

MINUTES
CITY OF DEKALB
Citizens' Environmental Commission
May 6, 2021

The Citizens' Environmental Commission (CEC) held a regular business meeting on May 6, 2021 at DeKalb City Hall and virtually on Teams.

Chair Clare Kron called the meeting to order at 4:03 p.m.

A. Roll Call

Roll call was recorded by Management Analyst Scott Zak, and the following members of the CEC were present: Chair Clare Kron, Vice Chair Steve Honeywell, Rachel Farrell, Adrian Lopez, Kyle Moore, Nick Newman, and Sharon Skala.

Also present were Ex-Officio Member Mat Emken, Ex-Officio Member Mike Holland and Management Analyst Scott Zak.

B. Approval of Agenda

Chair Kron requested a motion to approve the agenda.

MOTION

Ms. Skala moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Ms. Skala.

VOTE

Motioned carried on a 7-0 vote. Aye: Kron, Honeywell, Farrell, Lopez, Moore, Newman, Skala. Nay: None. The agenda was approved.

C. Public Comment

No public comments were received.

D. Approval of Minutes

1. Regular Monthly Meeting Minutes of April 1, 2021

Chair Kron requested approval of the minutes.

MOTION

Ms. Farrell motioned to approve the minutes, seconded by Mr. Honeywell.

The Commission discussed a portion of the minutes regarding Commissioners interacting with people at a community center. At the April meeting, Mayor Smith cautioned that Commissioners would have to share their positions as an individual and not a representative of the Commission or the City. Mr. Honeywell said the intention of the community interactions is to listen to people, not to disperse information. Commissioners then discussed whether they could state they are a member of the CEC. Mr. Zak said he would bring back information on this point.

Mayor-Elect Cohen Barnes joined the meeting at 4:13 p.m.

VOTE

Motioned carried on a 7-0 vote. Aye: Kron, Honeywell, Farrell, Lopez, Moore, Newman, Skala. Nay: None. The minutes were approved.

E. Commission Reports

1. DeKalb County Health Department

With the health department's ex-officio position vacant, no report was given.

2. DeKalb Park District

Ex-Officio Member Mat Emken reported that 12 people came to the recent garlic mustard pull in Prairie Park, including several employees of Mortonson, who are working at the Facebook Data Center site and have volunteered multiple times with the park district. A pull of dame's rocket is scheduled for June in Prairie Park

3. Kishwaukee Water Reclamation District

Ex-Officio Member Mike Holland reported that the KWRD has sold rain barrels at a discounted price with the Soil and Water Conservation District, is excited about its native plantings and has had success producing power from biogas at their facility.

The discussion turned to solar panels. Holland says the KWRD has about two acres of land available to install solar panels, and Mayor-Elect Barnes suggested local taxing bodies work together on solar initiatives, which Holland agreed was an idea worth discussing.

4. Northern Illinois University

With Ex-Officio Member Sarah Fox not yet present, her report was delayed.

5. City Staff Liaison

Management Analyst Zak reported that he had not heard back from the health department on filling their ex-officio position on the Commission.

Mr. Zak reported that he talked with City staff after concerns were raised at the last meeting about trash in neighborhoods. The best way to tackle the problem would be to support neighborhood initiatives since there is not enough Public Works staff to perform the trash pick-up service that would be required if trash cans were put out in neighborhoods.

Mr. Zak shared a large Monarch City USA sign the City has created and placed in one of the downtown kiosks.

F. New Business

1. Adopt-A-Park for the summer

The Commission discussed volunteering again this year to tend gardens in DeKalb Park District parks. Commissioners Kron, Moore and Lopez volunteered to tend Overlook Pointe Park, Commissioner Farrell will tend Oakland Park and the Commission volunteered to take on a third park this year. Mason Larson Park will be cared for by Commissioners Honeywell and Newman.

Commissioner Lopez left the meeting at 4:49 p.m.

Chair Kron asked for a motion to approve adopting the three parks.

MOTION

Ms. Farrell motioned to adopt the parks, seconded by Mr. Newman.

VOTE

Motioned carried on a 6-0 vote. Aye: Kron, Honeywell, Farrell, Moore, Newman, Skala. Nay: None. The park adoptions were approved.

2. Working with the new city administration

Chair Kron asked Mayor-Elect Barnes how he would like the Commission to proceed with an update of the City's Sustainability Plan, which is now seven years old. Mayor-Elect Barnes would like to meet with a few Commission members in the next 30 days to be brought up to speed on the current plan and discuss the next steps for the update.

3. Coffee with the CEC

Inspired by the Coffee with the Tanzania Development Group, Chair Kron asked the commissioners if they would like to do a similar event where members of the public could bring environmental concerns to the CEC. Commission members expressed interest. Mayor-Elect Barnes said he believed City staff would not be needed, and Mr. Zak said he would check that.

Chair Kron asked for a motion to plan a Coffee with the CEC to see how it works and to proceed with the planning while awaiting information of whether City staff is needed.

MOTION

Mr. Newman made the motion, seconded by Mr. Honeywell. Motioned carried on a 6-0 vote. Aye: Kron, Honeywell, Farrell, Moore, Newman, Skala. Nay: None. The motion was declared approved.

4. 5G information and program

Ex-Officio Member Fox joined the meeting at 5:05 p.m.

Chair Kron noted that at a recent City Council meeting, Sixth Ward Alderman Mike Verbic brought up concerns about additional radioactivity from 5G technology. She said the Commission's role is to analyze the health effects and feels a program should be done in June before the issue comes before the Council again in July.

Mayor-Elect Barnes noted 5G will be deployed worldwide for cell phones and believes local governments will have little control over the deployment, leaving the federal government in the role to protect health and wellbeing. While fiberoptic is an underground cable, Mayor-Elect Barnes notes 5G is for wireless connectivity that will bring highspeed internet access at hopefully a reduced cost to many families in the community. He says fiber optic is not a viable solution. Mayor-Elect Barnes questioned how much time should be spent on the issue since local governments will have limited input and that bringing the modern technology into the City will be a good thing for many residents.

Even if local government has little control, Chair Kron said the Commission still has a role in presenting the effects on the environment and would like to discuss the issue again at the June meeting.

Ex-Officio Member Fox joined the conversation and agreed that local government will be able to do little to control 5G following preemptions on the federal and state levels. The appellate court upheld most of the FCC rules but did strike down a preemption on local aesthetic rules. Ex-Officio Member Fox believes it is likely the state preemptions will be extended. She said the state preemptions are broad and make 5G a permitted use; although, there are specific areas where local government has input, including antenna height. She said her impression is that the goal of the state and federal legislation is to prevent local governments from banning 5G because of health effects. She said local governments will have more control over 5G in residential zones.

Chair Kron concluded that the Commission's only role is gathering information on the potential health effects to the environment that will come along with 5G.

5. Feral cats

Chair Kron said the manager of the NIU greenhouse asked that the Commission address feral cats because of their impact on wildlife, including killing birds. The Commission agreed to make the issue the topic of the Daily Chronicle article in June to raise public awareness of the problems caused by feral cats.

G. Old Business

1. First CEC presentation scheduled

Chair Kron said the "Celebrate Butterflies" presentation went over well. NIU's STEM Fest outreach coordinator attended and is interested in engaging the community, children and schools in habitat initiatives. Chair Kron suggested a butterfly coloring contest ahead of the Monarch Festival in 2022.

2. Support the Trash Squirrels

In addition to a PRIDE award nomination, Chair Kron said the Commission could recommend the City recognize the group with a proclamation. Mr. Honeywell said what the group would like most is more trash cans in public places and could also use donations of supplies like trash bags. He suggested postponing the Trash Squirrels article to a later time when the group may need more support. It was agreed that a 5G article would be done in July followed by a Trash Squirrels article in August.

3. Bee-keeping ordinance plans

Mr. Honeywell said an ordinance would need to be passed by the end of the year for those interested getting bees in the winter. He said it is important to make known that allowing people to have apiaries would provide more control over the bee population. Chair Kron said it may be worth delaying consideration of the ordinance for a year to have more time to build support, possibly through more Daily Chronicle articles. Mr. Honeywell suggested putting out press releases as another way of getting more information in the paper.

Mayor-Elect Barnes said it would be worthwhile to see where the Council stands on an issue like beekeeping. He said he would hate for the Commission to devote a lot of time to an issue only to see it defeated by the Council or at referendum. He volunteered to help gauge support on issues so the Commission can spend its time on issues they know will be accomplished. In response, Chair Kron noted the Council defeated the Commission's leaf burning ban after hearing only from members of the public who were opposed, so she said they need people who want to keep bees to be at the Council in person and write letters. Mayor-Elect Barnes again offered to help gauge Council support and suggested focusing on issues like helping to expand solar energy use, expanding trash pick-up by the Trash Squirrels and other issues that do not require drumming up public support and where it is known the Commission will be successful. Mr. Honeywell said he knows he can get two yes votes from the Council on beekeeping, and Chair Kron said they took up the issue after people came before the Commission in support of beekeeping. She said just because it might not be easy does not mean the Commission should not address an issue. Mayor-Elect Barnes said his challenge to the Commission is to also make it a priority to work as a team to go after issues that will help the environment, where it is known the issue will get through the Council, and where entities can work together. Chair Kron agreed.

4. Monarch City USA

No information on this topic was presented.

5. Light intrusion

Mr. Newman summarized articles and his report on light intrusion. He said artificial and LED lighting has both short and long-term impacts on wildlife and ecosystems, including affects on sleep and reproduction. He said blue and LED lighting can affect humans' sleep patterns, can be correlated to depression and eating disorders and increase the risk of breast and prostate cancer. He said there are also environmental impacts, noting 80 percent of Illinois' electricity is produced by coal-fired powerplants, and aesthetic impacts, such as disrupting the night sky.

Chair Kron said the Commission's concern is light intrusion from exterior lighting and they are looking into whether light intrusion can be regulated. She said the City's lighting is acceptable under the International Dark Sky Association guidance, so they are now looking into light intrusion into personal lives. Mayor-Elect Barnes said he also dislikes blue light, and suggested the Commission also look into what lighting requirements companies need to meet for issues like security and any possible impacts on economic development from lighting regulation. He suggested there could be a grandfather clause where regulations apply to new developments.

6. Daily Chronicle articles

No additional information on this topic was presented.

7. Other updates on previously discussed items

Chair Kron said a thank you letter has been sent to Executive Assistant Ruth Scott for her assistance during the transition between staff liaisons.

Natural Resources Inventory forms were discussed. Mr. Zak clarified that a new transit center had not yet been designed before an architectural and engineering agreement for the facility was voted down by the Council. He said an NRI of the proposed site off Dresser Road would have likely been done as part of that contract. Chair Kron asked if NRIs could be done before the construction of solar farms. Mayor-Elect Barnes noted that the planned solar farms are in the county, not the city limits, and that farmers are excited about the plans because the land will be returned to farmland after the solar panels have served their useful life and are removed.

H. Announcements

1. New announcements

Mayor-Elect Barnes said he is supportive of environmental issues, and believes his support is stronger than most and stronger than Commissioners may think. He said he will always balance what he believes and hears from residents and economic development since development brings tax revenue along with opportunities that people in the community need. He said that while he and the Commission might not always agree, he will be as informed as possible. Chair Kron invited Mayor-Elect Barnes to attend as many Commission meetings as possible.

2. Next meeting: July 1, 4:00 p.m.

I. Adjournment

Chair Kron asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

MOTION

Ms. Skala motioned to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ms. Moore.

VOTE

The motion was carried on a 6-0 vote. Aye: Kron, Honeywell, Farrell, Moore, Newman, Skala. Nay: None. The meeting was declared adjourned at 6:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted: Scott Zak, Management Analyst

Approved by the Citizens' Environmental Commission on June 3, 2021.