

Rockville Environment Commission

Draft Minutes of Thursday, September 9, 2021

WebEx Meeting

Meeting Attendance

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

City Staff: Amanda Campbell, Staff Liaison; Erica Shingara, Chief, Environmental Management Division

Guests: Nancy Breen

Council Liaison: Monique Ashton

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

Approval of Agenda and Prior Meeting Minutes: The agenda was approved with the addition of a briefing on the Rockville Pike. Prior meeting minutes were approved with no changes.

Community Forum: Nancy Breen, Rockville Bicycle Advocacy Committee chair introduced herself.

Chair Report

Chair Reed remarked on the Solar Co-op outreach successes. There are already 333 people joining the co-op in Maryland. Prior years in Montgomery County were lower – 244 in 2016, 172 in 2019, 211 in 2020. Staff added that Rockville has by far the highest rate of contracts among participating cities and towns in Maryland.

Chair Reed thanked everyone for their participation at the Farmer’s market over the summer. Tabling at the market, volunteers spoke to 187 people, about 14 a weekend, totalling over 40 hours of service. The Solar co-op FAQ video was updated and shared widely, getting at least 27 views (although some formats did not track views). The video required 10 volunteer hours. The co-op was promoted on social media apps, with at least three posts on Next Door.

Chair Reed asked for feedback on members’ experience this year. Many found it helpful to connect with each other and with market-goers in person, especially after a tough couple of years. The outreach improved Environment Commission visibility. The Farmer’s Market was a great location for outreach and an enjoyable experience. Members recognized the need for information about inclusive options for renters to participate in renewable energy opportunities.

Staff noted that the county's aggregate energy purchase is in development. Promoting community solar is a challenge for the city since it implies promoting private business.

Montgomery County anticipates launching an electric vehicle buyers cooperative purchase later this fall and Chair Reed is awaiting updates.

Mayor and Council Report

Councilmember Ashton thanked everyone for their progress and efforts. Given the recent tragic flood events caused by tropical storm Ida, more constituents are asking what they can do to help with climate change. People are interested in joining the co-op waitlist. She is planning to ask Maryland Solar United Neighbors if they could consider adding a few more participants this year.

Other announcements include:

- The city is seeking [public comments](#) on Future Use of Town Center Streets and whether to continue the practice of using street space for café tables, bicycles, and pedestrians.
- The City's Comprehensive Master Plan was adopted in August. Thank you to the Commission for the detailed feedback on the plan over the years.
- Councilmember Ashton is looking forward to seeing City leadership reflected in the Climate Action Plan which will be presented this fall. Councilmember Ashton is interested in more public electric vehicle chargers and an Electric Vehicle Plan, for example.
- The plan should consider how the City and its residents could be better prepared for this and other chaotic weather events. DPW is investigating the recent flood events.
- Interested residents can donate to the local groups Wider Circle, Montgomery County Housing Partnership, and Interfaith Works.

Staff added that the City is working on collecting data on flood issues through a survey that includes mapped locations. The City is comparing rain gauge data and NOAA data on this event. The CAP includes several actions in this area. Rockville will be working with FEMA to update the City's floodplain maps over the next year. However, this effort does not map flood small subwatersheds or inland flooding, so we are also exploring what more can be done to assess flooding at the local level. The Environmental Management Division also plans to work with MDE to factor in new rainfall/ storm event projections in stormwater regulations.

Rockville Pike Project Briefing from the Rockville Bicycle Advocacy Committee

Nancy Breen, the chair of the Rockville Bicycle Advocacy Committee briefed the commission on the status of the Rt. 355 Neighborhood Plan implementation. A proposal for redevelopment of one section of the corridor contains a proposal that would reduce the width apportioned to sidewalk and bike lanes.

Several commission members expressed support for a design that would include more space for bicyclists and pedestrians. Monica Saavoss and Will McClain volunteered to look into the issue and identify when/how the Commission could consider weighing in on the project proposal.

Climate Action Plan

Staff presented an overview of the changes and additions in the Draft Climate Action Plan compared to previous materials. The Draft Plan includes:

- Description of timeline and how the plan was developed
- Summary of Draft Action List feedback form responses and summaries of prior feedback
- Some adjustments to climate projections to better align solar and compost program benefits with Rockville-based information
- Updates to climate data to reflect the county's and other data sources, adding drought
- Demographic information and context as part of analyzing climate impacts and climate-related policies on low income and communities of color
- Preliminary climate vulnerability analysis of infrastructure, ecosystems, and people, identifying potential needs and gaps and ways to strengthen resilience
- Action write-ups containing details about estimated costs and staff resources, co-benefits, the objective of the action, current status (ex. proposed, underway, in development) lead and partners. Actions narratives describe what it is, what the action is expected to entail, and other background information.
- A "What Can I Do" section with links to resources.

The draft plan is currently under interdepartment staff review. Environmental Management staff shared the first half of the draft plan with the Commission for review and welcomed feedback. The detailed action write-ups will be shared with the Commission shortly thereafter. The plan will be presented to the Mayor and Council [now December 6], followed by a public comment period, revisions, and hopefully adoption in early 2022. Staff plans to illustrate synergies among actions and include a proposed schedule. Funding and support across the City will be key to implementation.

Actions are the same as the draft actions presented at the July 22 event with some additional emphasis on flood resilience to respond to recent events.

REC noted the draft CAP includes a map of dams and floodplains and inquired about potential flooding impacts from dams outside of the City limits. Staff responded that the Maryland Department of the Environment requires high hazard dam owners to have emergency action plans that detail evacuation triggers and subsequent evacuation plans. Commissioners thanked staff for their hard work on the plan.

Environment Commission — Annual Report Preparation

The Environment Commission was invited to present an annual report to the Mayor and Council this fall describing accomplishments and goals. Commission members listed some accomplishments since the last report two years ago:

- Pesticide ban – research, inviting speakers, several discussions over several months, decision to support and transmittal to Mayor and Council, and follow-up support at Mayor and Council meetings
- Solar Co-op and outreach
- Environmental Excellence Awards during the pandemic
- Maryland Legislation recommendations and white paper research
- Climate Action Plan – providing detailed feedback at Commission and Committee levels, facilitating the November 2021 Open House event
- Adopted Maryvale previously. Stream clean-ups: at least twice a year.

- Stream Restoration Tour planned for September 18
- Sustainable Maryland re-certification application
- Comprehensive Plan comments
- Adding Commissioner Corner to Commission agendas to learn from each other
- Earth Day proclamation
- Attending Montgomery County Energy Summit and Green Team Equity training
- Following Montgomery County climate action plan
- Briefing on the County's Building Energy Performance Standards
- Submitting recommended comments on I270 widening project
- Providing feedback on the City website and how it functions for environment, sustainability, and the commission
- One Commissioner volunteered to serve on the Human Services Grant Selection Committee

Future initiatives include:

- Salt testing in streams – citizen science
- Electric Vehicle Purchasing Group
- White Papers in the works and issues coming soon: Coal tar ban, electrifying landscaping equipment, net zero building codes, and others referred by Mayor and Council
- Environmental Excellence Awards
- Maryland Legislation priorities for 2022

Committee Reports

Climate Action Committee: No report.

Energy Committee: No report.

Watersheds: Shannon Philbin talked to the WS committee about scheduling another clean-up. A lot of trash washed into local waterways during the storm. The Commission agreed to participate in a cleanup on Sunday September 26th, which is World Rivers Day, 10am-noon.

Staff Report

Project Updates

- Sustainable Maryland Re-Certification: The City submitted responses to comments. Certifications will be recognized at Maryland Municipal League conference in October.
- Building Tune-up for City Hall: Staff is working with contractor to refine the proposed scope and discuss plans for implementing recommendations.
- City Hall lighting: Staff is developing project plan and budget amendment request.

Outreach Campaigns and Events

- Upper Watts Branch Stream Restoration Walk, Saturday, September 18, 9am-11am.
- Tree Giveaway, Saturday, October 16 – Registration FULL.

The Mayor and Council

- November 8 [Now moved to December 6]: Environment Commission Annual Report and Rockville Climate Action Plan briefing

New Business: No new business.

Adjourn: Chair Reed adjourned the meeting at 9:02 p.m.