

Swarthmore Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, September 27, 2022
Minutes
Approved 10/25/22

Present: Anna Benner, Margaret Betz, Phil Coleman, Hannah Covert, Shirley Dodson, Sue Edwards, Julie Ellis, Elizabeth Jenkins, Susan Kelly, Jonathan Lock, Scarlett McCahill, John McKinstry, Vibhat Nair, Carol Nackenoff, Susie O'Donnell, Jennifer Pfluger, Allen Prindle

The September 27 meeting of the Swarthmore EAC opened at 7:30 on ZOOM and in Borough Hall.

1. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

2. Approve of Minutes

The Minutes of the August 23, 2022 meeting were APPROVED.

3. New Members of the EAC

Elizabeth reminded everyone that we are looking for new EAC full and associate members. People are asked to forward names to Elizabeth, John or Scarlett. We will do a recruitment push in October.

At the Fun Fair, we had a good presence next to a Few Steps.

4. Community-Sponsored Commercial Electric Lawn Equipment Initiative

Vibhat Nair and Jonathan Lock came to talk with us about community-sponsored commercial electric lawn equipment. Electric lawn equipment reduces noise, noxious fumes and greenhouse gases. To change from gas to electric, they propose a two-phase plan. The aim is to have one provider with electric equipment, allowing people to switch to this provider. It is hard for a provider who already has sunken costs in gas equipment to buy electric equipment. So, they suggested catalyzing this transition via a financing deal. Thus, a fund would help a provider go completely electric. (This is better than spreading smaller financing to many who might only partially make the transition.)

Phase 1 would be to get 100 homes to be a customer of this provider or help provide financing. Each home would provide \$300 each for a five-year loan. (\$30,000.) This gives the lawn company a 100-home market. Phase 2 is to give the lawn company a \$30,000 loan at 0% interest, and a guaranteed market of 100 homes. There also might be grants available. They would also have the first mover advantage. John and Vibnat would provide the financials and contracts to make it work.

There are utube videos showing electric providers showing how they have done this. They will share these with Elizabeth who will forward them to us.

The help they need: 1) A nonprofit to house this effort; 2) research and access to grants; 3) advocate for any legal provisioning needed (a) enabling (b) future mandates) 4) evangelizing and marketing the concept.

Phil said he would share this with A Few Steps. We recognized that we also need to change the culture of what is a beautiful lawn, so that the need for leaf blowers vanishes.

(Other Lawn and Lawn Care Ideas: Gas Blower Ban,

There is an interesting article from the New York Times about the importance of Clover

Lawns: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/10/realestate/clover-grass-lawns.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>)

The clover lawn has the merits of being more aesthetically pleasing.

5. Community Choice Aggregation opportunity with Joule Community Energy

There is an option in Pennsylvania municipal law where an entire borough in Pennsylvania can be an electricity provider. Using this law, it could be used to allow an entire borough to switch its electricity to green power. Since this would allow economies of scale, the price for such green electricity would be much more competitive vs. fossil fuels. Joule Electric has said they could do this, but needs 30,000 households. If Swarthmore were to collaborative with Narberth and West Chester Boroughs, they could get to this number of households. There have been eight boroughs have already expressed interest to the CCA for PA Working Group and Swarthmore has been invited Swarthmore to further explore this. Boroughs include Narberth, West Chester, Downingtown.

Questions have been raised in an email by Will Williams, the sustainability director of West Chester about the statutory basis for the borough exception. He also raised the question of using Joule to go forward: they should be independently involved. He also suggested that we use the PA Association of Boroughs and their legal team. He also cautioned that taking on PECO would be daunting.

6. Bird Town Application

The Bird Town application was sent out to the members of the EAC. The draft application is a great testament to the Borough's devotion to supporting the environment. We have a Bird Town Committee in place. The EAC APPROVED sending this application to the Environment Committee of Borough Council at its October 26, 2022 at 7:30.

7. Monarch Symposium

Julie reported on an initiative called Monarch Watch. There was a Monarch Symposium that covered the latest research on Monarch Butterflies. The host plant of monarchs are milkweeds, but those plants are declining due to development and the use of herbicide. Monarch females lay eggs all over the place, so people are trying to organize backyard gardens all over the place, so there is plenty of places for the eggs to hatch. Monarchs are on the red list of species listed for extinction, and the US Fish & Wildlife Service might be listed next year.

Actions that can be taken to support Monarch:

- Create monarch way stations (a habitat in your yard or school)
- Mayor's Monarch Pledge (commit to implement three of 30 actions) Mayors who complete 8 actions get special recognition.

- Community Science and Outreach opportunities such as tagging. Tagging gives information and engages the community.
- Symbolic migration: a student project where they send paper butterflies to their destination in Mexico. It builds curriculum and helps students from US interact with Mexican students.

We could also add some of this information to those taking the home eco audits.

Getting your monarch habitat certified should be at least 100 Square ft. See

<https://www.monarchwatch.org/waystations/>

Next month we can talk about what we will do for 2023.

8. Zero Waste Initiatives

Jennifer reported on the zero waste initiative. She is working with a student green advisor at the college who wrote an article for *The Swarthmorean*. It shows how many other states have already enacted plastic bag bans. We have student volunteers to help promote re-usable bags at the October 1 Farmers Market. They will be presenting a survey for the community. Once we go with the language, the student advisor will help with the community survey.

Recycling campaign signs: we will ask people to bring their election yard signs to the recycling center and take them apart. They can recycle the metal, even if the metal is not that valuable. There is a possibility that the Delco Dems might reuse the metal.

9. Borough Council Update

Scarlett noted that there has been discussion about building height prompted by the development on Park Avenue. She presented a proposal that if a building is over 35 feet, it needs to provide an environmental benefit.

Questions raised about the specificity of the language, the use of LEED criteria, and the risk of using a point system where there might be empty points.

The draft will come before Borough Council this Monday. The soonest it could become law would be November.

In August, the EAC put forth two solar energy projects for the ARPA projects. The Environment Committee reviewed them. Neither project will go forward to Borough Council: the Borough Roof did not go forward because there is uncertainty of what the roof will look like. The Myers Avenue project will not go forward because someone could build a tall building along Myers Avenue, and we do not have the potential user of the electricity.

[Secretary's Note: The Borough has applied for a greenways grant this year to improve stormwater management and ADA compliance in Thatcher Park.]

10. Electric School Buses: The City of Philadelphia is converting its fleet to electric school bus. SRS will have Katie McKinstry talk about electric busses. We need to see if there are grant opportunities for buying electric busses. The EPA has a green school grant program. We should also talk about why we even had busses for SRS, other than Rutledge. It would be good to have a crosswalk across Yale at Cornell to allow children in that neighborhood to walk to school.

11. Delaware County Greenways Grant Opportunity: There was a webinar on getting grants for parks. There are grants available. We might think about such a project for 2023.

The meeting adjourned at 9:26 pm.

Respectfully submitted.

John McKinstry

Co-Clerk