



ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Thursday, May 20th, 2021 – 4:00pm – 5:00pm
Virtual Meeting – 127 N. Wyman St., Suite 100

ATTENDEES: Ashley Sarver, Studio GWA; Rebecca Olson, Olson Ecological Solutions; Colin Belle, City of Rockford; Dick Rundall, Eliminate Racism 815; Neeley Erickson, Illinois Realtors Association; Harlan Johnson, NAACP; Dan Kane, Joshua Sage, Boone County Conservation District; Brad Roos, Sustain Rockford; Aaron Miller, Nicor Gas; Sean Von Bergen, Winnebago County; Dan Streed, Boone County; Tim Bragg, Rockford Park District; Shelby Best, Sydney Turner, Kaylin Janicke, Region 1 Planning Council.

1. INTRODUCTION

- a) **Call to Order:** Ms. Sarver called the meeting to order at 4:02 PM.
- b) **Approval of January 21st, 2021 meeting minutes:** Ms. Sarver entertained a motion for approval. Mr. Kane motioned the approval (4:03 PM); it was seconded by Mr. Belle (4:03 PM). Approval passed unanimously at 4:04 PM. Motion passed unanimously.

2. COMMITTEE ITEMS

- a) **Chair and Co-Chair Appointment:** Ms. Sarver, the co-chair of the committee, raised the topic of appointing a new chair since Mr. Linnabary will be stepping down. She stated that Mr. Kane has agreed to accept the responsibility as he has been very involved in the committee and also has a strong environmental background. Mr. Kane thanked Ms. Sarver for the opportunity and explained his experience in geology and conservation in this area for the last 35 years. Ms. Sarver discussed that this committee is simply advisory, so with no need for formal action, she handed the rest of the agenda items over to Mr. Kane.
- b) **2021 Greenways Plan:** Ms. Best provided an update on the 2021 Greenways Plan. She stated that the plan was adopted by the MPO Policy Committee in April, and provided a [brief overview presentation](#) on the plan's main purpose and key objectives, planning initiatives, goals, benefits, implementation strategies, and maps and resources.
- c) **Keith Creek Planning Projects:**
 - i. Ms. Sarver gave an update on the Keith Creek Water Quality Plan and stated that with Zion Development, Studio GWA is meeting every other month to discuss and evaluate the water quality of Keith Creek. The study will likely take a year and a half and she hopes to be receiving some preliminary findings soon.
 - ii. Ms. Best provided an update on the Keith Creek Corridor Plan. A Request for Proposal to find a consultant to form and carry out the plan was published last week and is available on RPC's website. It will close on June 9th. Similar to the water quality plan, this plan will also take a year and a half and will end in approximately October or November of 2022.
 - iii. Ms. Sarver added that there have been discussions about working together and pooling engagement sessions, so as not to overwhelm anyone with multiple public meetings. Efficiency will be kept in mind as they move forward.

- d) RPC Sustainability Newsletter:** Ms. Best discussed RPC's monthly newsletter that began in April and highlights sustainability initiatives in the Rockford region. She encouraged the committee to subscribe and submit any organizations or projects to be highlighted that would help increase the communication and education surrounding sustainability.
- e) Project-Based Working Groups:** Ms. Best continued the discussion on the differences between our current working group structure and moving forward with a more project-based working group infrastructure. She stated that in the committee packet is a summary of how they would function and be set up as subgroups of the Environmental Planning Committee to help guide us in our work on meaningful topics. There are two distinct tracks listed and detailed: an RPC project working group and a non-RPC project working group, as well as a request form attached to the latter. Ms. Best asked if anyone wanted more clarification on any areas, otherwise she can answer questions and proceed with a motion to approve the new structure.
- i. Mr. Streed asked if the working groups would be assigned to specific projects, e.g., the Keith Creek Corridor Study? Ms. Best stated that yes, that is how it would function and that we have already created a working group for that project, as well as one for Greenways. From RPC's perspective, we have those project-based groups, while also allowing for it to be opened up to the larger community if anyone has something they would like to submit a form to work on.
 - ii. Mr. Kane entertained a motion to adopt the updated working group structure at 4:22 PM. Ms. Sarver made the motion (4:22 PM); it was seconded by Mr. Streed (4:22 PM).
 - iii. Ms. Sarver commented that we don't necessarily need new ideas, we can focus on some of the great ideas we have had in the past and formalize them through the new structure.
 - iv. Mr. Kane agreed, adding that he is partial to the state geological survey and 3D groundwater modeling/geologic mapping project that is underway, and that it could benefit from additional input and participation from the community. If anyone is interested in becoming more involved, he would appreciate the support.
 - v. Mr. Johnson stated that as the chair of the Environmental and Climate Justice Team of the NAACP, he has been involved in many national conversations about environmental injustices around the country. However, he hasn't been made aware of any particular area where environmental justice issues need to be raised from any of the topics we talk about. Keith Creek would be a possibility due to the damage caused by tremendous flooding and the lack of a safe waterway. Mr. Johnson wanted to raise the topic in case an issue emerges that the NAACP would be interested in handling, because of course the committee is interested in big topics such as climate change, but in terms of it affecting us in the Rockford region, he hasn't seen anything recently.
 - vi. Mr. Kane brought the attention back to the motion on the floor. He commented that perhaps at the next meeting, we could see if there are any existing projects that might fit under this working group structure that we can incorporate into what we are working on going forward. Approval passed unanimously at 4:27 PM. Motion passed unanimously.

127 N Wyman St, Suite 100, Rockford, IL 61101 | 815-319-4180 | info@r1planning.org

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3. PRESENTATIONS

- a) Josh Sage of the Boone County Conservation District provided a presentation on "[A Wetland Mitigation Success Story](#)".
- b) Mr. Roos asked if there was a concern about increasing pollinators, or if a wetland is not an appropriate place for them to survive. Mr. Sage answered that yes, they will survive and the key to a quality wetland regarding pollinators is to have something blooming through the growing season (April-October) so that the pollinators have a nectar source. In two years, the Piscasaw Fen Conservation Area will be a great pollinator area with high biodiversity that, along with others in Illinois and Wisconsin, has the potential to save several plant species from extinction.
- c) Ms. Sarver stated that she was curious about the Army Corp's process in this project and if there is a difference in the standards as a result. Mr. Sage answered that there was a heavy focus on the FQA and FQI's and due to the Army Corp, it is very regimented.

4. OPEN FLOOR: Mr. Linnabary asked for any group reports or agency updates.

- a) Mr. Roos provided an update on the 2021 Greentown Conference. The date has been set for Friday, November 12, 2021 at the Embassy Suites in Rockford. It will be an all-day conference and they are planning for 300 attendees, both virtually and in-person. The core planning team of about 14 people along with a few subgroups are working to plan the specific aspects of the conference, including key note speakers. Doug Scott, who is leading Governor Pritzker's effort to develop a plan for Illinois to become net carbon zero by 2050, has agreed to speak. There will be breakout sessions in 4-6 different areas: economic development, social equity, energy, food and waste, outdoors, and the sustainability planning process. Initial conversations are underway about how that process to develop a sustainability plan will proceed, and before and/or during the conference, this discussion on the planning process and next steps will be shared. The whole conference will cost around \$50,000 and they have already raised \$20,000. There is another \$6,000 spoken for, as well as many EPC members who have committed to supporting and sponsoring. There is no maximum goal – any surplus will go towards next steps of education and community engagement surrounding the sustainability plan. Additionally, the last activity at the conference will be a craft beer exploration. Mr. Roos encouraged everyone to attend, share any ideas for the breakout rooms, and spread the word to colleagues and friends; it will be very pivotal to our region. He thanked Shelby and everyone else involved for their efforts so far.
- b) Mr. Johnson asked what the cost to attend will be. Mr. Roos replied that the range is currently \$25-\$65, depending on who you are. If you sign up early, the price will be lower, as well as if you are a student; some scholarships will also be available. Business people will likely pay the full amount, and non-profit sponsors will receive a number of free tickets based on the level of their organization's sponsorship. Mr. Miller asked that Mr. Roos email him about the scholarship information.

5. ADJORNMENT

- a) Mr. Kane stated that the next Environmental Committee meeting is scheduled for **July 15th, 2021** at 4:00pm. **All RPC meetings are now open to a hybrid composition; attendees are welcome to join via Zoom or in person.**
- b) Mr. Kane entertained a motion to adjourn at 4:56 PM. Ms. Sarver made the motion (4:56 PM); it was seconded by Mr. Streed (4:56 PM). Approval passed unanimously at 4:56 PM. Motion passed unanimously.

Opportunities for public comment will be afforded on all agenda items.

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