment & Sustainability Newsletter

New Business: None.

Adjourn: Chair Reed adjourned the meeting at 9:00 p.m.