



**City of Harrisonburg Environmental Performance
Standards Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
July 31, 2019 5:00 – 7:00 p.m.**

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

Staff in attendance: Tom Hartman, Thanh Dang, Rebecca Stimson;

Public Input

No public input.

Schedule Updates and Next Steps

Thanh Dang overviewed the proposed schedule, which is outlined below (with a change based on Richard Baugh's comment that City Council meets October 22). She stated the City Council presentation date has been pushed back from previous schedules.

- **July 31** – EPSAC meeting
- **August 9** – final staff comments due
- **Week of August 12 or week of August 26** - Staff meet with City Manager's Office
- **By September 13** – update EAP and compile staff comments
- **Mid-September** – send EAP and staff comments to EPSAC members to request endorsement
- **September 25** – ESPAC meeting – EPSAC members to discuss endorsement of EAP
- **October 22 (tentative)** – Presentation to City Council to consider adoption of EAP Phase 1

EPSAC will have opportunity to review the revised plan before the September 25 meeting, at which point an endorsement decision will be made. Thanh described three possible options for endorsement: 1) endorse the plan with no comments, 2) endorse the plan with attached comments, 3) no endorsement. Dan Downey clarified that the schedule is subject to change if more time is needed for revisions.

Review of Environmental Action Plan (EAP) Open House and Comments

Rebecca Stimson described the open house for EPSAC members that were not able to attend. Around 50 people attended the event, which was held in the City Hall Atrium on June 5, 2019. Comments were accepted during and after the event and were then compiled into a packet which was sent to EPSAC members and city staff. City staff received a version that included what sector or department each comment pertained to. Rebecca asked if there was any discussion about the comments. Tom Benevento asked how comments will be incorporated into the plan, if comments repeated a certain number of

times would be put into the plan. Thanh said that staff discretion will be used to determine how comments will be incorporated into the plan, not based simply on the number of times a similar comment was made. Tom Hartman stated staff will compile a document of staff's responses to comments that were not incorporated into the plan. There was discussion that staff will not be able to respond to each comment individually but would respond to similar themed comments together.

Mikaela Schmitt-Harsh said there were two types of comments she wondered would be incorporated into the plan. The first were comments about the language of the plan, specifically the use of the word "consider". The second were comments that renewable energy initiatives were not included in the plan. Thanh stated that staff will discuss those with the City Manager's Office, and if the decision is made not to include renewable energy, the rationale behind this would be included as a staff response to the comment.

Johann Zimmerman had a comment about language of a specific line at the beginning of the EAP:

While City staff has led the effort to develop the EAP, members of the Environmental Performance Standards Advisory Committee (EPSAC) have played an important advisory role in the development of the plan.

Johann stated his understanding was the City Council asked EPSAC members to develop the plan, with city staff as support, which would mean EPSAC would decide which public comments are incorporated into the plan. Tom Benevento agreed that this was also his understanding of the role of EPSAC.

Tom H. and Thanh said that originally EPSAC was leading the effort and city staff was supporting EPSAC but during the presentation to Council on October 23, 2018, the roles were switched when City Council directed the staff to finalize the EAP.

Jeff Heie agreed that there was a switch in roles because city staff was tasked with writing the document but did not think that EPSAC was moved to an advisory role. The exact wording of the City Council request was not reviewed during this EPSAC meeting but is as follows (from the powerpoint slide):

Direct City Staff and City Manager, with EPSAC member assistance, to finalize the Environmental Action Plan within 6 months, including implementation timeline.

Additionally, the October 23, 2018 memorandum from staff stated:

The EPSAC is recommending that City Council consider requesting City Manager Campbell review the attached Executive Summary and determine if City Staff can take the lead on writing the EAP within the next six (6) months with assistance from the EPSAC.

Jeff stated he is concerned about the difference in perception of city staff and EPSAC roles because the presentation made to City Council included goals related to renewable energy which were not included in the draft plan, even though City Council did not say to remove these goals and he believed that affirmed them. There was discussion about the exact definition of "affirm".

Thanh reiterated that staff did not include renewable energy goals in the plan due to constraints surrounding HEC. The renewable energy goals from the City Council presentation were not reviewed during the EPSAC meeting but are as follows:

Renewable Energy Goals: 1) Support unrestricted development of behind-the-meter solar power in the public and private sector. 2) Require that the municipal utility support Harrisonburg's fair transition to sustainable energy sources.

Jeff asked if it would be appropriate for ESPAC to make recommendations to City Council regarding renewable energy separate from the EAP. Doug Hendren stated that these recommendations would involve changing HEC's mandate. Thanh stated staff would consider this question but could not decide now.

Mikaela stated that many of the goals used the language "consider" and asked if a visionary statement about renewable energy could be included. There was discussion about the word "consider". Johann asked that staff review each item that includes "consider" and replace with "recommend" where appropriate. Tom H. stated that "consider" is necessary due to the compressed time frame the plan was developed in – impacts for many of the items have not been fully for evaluated and so the items can't yet be "recommended". Brad Striebig said the EAP is a planning document and does not mandate any items be completed. Thanh stated "considers" are placed in the plan so there is no confusion that this is a planning document.

Tom B. asked how it will be decided what remains in the plan – will city staff decide or will EPSAC take a vote? Thanh said city staff will compile the document and use discretion on what to include and then EPSAC would make an endorsement decision. Johann and Tom B. brought up that a lot of input from EPSAC and community members on certain sections that were not included in the draft document.

Richard Baugh said that EPSAC could propose a document to Council; however, Council would then refer the document to city staff for input. The process occurring now includes city staff review before the document arrives at Council.

Mikaela clarified that Phase 2 of the plan would include the greenhouse gas emissions study as well as other metrics for measuring the success of goals. Tree canopy coverage was provided as an example. Tom H. confirmed and said the Phase 2 would also focus on setting baselines for other goals. Phase 3 might start at different times for different sectors depending on how long data collection takes as part of Phase 2, in other words, Phase 2 and Phase 3 efforts may overlap.

Tom B. asked what phase a new sustainability coordinator position would be added. Tom H. stated that this would need to be a discussion with the City Manager's Office. Thanh said staff would consider adding to add a statement to the EAP to "consider a sustainability coordinator position" with the understanding that the position would have to be further evaluated. Tom B. suggested "recommend" instead of "consider" for this statement. Tom H. said if the EAP uses the word "consider" EPSAC could suggest "recommend" instead in their endorsement document.

Ben Meredith said he was uncomfortable with city staff deciding what information is in the EAP because then EPSAC must convince city staff to include certain things in the plan. Richard explained that Council gave a directive to city staff to write the EAP with the understanding that EPSAC and city staff would collaborate. Ben asked if EPSAC took a vote to include the sustainability coordinator position into the plan, would city staff include it? Mikaela said she felt the same way about renewable energy.

Deb Fitzgerald asked if EPSAC should write a renewable energy document that would be created by EPSAC members, not city staff, and be presented to Council as a document separate from the EAP. Ben asked why renewable energy would not be included in the EAP. Tom H. said when city staff meets with the City Manager's Office, they will share this discussion and either include these points or provide explanation as to why certain things were not included. Dan Downey outlined that he felt the document was incomplete because public comment are not included, staff comments are not included, a stronger statement about renewable energy is needed, and a stronger statement about a sustainability coordinator is needed. These items would need to be included by September so EPSAC can review.

Deb asked for clarification about renewable energy and HEC. Thanh stated city staff's position with the draft EAP was not to include renewable energy and HEC goals. However, staff will relay EPSAC's concerns to the City Manager's Office and discuss inclusion of renewable energy and HEC goals. There was a general agreement among EPSAC members that renewable energy goals are important to include in the EAP. Tom B. asked if a visionary statement could be added to the EAP regarding renewable energy. Mikaela asked if inclusion of renewable energy or a sustainability coordinator was more important. Thanh said the inclusion of one wouldn't exclude the other and staff will discuss both with the City Manager's Office.

Revisions to Bylaws and Terms

Thanh explained that there an EPSAC member expressed interest in creating terms in the EPSAC bylaws and staff agreed with the idea. The current bylaws do not have terms listed. EPSAC members raised concerns with the loss of knowledge and momentum if the bylaws were amended before Phase 1 of the EAP was completed. The EPSAC recommended that bylaw revisions should only be considered after Phase 1 of the EAP is adopted by City Council.

2019 Meeting Dates

September 25, 2019

December 4, 2019

Adjourn

The next meeting will be September 25, 2019