

Swarthmore Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, January 25, 2022
Minutes
Approved 2/22/22

Present: Margaret Betz, Hannah Covert, Sue Edwards, Nancy English, Francie Halderman, Elizabeth Jenkins, Susan Kelly, Scarlett McCahill, John McKinstry, Carol Nackenoff, Robin Schaufler, Allen Prindle, , Susie O'Donnell

The January 25, 2022 meeting of the Swarthmore EAC began promptly at 7:30 pm.

Introductions

Carol Nackenoff, Hannah Covert and Scarlett McCahill introduced themselves.

EAC Orientation Materials

Elizabeth Jenkins explained that the EAC has assembled orientation materials for the new members. She will send these to the EAC listserve as well as Francie.

Vote to recommend that the Environment Committee utilize A Few Steps to help accomplish Ready for 100 goals

Robin Schafler announced that she was resigning from the EAC.

Elizabeth noted that in 2019, the EAC had recommended the Borough sign on with Sierra Club's Ready for 100 Program to have community wide adoption of renewable electricity. There was a task force formed, with Annie Fox, Sue Edwards and Robin Schaufler. The Task force dissolved in November. Now, A Few Steps, which was founded in 2010, has offered to take on various projects to help us fulfil the goals of reducing the Borough's carbon footprint.

The EAC voted to recommend to the Environment Committee that the Borough use A Few Steps as a partner in achieving these goals.

Susie O'Donnell, a member of A Few Steps, explained that its goal is to put out information into the community of what you can do to reduce one's carbon footprint: insulating your house, alternating your travel, not wasting food, etc. They put green tips into *The Swarthmorean* every week. They offer workshops on what people can do.

Sue Edwards said that she will be able to participate more, especially with Delaware County's Ready for 100. Elizabeth will talk more with Scarlet and Francie about presenting this to the Environment Committee.

Scarlet asked with we can provide input to the Environment Committee on the priorities of the EAC.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The EAC APPROVED the minutes for October, November and December meeting.

Updates

Elizabeth reported that she had checked in with Scarlett McCahill (New Environment Committee Chair) and that she and John reached out to Bill Webb, the new borough manager.

Borough Electricity Contract (Elizabeth)

Swarthmore Borough's electricity contract ends at the end of 2023. Allen Prindle noted that Delaware County is looking to aggregate with other nearby counties in purchasing renewable energy. He is hoping that Delaware County might provide a way for municipalities to opt into such an arrangement. Allen said he would be on top of this and report back to us.

Delco Plastic Bag Meeting

Susie O'Donnell reported of a meeting with Media Borough EAC which invited other EACs. It came up with topics for an informational meeting on February 8. There will be a Q&A with someone from PennEnvironment who helped bring about the plastic bag ban in Philadelphia. The speaker from PennEnvironment noted that in crafting a plastic bag ban legislation, is important how a plastic bag is defined. In addition, the legislation should also require a bag fee (10-15 cents per bag works, and the retailers get to keep the fee). He also said that a local ban pre-empts state-wide legislation. (The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania tried to pre-empt it, but there was enough opposition, so the state did not go forward.) There are also issues about encouraging re-usable bags. It is important to communicate with retailers to make the transition easier. Susie said she could share this information about the 2/8/22 meeting and include links to other information she has.

Carol raised the issue of how this works with self-checkout lines. Susie said that talking with retailers in advance might address this. Margaret raised the question of how a bag fee might disproportionately hurt poor people. Elizabeth suggested checking how the District of Columbia deals with this. Francie noted that Lidl has a self-checkout, and the store does not provide plastic bags. She suggested talking with them about how they make it work. Allen noted that Lidl offers neither plastic nor paper bags but allows the shopper to use a shopping cart to take the groceries to one's car.

Elizabeth noted that the EAC could recommend a ban on plastic bags. We had previously looked at how Narberth had phased in bans on plastic bags and straws. In our earlier surveys, a majority of people in town favored a plastic bag ban. We will continue to research this, including see how things in Narberth have worked out. Susie hoped the culture can change away from always automatically giving out plastic, and instead, expect people to ask for plastic.

Scarlett noted that Goshen and West Chester have bans. Bill Webb, the new Borough Manager, came from Goshen and he helped draft the ordinance there. The way Goshen did it was that the ordinance was passed at the end of a calendar year but it did not go into effect until Earth Day. She suggested that we talk with the General Government Committees. She said she could help connect those resources. We also should consider creating a fact sheet to help educate consumers and merchants. Members interested should connect with Elizabeth.

Doug Tallamy Bookclub and Talk

John reported that the book review of *Nature's Best Hope* by Elizabeth and him appeared in January 7, 2022 edition of *The Swarthmorean*. He also noted that in conjunction with the

Swarthmore Public Library, an online book discussion will be taking place on February 2 at 7 pm. He urged all members of the EAC to take part in this. An announcement of this will be in this weekend's *Swarthmorean*. (The book review also noted that this would happen.) We are also working through the SSCA, the SHS, Friends of Little Crum Creek Park and other organizations help publicize this.

He said that he has arranged with Doug Tallamy to do a Q&A of his work on March 31 at 7 pm. The zoom call is through the public library. He noted that it might be possible to expand this into a talk & Q&A, but that would cost another \$250 and he was not sure where he could get the money. He asked the feelings of the group.

He urged everyone to help spread the word. John will send information to Elizabeth Drake who could spread the word through the College. Margaret Betz will put that on our social media.

The Secret Life of Trees is a video available in the public library.

PECO

John gave an update of what has learned. He had filed an informal complaint with the PUC, as suggested by many people concerned about PECO's plans to remove many trees to make way for new electric lines. He spoke with a representative of the PA Public Utility Commission who is in charge of responding to such complaints and that person said that his department of the PUC does not have authority to limit what PECO does with its trees. He said one could file a formal complaint which would go before an administrative law judge. When John talked with David Page, the chair of Swarthmore's Tree Committee, David felt that the Borough had little authority over this. What seems to be the consensus is that the best way forward is to have PECO and the Borough discuss ways to mitigate the damage. It is unusual for PECO to get such opposition from people, so the town's reaction has gotten their attention.

Internal Carbon Pricing at Swarthmore College with Elizabeth Drake

Elizabeth Drake is the Director of Sustainability at Swarthmore College. She reported on the Internal Carbon Pricing Program at the college. The program has 3 main elements: 1) A carbon fee on various departments on their carbon footprint. It is a fee on heating and electricity related to emissions for those sources. The fee is \$26/ton of CO₂. This fee is distributed among the departments according to their proportional operating budgets. This produced \$300,000 in funds but increased with the new larger buildings. Some of that funding is then dedicated to the Green Revolving Fund which finances energy efficiency projects, hiring consultants, creating energy master plan. A small amount is set aside for education. Projects that produce savings bring the savings back into the Green Revolving Fund and is therefore used for future projects. 2) A shadow price: is set as \$100/ton of CO₂. This provides the college a way for it to incorporate the environmental cost of projects into their financial decisions: it therefore make its clear what the advantages of renewable energy are by making the social costs of fossil fuel projects real. It acts a risk mitigation tool: if there is a future price on carbon, they have having it built into this already. 3) Advocacy of carbon pricing.

We discussed how this might apply to the Borough. Allen wondered whether municipalities would have authority to have such internal carbon pricing. Elizabeth had asked Bob Scott about

this. He said the Borough might be able to do this as council makes its decision, but it might not be able to require a contractor it hires to do this. Margaret suggested that maybe we could use a lifecycle analysis.

Overview of 2022 Project List + Additional Ideas?

2022 Projects

- Environmental Code Updates - EV Charging, Stormwater, Green Building, Native Plants
- Native Backyards/Homegrown National Parks
- “Free the Trees” - English Ivy management (Margaret noted this)
- No Mow May
- Home Eco-Audits (with the Swarthmore Horticulture Society)
- Leaf Blower Ban (for gasoline only) - partner with other EACs? Susie had put together a program on this.
- Audubon Birdtown (along with PSU Extension Service’s program)
- Instagram for the EAC (Margaret can set this up, along with our Facebook presence)

John raised the idea of making 111 Dartmouth as a demonstration project for rain gardens and native plants. Sue also said she would raise the possibility of making this a park with the new Borough Manager and Francie Halderman.

Elizabeth reported that Jennifer Pennington of the Swarthmore Horticultural Society said they are interested in partnering with the EAC in doing Eco Audits again this year. Jen said they were interested in having yard projects that could be models for others in making a native plant yard. Susie wondered how we might involve the College and the Scott Arboretum.

The meeting adjourned at 8:55.

Respectfully submitted.

John McKinstry

Co-Clerk and Secretary Pro Tem