

Athens City Environment and Sustainability Commission
Regular Meeting Minutes
Wednesday February 1st, 2023, 6:00 PM
Athens City Building
8 East Washington Street, 3rd Floor
Athens, OH 45701

1. Call to order—Chair Aimee Delach called the meeting to order at 6:06 PM. Members present include Aimee Delach, Elaine Goetz, Sam Crowl, Jasmine Facun, Katelyn Rousch, Sarah Conley-Bellew, Ed Newman, and Megan Almeida. Quorum was established. Members absent included Megan Westervelt, Beth Clodfelter, and Paul Logue. Guests included Nancy Pierce, Kya Stone, and Sean Pierce.

2. Disposition of Minutes—Goetz motioned to approve minutes for November as submitted. Delach seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. The motion was approved.

3. Next Meeting Date—March 1st, 2023.

4. Old Business

A. OU Move Out—Newman explained that the focus for campus move-out would be primarily on food and mattresses, more pending university involvement and engagement of multi-unit housing. Move-out requires long-term planning and coordination between city, university, and regional groups. Newman recommends beginning move-out discussions a year in advance of actual plans. Almeida suggested pushing for greater student involvement to support move-out activities. Rousch suggested communicating with campus organizations and collaborating with Earth Month to take pressure from finals-week move out by consolidating durable wastes at an earlier time. Delach volunteered to help coordinate a bike recycling event.

B. Earth Day—Crowl discussed the upcoming Earth Day Celebrations, including the possibility of partnering with Athens Move Out to reduce some of efforts needed during finals week. This year, there should be an opportunity for Athens High School students to join in for some activities. Crowl is also working with the Campus Center for Community Engagement on a potential pollinator garden volunteer opportunity for Commission members in honor of Earth Month.

C. Green House Gas (GHG) Inventory—Goetz has been reviewing Commission data to prepare for an upcoming meeting with Jon-Paul to clarify the methods used in the inventory.

D. Mowing Practices—Facun, Rousch, and Newman presented their mowing recommendations. If mowing is necessary, lower frequency, slower speeds, leaving a higher grass height, and using devices such as flushing bars can aid in reducing the ecosystem impact. Due to traditionally wet springs in southeast Ohio, the recommendation is to mow in late fall after pollinator-friendly plants have died from frost. These findings will be presented in March as an official letter of recommendation.

E. Municipal Solid Waste Contract—At the next Council meeting on February 13th, the city will be reviewing applications submitted by Rumpke and Athens-Hocking and is required by law to choose the lowest bid unless something is wrong with the application.

5. New Business

A. Citywide Review of Commission Bylaws—Commission bylaws must be reviewed, standardized, and better defined, if needed. A subcommittee including Crowl and Conley-Bellew will be undertaking this task, Clodfelter being nominated as a third member.

B. Review draft of Plastic Bag Ban Ordinance—Nancy Pierce, a representative from Athens Rethink Plastics, presented a draft of a plastic bag ban to the commission for feedback. The ban would prohibit bags after a certain date and would have a provision where funds can be set aside to support the costs of merchant's bag transition. Pierce noted many local businesses have already shifted away from plastic single-use bags and most large stores have made announcements of goals to move away from single-use plastics in the next five years. The commission recommended simplifying and clarifying the draft, including providing a clear definition of "store," which is the word that characterizes businesses the ban would apply to. The commission plans to read a completed draft at the March meeting to vote on endorsing the ordinance before it goes to Council.

C. Recommendations of Pedestrian Accessibility Committee—The ad hoc Pedestrian Accessibility Committee has prepared a draft of best-practices, funding strategies, and recommendations for city council. These findings were based on a community survey with nearly 800 respondents. Improving pedestrian infrastructure is essential for improving the accessibility of the Athens community and for lowering transportation-related emissions (the highest emissions category from the survey).

6. Announcements and Updates

7. Adjournment—Delach motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:30. Goetz seconded the motion. All members voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Katelyn Rousch.