



**City of Harrisonburg Environmental Performance
Standards Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
September 26, 2018 5:00 – 7:00 p.m.**

Members in attendance: Jeff Heie, Mikaela Schmitt-Harsh, Brad Striebig, Daniel Downey, Johann Zimmerman, Doug Hendren, Tom Benevento, Richard Baugh (Council Representative), Deb Fitzgerald (School Board Representative)

Staff/Others in attendance: Staff: Tom Hartman, Thanh Dang, Rebecca Stimson; Members of the Public: Carl Droms, Adrie Voors, Heather Hunter, Daniel Castaneda

Public Input

Adrie Voors was present and asked staff to consider her proposal to place a Black Bear composting bin at the Recycling Convenience Center on 2055 Beery Road. Tom Hartman stated that Public Works Department had received the proposal and would consider it.

Vision and Goals Statements

Thanh Dang opened the meeting by asking the integrated plan sector to describe the summary document they created. Tom Benevento reminded the group that the integrated plan sector consists of himself, Mikaela Schmitt-Harsh, Johann Zimmerman, and Jeff Heie. Mikaela explained that the sector first started out tackling the entire Sustainability Action Plan that was proposed by EPSAC at the February 2018 City Council meeting, which included social justice and education. The group then stepped back to focus only on environmental issues and changed the name of the plan to “Environmental Action Plan.” Mikaela described that this name is not set in stone but was based on what other localities are naming similar plans. The plan includes seven sectors: building standards and efficiency; waste reduction and recycling; renewable energy; stormwater, water quality, and water conservation; sustainable transportation; regional food systems; land use and open space. Some of the sectors have more content than the others. Tom B. mentioned that many other localities cautioned not to be focused on completing the whole plan before implementation, because that might take years. They suggested compiling a summary, getting a few pieces completed, and then taking that to council. This is why the current Environmental Action Plan summary suggests a phased approach. Tom H. asked if the cities Tom. B spoke with used mainly a citizen advisory committee or staff to complete the plans. Tom B. stated that mainly city staff worked on the plans, but Blacksburg also had a citizen advisory committee. Doug Hendren brought up that the plan created by EPSAC will be different than other city’s plans because EPSAC can only make suggestions for policies, not actually set policies like city staff may be able to do. Mikaela mentioned that the group had a difficult time aligning their plan with other city documents like the Comprehensive Plan. Thanh stated that this plan does not have to follow the formatting of other city plans, especially as to how goals, objectives, and strategies are laid out. The word “affirm” was used in the summary document was clarified to mean asking City Council to support

an action in principle knowing that there is more work to be done. The summary includes four recommendations for Phase 1: create a sustainability coordinator position, adopt ICLEI's ClearPath resource and reporting tool, affirm Sector 1 of the Action Plan (Building Standards and Efficiency), and affirm Sector 2 of the Action Plan (Waste Reduction and Recycling).

Thanh said she felt that an umbrella idea of reducing greenhouse gas emissions was missing, even though reducing greenhouse gas emissions was rolled into each of the sectors individually. Thanh suggested that making reducing greenhouse gasses more prominent in the document might be helpful, especially since one recommendation for Phase 1 was to use ICLEI to track emissions.

There was a discussion about the ICLEI software. Tom H. asked if it would be used early as a baseline or used after the plan is adopted. Brad Striebig explained that there is quite a bit of data collection that is necessary. He suggested that for a city the size of Harrisonburg, the data might be able to be collected on a spreadsheet instead of on the software. The initial data collection would require a large effort, but the upkeep and updating would be a minimal amount of work. Tom H. asked if there were other focus areas that might be better places to spend time and effort instead of a data collection tool. Johann said it seemed like the tool might be best used once a sustainability coordinator is hired. Tom B. argued that a baseline would be necessary to measure progress. There was consensus that the time commitment and cost to input the data would greatly outweigh the initial cost to purchase the product. Brad mentioned that most of the data can be back calculated or collected and not immediately put into the ICLEI software.

Tom H. asked what the next steps were. He said he felt that the plan writing may be accelerated if city staff are allocated to do most of the writing, as opposed to the EPSAC. This may also support the case for creating a sustainability coordinator position, if staff is allocated to create the plan and understands how much time is needed to do so and suggests an additional staff person is needed to complete the work. There was a discussion about time frame for completion, which could range from 6 to 24 months. Mikaela asked if the Environmental Action Plan could have a goal to update or amend other existing city plans, such as the Stormwater Improvement Plan, to make them more far reaching. Thanh stated that was a possibility. Thanh suggested another recommendation for discussion of Phase 1 Environmental Action Plan would be to make it clear that a sustainability coordinator would be applying for grants. Richard Baugh stated that if EPSAC has concerns about existing staff not having time needed to complete the plan, they are able to mention this to Council. Jeff reminded EPSAC that this is a very timely issue and that meeting every three months as a committee is not enough, he also stated he felt a sustainability coordinator position would be necessary for accountability and tracking purposes. Tom H. reminded the group that even if a sustainability coordinator position was approved immediately, it would still take time to hire the position, so it would make sense to allocate staff to complete some of the low hanging fruit. Mikaela said that unlike the other sectors, such as solid waste or transportation, where city departments are working on projects and plans, there is no city department that works on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Thanh stated that this is correct, although there may be some things staff is doing that reduce greenhouse gas emissions as an ancillary benefit.

It was decided that EPSAC would present to Council on October 23, 2018. In order to present to City Council, the EPSAC would need to finalize the “asks” in the memo, a presentation would need to be created, staff would create a memo, and everything would be uploaded in advance of the City Council meeting. Tom H. stated he would like to meet with EPSAC to review the presentation before it is submitted for the City Council meeting. Tom B. asked if EPSAC could invite members of the public to the City Council meeting. Thanh agreed this would be fine, as long as the invitation included the caveat that there would be no public comment opportunities at this meeting so that people know what to expect. Public comment would be an option at the next council meeting, and Thanh and Tom H. reminded the group that there would be public input opportunities while the Environmental Action Plan is being written. There was discussion about what the ask would be from Council. Generally, it was agreed that the asks would include the following: Ask City Council to appropriate staff time to write the Environmental Action Plan based on the summary document; hire a sustainability coordinator; review the summary document and affirm that the intent and type of plan the EPSAC would like as a final document is agreeable with City Council.

Working Group Updates

Water Sector: Brad updated the group that some funding was received for the grant that was submitted by the Water Sector earlier in the year. The user count at the Dry River property has been completed and that information will be sent out once the data is compiled.

Adjourn

The next meeting will be December 5, 2018 at 5pm.