

Rockville Environment Commission
Draft Minutes of Thursday, May 4, 2023, 7pm - 9pm
 WebEx Meeting

Meeting Attendance

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

City Staff: Amanda Campbell, Staff Liaison; Erica Shingara, Chief, Environmental Management Division (EMD); Jim Woods, Deputy Director for Public Works; Steve Sokol, Operations Maintenance Superintendent for Public Works

Councilmembers: Councilmember Monique Ashton

Guests: Karl Van Neste, Jyoti Bisbey, Steve Chesterton, Audrey Shen, Hande Apaydin

Meeting Commencement: Chair Reed convened the meeting at 7:04 p.m.

Approval of Agenda and Prior Meeting Minutes: The agenda was approved after switching the times for the Methane Leak Proposal to after the Salt Discussion and moving the Trees and Solar item before the Salt Discussion to enable participation of other Public Works staff in the methane proposal. Also, the Commissioner Corner was postponed due to time constraints. Prior meeting minutes were approved with the addition of Susan Koester in attendance.

Community Forum: Hande Apaydin joined the meeting to announce that due to her move outside the City boundaries, she is stepping down as Commissioner, but will continue to be involved in the environment in Rockville. Everyone thanked her for her service.

Audrey Shen introduced herself as a Watersheds Committee volunteer. Later in the meeting, Karl Van Neste, Jyoti Bisbey, and Steve Chesterton, also Watersheds volunteers, joined the meeting.

Chair Report

- Thank you to Earth Month volunteers. Rockville hosted or sponsored 13 stream cleanups attended by 182 volunteers that collected 126 bags of trash. Five of the cleanups were hosted by city staff or the Environment Commission.
- Summer White suggested the group explore ways to prevent trash entering streams.
- Sue Koester and Clark Reed volunteered to present the Environmental Excellence Awards on June 5.

Committee Reports

- Energy Committee: no report.

- Climate Action Committee: no report.
- Watersheds Committee: no report

Trees and Solar in the Street Tree Plan

The Commission reviewed the request from a City resident to allow flexibility in the Master Street Tree Plan to be able to request that the City plant a smaller tree if a planned new tree planting would shade rooftop solar. The Commission discussed how such a policy would need to be grounded in science and balance the substantial environmental and community value of planting all sizes of trees and investing in solar energy. The recommendation should be a narrow exception and not require approval of neighbors.

The Commission voted unanimously to support the following to be transmitted to the Mayor and Council along with the Solar-friendly tree proposal: "In situations where the city is planting a new large tree where it would eventually shade a resident's home who is installing (or plans to install) a rooftop solar renewable energy system, the city should allow flexibility in the Master Street Tree Plan for the resident to opt for the City to plant a species from a list of smaller native species (such as those in the attached proposal) without requiring further approvals."

Salt Discussion

Jim Woods, Public Works Deputy Director, and Steve Sokol, Operations Maintenance Superintendent joined the Commission to describe salt application and data tracking practices. Mr. Sokol and Mr. Woods explained how the City staff is very aware of water quality impacts of salt application, and very carefully gauge storm type and size, temperatures, conditions, and forecasts to determine the timing and method of salt applied. The City owns a brine machine which can treat all the City's roads with only 10 tons of salt; however, it can only be applied if the temperature is below 32 and the City is expecting accumulating snow. Otherwise, rainfall could wash it into waterways. Staff participates in national seminars and hones new techniques to ensure impact to the environment of salt application is minimized while ensuring safety and maintaining service expectations of residents and businesses.

Primary roads are treated and shoveled first. Sometimes more resources are put towards areas that do not have driveways and rely on public transportation routes in order to ensure equity.

It is difficult to compare data from other Cities on salt application volumes because of different definitions of storm type, how lane-miles are calculated and how salt is measured. The City is consistent in tracking its own data in order to determine trends over time and ensure precise and calibrated systems. The City welcomes any questions or feedback.

Methane Leak Proposal

Chair Reed shared that many of the City's questions about the Methane Leak Detection project have been addressed through some of the new revisions to the White Paper, such as by specifying that only gas caps on sidewalks would be assessed and that volunteers can be trained using readily available training videos.

Staff reminded the Commission of its work plan and the Climate Action Plan implementation actions that were committed to by the Commission and the Mayor and Council. In addition,

concerns were expressed about the role of the City in acting on any information gathered since it does not regulate methane gas infrastructure, other than to recommend contacting WGL immediately at any sign of a leak. The City monitors legislation affecting energy infrastructure and greenhouse gases and could advocate to the General Assembly or the Public Utilities Commission for issues affecting the City. Staff asked how the leak detection equipment, can be assured to be handled with care, and how the equipment would be calibrated.

Commission members discussed how methane leakage is an urgent question for multiple reasons including public safety and reducing the gains of the climate action plan. The volunteers could serve as information-gathering stakeholders. If unknown leaks are occurring, then the community would want to discover them. They could start with a small pilot and go from there.

Mr. Woods explained that if the Commission recommended that the City support the project, the Mayor and Council will ask staff for their response. One issue is staff capacity, another is that superleaks can be anticipated to have higher priority and be addressed, but low level leaks may receive lower priority.

After discussion the group decided to continue to develop a pilot project and to discuss how the project fits in with other Commission priorities at the June meeting.

Staff Updates

- Member interest in running for Chair elections in June
- Solar Canopy grant agreements approved by Mayor and Council April 24
- Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant pre-award form submitted
- 1st & 3rd floor City Hall lighting complete; Window film scheduled for May.
- City is discussing potential grant applications lead by the Maryland Clean Energy Center and Montgomery County on the Charging and Fueling Infrastructure Discretionary Grant application due May 31.
- City Academy next week: <https://www.rockvillemd.gov/152/City-Academy>

New Business: The Environment Commission voted unanimously to allocate the remainder of its budget to purchasing Climate Action Plan tote bags made with recycled materials to hand out at outreach events.

Adjourn: Chair Reed adjourned the meeting at 9:34 p.m.