

Swarthmore Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, August 23, 2022
Minutes
APPROVE 9/27/22

Present: Margaret Betz, Phil Coleman, Hannah Covert, Shirley Dodson, Sue Edwards, Nancy English, Elizabeth Jenkins, Susan Kelly, Scarlett McCahill, John McKinstry, Carol Nackenoff, Susie O'Donnell, Rachel Pastan, Jennifer Pfluger, Allen Prindle

The August 23 meeting of the Swarthmore EAC opened at 7:30 on ZOOM and in Borough Hall.

1. Minutes of July Meeting

The minutes of the July 26 EAC meeting were APPROVED.

2. Updates

Elizabeth reported that the table at the Farmers Market on Saturday with the Tree Committee went well. There was a lot of traffic. Thanks to Julie Ellis and Francie Halderman for joining us. We are still looking for volunteers at the Fun Fair. Let Elizabeth know if you can join. Elizabeth has a list of things to talk about and the Tree Committee may join us there.

3. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

4. Affordability Taskforce

Rachel Pastan spoke on the Affordability Task Force. The origin of the task force started about a year ago among neighbors who saw a dramatic increase in the price of housing and who saw that people they knew were leaving Swarthmore because of lack of affordability. There was concern that the nature of the town could change. They petitioned Borough Council to appoint an Affordability Task Force which would study the issue and make recommendations. There are 9 people on the task force, and they have been meeting monthly. Much of their work is around ownership, rather than rental. Through their research, they have written 8 short white paper recommendations. The median home value in Swarthmore in 2000 was \$258K, and now it is \$550K, so it has doubled in the last 20 years. Many of their solutions dovetail with environmental sustainability: gentle density. Housing policy is environmental policy. The initial draft of their report has eight options to help with affordability.

Among the issues raised and suggestions made:

Will more impervious surface increase runoff, especially as we have more extreme weather events?

Could we increase EV charging capacity for new structures?

Would more housing result in a loss of the tree canopy?

How many accessory dwelling units are there in town?

Would the College be willing to sell Morganwood?

Can the existing sewer infrastructure handle increased density?

The community land trust option might be a way to increase acreage in native plants and other bird friendly features: a community owned land trust would ensure continuity in bird friendly habitats.

Using existing housing stock, rather than building new buildings would be more environmentally friendly.

Are prohibitions to accessory dwelling units related to how a family is defined? How are concerns about apartments related to the number of college students in town?

Rachel said they are collecting data on accessory dwelling units. Regarding the College, they are interested in taking their big houses and making them smaller sized rentals to increase housing inventory if the Borough will allow them to do that. The College seems to think Morganwood might be a place for young faculty. She said they are going to investigate the sewage capacity. She noted that it is expensive to do some of that conversion.

Members of the EAC are encouraged to write to Rachel with their thoughts on the options that were presented.

5. Backyard Chickens Education

Scarlett asked us to make recommendations about people keeping chickens in their yards and how to limit rats. John had shared with Scarlet one website about ways to protect chicken coops from rats. There seems to be a growing problem with rats. Rats go after the chicken feed. Sue Kelly reported that her neighborhood has had a proliferation of rats. Sue said Bill Webb had seen an ordinance at West Goshen to deal with chickens. Carol said that an ordinance might be appropriate. Rachel said that in the Borough, as long you have chickens as a pet (rather than for commerce) you have a right to them: it is a permissible activity.

Scarlett asked that we prioritize four actionable things that people must do.

There are four items on the website John shared with Scarlet.

There is also a way to reduce rats by having compost in closed containers, as opposed to having open bins.

Elizabeth said a middle way between no action and an outright ban is to require that anyone who wants chickens talk to the Borough and get a fact sheet on how to keep chickens.

Scarlett said she will draft a fact sheet and share with the EAC to get suggestions.

6. Bird Town Application

We have reached out to community members on the EAC's Bird Town application, including the Tree Committee, the Horticultural Society, Friends on Little Crum Creek, Chester-Ridley-Crum Watershed Association, the Scott Arboretum and the College and have received good feedback. How big should the Bird Town Committee be? Some felt it should be between 5 and 7 people.

7. Zero Waste

Susie O'Donnell and Jennifer Pflugger reported that they have been working on the Farmers' Market bag ban which is set to begin on October 1. They have received 400 reusable bags.

They are lining up volunteers at the Farmers Market on October 1 and are approaching the middle and high school and the Rotary Club for help with the effort. They estimate that 80% of the shoppers at our Farmers Market already bring their own bags.

Carol suggested that we might have to re-educate people in the spring because they might forget over the winter. Susie said they are looking for volunteers for the spring as well.

They are also working on plastics minimization. They have done the merchant survey and want to do a community survey. To help with this, they have engaged a college student green advisor. He will write a *Swarthmorean* article that will come out right before October 1. He will administer the survey and report back the results. He might also be able to draft an ordinance.

8. Ready for 100

Bill Webb had asked questions about the renewable natural gas contract. Scarlett shared with Borough Council information on 100% renewable natural gas (from landfills) so they renewed their contract with The Energy Co-Op through the end of the year.

John and Phil have reached out to the Co-Op and Dartmouth House Apartments about creating a solar canopy. They have not gotten a response from either yet but are still trying to contact them. Elizabeth suggested that maybe the college might want to purchase the electricity.

9. Borough Council Update

The Environment Committee will review EAC and TC ARPA requests during the committee's meeting on Wed 8/24, in case anyone wants to join/listen in.

10. Future Collaboration

Elizabeth noted that we had great success in working with the Horticultural Society. She asked that we think about a speaker series with others and the library for next spring. She asked we bring these ideas for the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted.

John McKinstry

Co-Clerk