

Swarthmore Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, May 23, 2023
Minutes
APPROVED July 25, 2023

Present: Margaret Betz, Anna Brenner, David Boonin, Phil Coleman, Hannah Covert, Sue Edwards, Nancy English, Elizabeth Jenkins, Susan Kelly, Scarlett McCahill, John McKinstry, Milton Meyer, Carol Nackenoff, Susie O'Donnell, Jennifer Pfluger, Allen Prindle, Karen Taussig-Lux

The meeting began on Zoom and in person in Borough Hall at 7:30, Elizabeth Jenkins and John McKinstry serving as co-chairs.

1. Conversation with Karen Taussig-Lux, Media Borough's Grant Administrator, about curbside composting

We heard a presentation on Media's curbside composting program. The concept originated in Media's EAC around 2015. Amy Johnson was the council member who was the liaison with the EAC. She made it a priority when running for election. It was also a priority of Transition Town Media.

Media had a 3-year pilot program funded by the Borough, with technical assistance from DEP via SCS Engineering. In year 1 of the pilot program, they had 100 participants gained through a survey (on the website, and email.) They created a map and required a workshop as a condition for getting a composting bucket. They started an FAQ which is up on their website. They had a survey halfway through, and it showed 100% approval. They budgeted \$34K but spent \$22K. For the 2nd and 3rd year of the pilot, they expanded it to 220 participants. They hired an outside hauler.

The pilot went well, so the composting program went borough wide. The planning committee included the borough manager. Public works took over collection. They combined composting pickup with the yard waste pick-up and emphasized that it was going to be weekly. Publicized this extensively January through April. The Borough began pickup in April after months of education. (They followed the rule of thumb that one needs seven repetitions for an idea to take in the public mind.) They created a flyer making it all simple (graphics at a 2nd grade level.) They created videos.

Because they merged composting with the existing public works collection, there was no added cost to the borough. Other costs such as buckets, printing, graphics were \$12K, which was paid by DEP 902 Grants Program for Recycling Equipment and Education. Ann Ryan is DEP contact.

They included pizza boxes in composting. Media borough could compost tons of pizza boxes every year.

The yard waste and food waste go into the same truck and this provides the right combination of materials. Media's citizens were pretty good about putting the right things in their compost. (Compostable utensils don't really work.)

After it is composted, they let residents have access to the finished compost behind the Media Youth Center for free!

Trash is the most expensive of their waste, much more than the compost tipping fee.

Think they have about 720 participants which is about 41% of their 1750 households.

In Media, 60% are rentals and 30% is owner-occupied. Their program serves only houses and apartments under 5 units. (It is hard to get trucks into the tight spaces of larger rental buildings. With their existing set up households, they are pressing up against an 8-hour day.)

One question for us: we have yard waste pickup twice a month, not weekly. How would that work for us? In Media the smell made collectors vomit. Media therefore required people to clean out and line their bucket.

It was pointed out that we have a contractor who picks up trash. We also have a private compost hauler who comes twice a month.

The 902 grant is for equipment and education. We should talk with Ann Ryan at DEP.

Havertown got a USDA grant its compost program. We should talk to their EAC.

David Boonin's and Bill Webb's hope is that they can remove as much compost out of our waste stream so they can have just twice a month trash pick up.

David pointed out that Swarthmore has the highest rate of recycling in Delaware County (59%), with Media being second (41%) while the County as a whole is 19%.

The County is looking into building a compost facility. Swarthmore has been entered as a volunteer participant in this.

The presentation will be sent to all of us.

Swarthmore requires people to recycle. We do not require compost. Scott Richardson composts all of his food waste at Occasionally Yours.

We will talk more about this at our next meeting.

2. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

3. Minutes of April 2023 Meeting

The Minutes were APPROVED.

4. Review of Draft Backyard Habitat Survey (John)

John presented a draft Backyard Habitat Survey and asked for comments. Elizabeth suggested that we add a question about whether the resident used electric lawn equipment. Susie suggested more specificity, including links to the pages for various certifications.

5. Bird Town Update

Margaret Betz reported that the Bird Town group has moved away from calling itself a committee, but a working group. There are five signs showing there are a Bird Town. They want to table with their own literature with the EAC whenever they are doing anything.

They are also promoting lights out and will discuss lights out. We might to urge people to stop using decorative lights that shine up into their trees.

David said at a Town Center discussion they were discussing lighting at the town center. David urged them to talk with us about this.

We might also want to educate people about not lighting their Christmas lights all year long.

The Washington Post reports study on how listening to birdsong improves mental health and absence of birdsong contributes to depression!

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/interactive/2023/birds-song-nature-mental-health-benefits/>

6. Update on CCA/Review of implementation plan, recommend for approval (if approved, goes to PUC)

David Boonin reported he has reviewed the documents from CCA that will go to the PUC. He has talked with Dennis Rowan, and he is hoping that the Borough will pass a resolution saying CCA for PA may represent Swarthmore before the PUC. David has suggested details to be worked on for the borough's relationship with CCA for PA.

The EAC APPROVED that it is in favor of continuing with these conversations with CCA for PA and for CCA representing Swarthmore before the PUC.

7. CCA Webinar on June 21:

A CCA Webinar will take place on June 21 where representatives from the Swarthmore EAC and Borough Council will give updates for other boroughs. One question is whether CCA constitutes a bulk purchase eligible for cooperative government funding. David and John may participate.

8. Update on Draft Plastic Bag Ordinance

Scarlett reported that the ban was not controversial other than the fee. In the more recent draft, the fee was reduced to 10 cents from 20 cents. This has been put out for advertisement. People should be willing to comment. There will be more on June 5 and June 12. Scarlett said the public comments in favor of this were very helpful. She added that there may be support more a higher fee. We should talk to our business owners informally to share support for the fee.

The EAC APPROVED a statement that the EAC favors the plastic bag ordinance as advertised and that this statement be communicated to Borough Council.

The EAC also APPROVED recommending to Council that the 2024 contract be for one year to make more time for waste planning, and not extend it for a second year.

We will include in for next time more discussion of the Zero Waste Plan.

9. Follow up on Passive House Speaker

Chris Debruin of the Planning Commission felt that an ordinance on passive houses might be hard to implement. We will consider this as a potential ordinance project in the future.

10. Heat Pump Discussion

Phil reported that Bill Webb suggested we investigate this. David brought this to us to discuss. Phil has said the borough hall equipment is fairly new, and so replacing it with heat pumps is not a near-term project. Phil will look at what can be done when the existing equipment nears its end of life.

11. WSSD Plans to put a parking lot at SRS on College Avenue

As far as we know, there is nothing planned on this. There is nothing before the Planning Commission on this.

12. Update on Open Space (conversations re 111 Dartmouth & 32 Amherst)

We should add that part of SRS campus to the list as open space.

13. EV Charging Grants

We missed this year's deadline for EV charging grants. We will try to go for this next year. David expects Council to go forward with a comprehensive plan and hopes the EAC will send its input on such things as EV charging, open space preservation and zero waste.

To save for next time:

-Styrofoam: Opportunities to recycle - individual level, Borough level?

-Review and organize David Boonin's ideas regarding dividing up the Zoning/Code Based recommendations vs. Education vs. Other to support Ready for 100 goals (Part of the 2023 and onward planning process)

David noted that there are two 2-year terms that need to be filled in Borough Council. He urged us to encourage people to run.

The meeting adjourned at 9:03.

Respectfully submitted,

John McKinstry, Co-Chair