

Rockville Environment Commission
Draft Minutes of Thursday, March 9, 2023, 7pm - 9pm
 WebEx Meeting

Meeting Attendance

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

City Staff: Amanda Campbell, Staff Liaison; Larissa Johnson, Montgomery County; Erica Shingara, Chief, Environmental Management Division (EMD)

Councilmembers: Councilmember Monique Ashton

Meeting Commencement: Chair Reed convened the meeting at 7:10 p.m.

Introductions: New members Summer White and Sasha Mushegian and all Commission members introduced themselves.

Approval of Agenda and Prior Meeting Minutes: The agenda was approved with no changes. Prior meeting minutes were approved with one change to the Chair Report section.

Community Forum: No guests.

Project Porchlight

Larissa Johnson from Montgomery County DEP presented an energy efficiency program that involves visiting neighbors, offering to change their porchlight to an energy efficient LED, and sharing opportunities to save energy. Communities are notified of the program through yard signs, emails on community forums, or other means so that they know to expect volunteer visits. All supplies would be covered by EmPower Maryland. Visiting residents in person has proven to be an effective communication method for these outreach messages. The Commission discussed what it would take to find a neighborhood with equity needs that is interested in partnering with the Commission and the City to conduct an outreach event over one or more days. In addition to considering a separate outreach event, the Commission discussed offering energy efficiency information and a porchlight volunteer sign up at the Farmer’s Market.

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. Items to watch include composting and stormwater/flood mitigation items.

- Mayor and Council approved submittal of testimony in support of Community Solar bill HB908/SB613

Chair Report

- The Earth Day Proclamation and Earth Hour introduction was held at the March 6 Mayor and Council meeting
- Stream Clean-up dates: April 15 and 22
- Permit fees for “green” installations are waived for April
- Draft City Budget was presented February 17; Hearings March 6, April 17. The draft budget includes the compost program, additional funding for the stormwater and flood mitigation programs, stormwater infrastructure upgrades, LED streetlight conversions, and continuing other climate action plan-related projects. The Commission voted unanimously to choose Clark Reed as the point person to draft a letter of support for the Climate Action Plan related items in the draft FY24 budget and to support the inclusion of a budget item for electrification grants to property owners modeled after the Takoma Park program with a focus on prioritizing low to moderate income households.

Committee Reports

Energy Committee is working on methane gas leak detection white paper.

Climate Action Committee – no report.

Watersheds Committee: The group is planning a salt testing event for March 12 with eleven volunteers thus far, and hosting the two stream cleanups on April 15th and 22.

Maryland General Assembly — Environmental Legislation

No additional discussion.

Staff Report/Climate Action Plan Progress Update

- Go Green and Save Green: In celebration of Earth Month, Rockville permit fees are waived for applications received in April for solar, EV charger, or energy upgrades such as heat pumps.
- MEA sent the City the grant agreement for signature to participate in the \$394,000 solar canopy and EV charger grant.
- Climate Action Plan 2022 progress report has a tentative Mayor and Council date March on 20 [actual date was the 27th].
- County’s electrification grant program is reviewing applicants and hopes to have the program up by summer. Join the [electrification pledge](#) for updates.
- Earth Month events [are posted here](#) and will be promoted through City media and the Environment & Sustainability Newsletter

New Business: Chair Reed opened a discussion about a methane leak detection project proposal described in a draft white paper from the Energy Committee. Methane (natural gas) is a potent, toxic, and flammable greenhouse gas. Several cities including Boston and the District of Columbia have conducted methane leak detection studies showing that leaked emissions appeared to be much higher than what had been reported. Other advocacy groups have conducted leak detection events separate from government agencies. The District of Columbia Department of the Environment conducted its own survey and then several volunteer groups conducted their own assessment measuring the level of leakage in different areas where methane had been detected.

After a committee volunteer requested safety waiver information, City staff discussed internally and initial discussions provided feedback that the project did not fit the mold of issues that the City has direct control or impact on and that there was concern that it could raise potential volunteer safety issues. The City surveys for methane routinely as part of implementing transportation projects or other projects in the right of way or for activities involving digging and reports any and all issues to Washington Gas and recommends that all residents and visitors to immediately report any potential gas leak or other problem directly to Washington Gas or call 911. The City Attorney offered to discuss the topic with Chair Reed, which will be the next step in exploring this topic.

The Commission also briefly discussed street tree and solar trade-offs and decided to continue the discussion with some further research at a future meeting.

Adjourn: Chair Reed adjourned the meeting at 9:10 p.m.