

Environment & Sustainability Commission

April 4, 2024

City Hall, Edward & Martha Berry Conference Room

Attendance:

Members - Aimee Delach, Ed Newman, Beth Clodfelter, Sean Pierce, Elaine Goetz, Megan Westervelt, and Meghan Jennings

New members - Shane Benton and Nichole Mazzone

Guests - Kathleen Shuttleworth, City of Athens intern; Dusty (Hannah) Kopp from the Polygonia Foundation; and Gene Duebler from the Shade Tree Commission

Absent - Molly Jo Stanley

Agenda

1. **Call to Order** - Aimee, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.
2. **Disposition of Minutes** from March meeting (attached)
 - Beth motioned to approve the March 6, 2024
 - Sean seconds the motion
 - All in favor; none opposed - motion passes
3. **Business Items**
 - Earth Week Plans and Announcements
 - OHIO Earth Day Celebrations is happening April 23rd in the Walter Hall Rotunda
 - More information can be found online at <https://www.ohio.edu/sustainability/get-involved/earth-day2>
 - The Sustainability Awards are open for nominations. The deadline to submit a nomination is April 16th.
 - Aimee asked if there are other Earth Month events that the Commission would be interested in serving together?
 - The events calendar for Earth Month is available online at <https://athensohioearthday.weebly.com/earth-month-events-calendar.html>
 - Aimee shared that she will ask Sam Crowl if there is an Earth Month project that the Commission can get involved with.
 - Nichole shared that she will be staffing a table at the Earth Day Celebration event.
 - Dusty and Shane shared that Rural Action is hosting a tree planting event along the Little Muskingum River on April 20th.
 - MoveOUT Plans
 - Ed and Megan shared the video they put together to promote MoveOUT volunteer opportunities
 - <https://bit.ly/MoveOut2024>
 - Many Commission members commented that the sound and images were good.
 - Commission members inquired who the target audience was.
 - Ed and Megan replied that the video would be shared on social media and with landlords.
 - Commission members asked if there are established locations for food collection bins?

- Additional comments were made that the food collection could be bigger and promoted bigger.
 - A suggestion to create a QR code which provided information and a map of locations was made.
- Commission members commented that they were having issues with the existing QR code not taking them to the correct webpage.
- Commission members stated that campus recycling has guaranteed that they will collect but can't guarantee that they will have the Give Back Day.
- Ed reported that he was working with off-campus housing. He is focusing on working with landlords to target where people are actually moving out. He states that he aims to have more convenient returns or drops which allow for a higher return volume. Ed stated that he is looking at MoveOUT plans with a 5-year plan scope.
- Ed reported that he is trying to work with Rumpke to reduce charging properties for mattresses by having landlords bring mattresses to a centralized location.
 - Beth commented that Ed should try to find/target volunteers to help with mattress collection.
 - Ed replied that they do have three established drop off centers.
 - Ed also stated that there are existing GivePulse events for MoveOUT.
- Commission members commented that the video should highlight: (1) what people can donate, (2) where people can donate, and (3) how people can help.
- Commission members suggested that metrics be included within the video. Metric tons of waste and importance of collecting food were listed as example metrics.
- "Leave the Leaves" Presentation - Dusty Kopp, Polygonia Foundation
 - Dusty reported that the National Wildlife Federation has a "Leave the Leaves" website, and reported that the Ohio EPA has a data collector.
 - Dusty mentioned that lawn care is a huge topic to address.
 - The Commission discussed an opt-in initiative to reduce leaf litter that's raked up. They discussed how the leaves could be introduced back into the natural system instead. The Commission also discussed a potential partnership with the City for the opt-in program. A mail out which targeted homeowners, renters, and landlords was discussed as an opportunity for sharing information about the potential opt-in program.
 - Dusty mentioned that the Polygonia Foundation has a "10% Lawn Challenge" where a property returns 10% of their lawn per year to natural
 - Aimee mentioned that the Athens City Code has been changed to allow for taller lawns but properties have to apply for a pollinator lawn.
 - The Commission discussed the need for a "Sustainability Resource Portal" which shared local information about many sustainability topics including: solar, pollinator lawn, leave-the-leaves, native species, curbside composting, etc.
 - Elaine mentioned that reaching out to the City to include information about the "Leave the Leaves" program on the utility mailer could be a successful way to share the information.
 - Aimee commented that utility mailers are effective, especially City-wide.
 - Shane added that another program to advertise could be raking leaves into gardens for mulch and strategic placement for seasonal wildlife habitats. He

stated that helpful information is available on the National Wildlife Federation's webpage.

- Nichole commented that "Leave the Leaves" and "No-Mow May" yard signs could be effective at promoting and sharing the program.
 - Kathleen commented that QR codes could be included on the signs for people to learn about the programs.
 - Elaine recommended having the City provide the signs by charging for sign and could include a fee for the mailer within the total price.
 - Aimee mentioned that a QR code could also be utilized on the mailer.
- Ed added that the Commission should think of opportunities to partner with City to reuse sludge from sanitary system. This type of program has potential to save the City money.
- Megan commented that there could be a platform for members of the public to share ideas and comments on programs/initiatives.
- Dusty announced that on April 12th at Jackie O's, there is a fundraiser to support the Polygonia Foundation.
- Athens Trees - Gene Duebler, Shade Tree Commission
 - Gene introduced himself and mentioned that he is an arborist in town that currently serves on the Shade Tree Commission.
 - Gene mentioned that the existing Athens City Code does not have enough protections for trees. He states that there is no punishment when trees are removed. He mentioned that the Shade Tree Commission is looking to partner with Cities who have active and successful programs for how to protect City trees. He stated that the Shade Tree Commission has a goal to rewrite the tree ordinances and sustainability policies. He included that the Shade Tree Commission's timeline is to present the language to City Council by June 2024.
 - Aimee asked the Commission members if they had copies of the Biodiversity Plan. She stated that she would share the plan with the members who did not have a copy and that she would add new Commission members to the existing Dropbox account.

4. Announcements

- Nichole asked what the protocol or level of sharing information with group was.
 - Aimee replied that Sunshine Laws limit discussion of items over email or within other group settings. Aimee mentioned that the Commission could create subcommittees where items can be discussed in detail but will have to report to full Commission
- Dusty stated that she is interested in solar and the needed infrastructure to accommodate alternate energy sources.
 - Aimee commented that electric panels and housing wiring need to be updated from knob and tube. She stated that her personal home has solar panels and she learned from her experience.
- Shane commented that there is a tree-based festival in his hometown of Audubon Park outside of Louisville, Kentucky. He stated that he would research his hometown's code to see how they protect trees.
- Many Commission members shared comments on the construction project along Union Street. The Commission discussed ways to promote and support businesses along Union Street while construction is underway.

- Beth discussed sunshine laws and that emailing information out to the Commission is fine, but the group cannot discuss items via email. She mentioned that agenda items can be proposed over email without creating issues with sunshine laws.
- Aimee announced that the next scheduled meeting is May 1, 2024.

5. Adjourn

- Elaine Goetz motioned to adjourn at 7:02 p.m.
 - Megan Westervelt seconded the motion
- All in favor; none opposed.