

Rockville Environment Commission
Draft Minutes of Thursday, June 1, 2023, 7pm - 9pm
 WebEx Meeting

Meeting Attendance

Commissioner	Present	Commissioner	Present
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; Erica Shingara, Chief, Environmental Management Division (EMD); Chris Dempwolf, Community Planning and Development Services

Councilmembers: Councilmember Monique Ashton

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

Approval of Agenda and Prior Meeting Minutes: The agenda was approved with no changes. Prior meeting minutes were approved with a few edits.

Green and Energy Building Codes

Chris Dempwolf, the Building Plans Examiner Supervisor with the Department of Community Planning and Development Services provided an overview of the 2021 Code amendment and review process which occurs approximately every three years.

- The Department of Community Planning and Development Services (CPDS) is currently leading the effort to work through proposed amendments to Chapter 5 of the City Code.
- The 2021 set of International Building Codes includes basic codes related to construction, fire safety, electrical, and plumbing, and advanced codes such as 2021 International Green Construction Code, International Energy Conservation Code, and 2020 National Green Building Standard for homes (ICC-700).
- Building codes apply to new construction and substantial renovations. Applicability may be revised to ensure apply more broadly and close loopholes.
- Proposed amendments must be coordinated internally to avoid conflicting code provisions (e.g. Implementing energy storage requirements coordinated with fire code).
- Code amendment workgroup will work to finalize proposed amendments to align with the CAP, surrounding municipalities, and the goals of the City.
- ISD staff will provide a draft of the proposed amendments on the City website for public review this fall. Two virtual community forums will be scheduled.
- Comments will be reviewed and changes made before presenting to Mayor and Council.
- The target effective date is January 1, 2024

- To effectively regulate construction and support green initiatives, ISD is exploring several options to enhance permitting and inspection services:
 - SolarApp+ – Automated residential solar panel permitting system
 - NGBS Green Verifier Program – Get City building inspectors certified
 - MyGovernmentOnline (MGO) – Exploring automation options

Environmental Management staff shared how codes provide an opportunity to support multiple areas of the Climate Action Plan, and specifically Action C-03 “Progressively strengthen green/energy conservation building codes for new construction to reach net zero or equivalent.” The 2023 code cycle is one step along that path. In addition, the updated and amended building codes will help buildings meet Building Performance Standards published by the state and the County and begin to align with the New Buildings Institute (NBI) Building Decarbonization Code. Seven green/energy themes of focus in this code cycle are:

1. Energy Efficiency
 - Increasing levels of energy efficiency requirements in code cycles sets a pathway to net zero buildings, helps reduce long term energy costs, and stress on the grid.
2. Renewable energy
 - Building designs that support the addition/expansion of renewable energy sources include orientation, designated “solar ready zones” on the roof, conduit and wire to this zone, and reserved space in the electrical panel.
 - In cases where solar is not feasible due to shading or orientation, include the flexibility to procure offsite renewable energy from the PJM Interconnection electric service territory or renewable energy through a long-term contract.
3. Building system electrification
 - Support the transition from the direct fossil fuel use in buildings (e.g., propane, heating oil, natural gas for heating, hot water, cooking, and other uses) to electric sources.
 - Provide electric-ready construction that allows for simple, low-cost all-electric technology installation at some point in the future (i.e., electrical panel upgrades and outlets near fossil-fueled equipment).
4. Transportation system electrification
 - Supporting electric transportation involves installing electric vehicle (EV) charging stations, preparing for short-term charger expansion through EV-ready full circuit electrical wiring, and longer-term expansion through EV-capable spaces built with conduit access and reserved electrical panel capacity.
5. Grid integration (“smart” features)
 - Support the transition from the direct fossil fuel use in buildings (e.g., propane, heating oil, natural gas for heating, hot water, cooking, and other uses) to electric sources.
 - Include grid integration technologies to help manage peak electrical loads.
6. Increasing energy storage
 - Rechargeable energy storage systems to provide resiliency and manage electricity loads.

- Storage ready: dedicated space in commercial or residential building for battery and/or electrical panel capacity.
- 7. Cool roofs and resiliency
 - Incorporating high reflectance roof materials can reduce costs and energy use.

Staff is conducting detailed evaluation of five sets of codes, each hundreds of pages long, and several sources of model code language to incorporate the themes above. Staff is coordinating with the State, County and the DC metro region, as well as comparing the new codes to current requirements and other updated sections to ensure that codes are clear and consistent.

Sources of model 'stretch' code language include the National Buildings Institute Decarbonization Overlay, a report on Montgomery County's net zero code roadmap, Department of Energy technical reports, and peer jurisdictions' codes. Staff is considering costs, benefits, financial viability, flexible options and exemptions, and how codes can be implemented in a practical and effective manner.

Discussion

- Commissioners discussed how the codes incorporate low-carbon materials.
 - Staff clarified that although building materials' carbon footprint isn't called out specifically in the green building codes, there are points given for salvaged, recycled, bio-based, and sustainably harvested wood in the commercial and residential codes.
- In response to a question about historic neighborhoods, staff responded that the Historic District Commission reviews development applications in historic districts.

Chair Report

- Environment Commission membership updates
- Commission submitted Solar and Street Tree recommendation
- City FY23 Budget approved
- Environmental Awards presentation was held at June 4 Mayor and Council meeting and received positive response.
- Coordinating supplies for Farmer's Market Outreach booth: members agreed to rely on Montgomery County materials and not purchase new ones unless needed.
- Sign up: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C44AEAB2DA1F4C16-environment>

Solar Switch Overview

- Solar United Neighbors is partnering with iChoosr to do more marketing and assist with logistics for higher volume of solar customers
- Webinars with Q&A will be scheduled soon (Maryland, DC, Virginia)
- iChoosr holds a reverse auction and chooses the best contractors
- Registrants are provided a basic quote
- To pursue solar, registrants provide a \$150 deposit, have their roof assessed and receive a detailed proposal with purchase, lease, and solar renewable energy credit options
- The deposit is refundable for any reason

- When registrants sign a contract, the \$150 goes towards the purchase/lease
- <https://solarswitch.com/en/capitalarea/home>

Methane Leak Proposal

The Commission discussed the volunteer project to detect methane infrastructure leaks. The equipment would cost \$1,359.50 per unit plus a separate calibration kit every 30 days. Clark Reed and Will McClain emphasized their opinion that the project should have no more liability than reading a machine and discussed reaching out to the hazard mitigation chief and the fire marshal about training options. The project would involve a planned route to be tested four times a year in different seasons. Councilmember Ashton mentioned the need to ensure that Washington Gas and Light is prioritizing Rockville in its system upgrades. Chair Reed shared that the company is not very transparent in their upgrade process.

Staff asked the Commission to develop a more specific project outline with a timeline, how many staff and volunteers would be needed, and how much time it would take to support. The Commission decided to examine the project in the context of its other work plan tasks at a future meeting and consider its priorities and whether supporting the project would displace other needed activities. In addition, all seven of the Commission members voted in favor of recommending that the City support the program as outlined in the white paper with the addition of the project work plan outline when it is completed.

Committee Reports

- Energy Committee: The Energy Committee discussed the methane project.
- Climate Action Committee: Some committee members are interested in volunteering at the Farmer's Market.
- Watersheds Committee: The Watersheds Committee reported that the Falls Road stream contained plenty of trash to clean up. Maryvale had less trash. The committee is interested in reaching out to other groups and inviting them to meetings to share ideas.

Mayor and Council Report

- The Sustainability Manager position was retained in this years' budget.
- Interested in hearing ideas for environmental state legislation to support.
- Good feedback on the compost program and kitchen counter pails giveaway.
- Mayor and Council to discuss a zoning amendment to allow parking reductions for installing electric vehicle chargers.

Staff Updates

- Member interest in running for Chair elections in July – contact Amanda
- Public Works Week was held last month
- City Academy included an EMD presentation.
- Recycling Enclosure Replacement Project received approval to award a contract for design and build.
- Window film installed at City Hall on third and second floor South-facing windows

- City is supporting grant applications lead by the Maryland Clean Energy Center and Montgomery County for Charging and Fueling Infrastructure (CFI) due June 13.
- Additional kitchen compost caddies were provided to Rockville residents

New Business: No new business.

Adjourn: Chair Reed adjourned the meeting at 9:05 p.m.