

MEETING: 02/04/2025

Opened at 6:00pm / City Hall 3rd Floor Conference Room & Virtually on Zoom

Attendees

Members	Public
Nick Gorski, Ian Kindle, Mary Arlina, Stacy Melvin, Robert MacDonald (virtual)	Miranda Wilcha, Kate Semmens (virtual), Molly Bilinski (virtual), Lauren Fosbenner (virtual), Todd Nemura(virtual)
Associate Members: Tom Pritchett, Analise Draghi	
Absent Members: Paul Schalow, Tony Klapatch	

Agenda

EAC Organization

Meeting called to order at 6:02 pm, At 6:42 the meeting began recording.

February Meeting Minutes Approval

Motioned to approve the minutes Ian first and Mary second, 5-0

Public Comment

No public comment was made

Reports

CAP & Climate Adaptation Plan:

Kate provided an update at the EAC meeting about the January CAP task force session. She briefly touched on the potential role of the new sustainability manager and mentioned that while they didn't get the overall score, they met the requirements for energy poverty. She then talked about the target and goals, explaining that the sustainability coordinator could help in achieving them. Kate also offered to share the full report with the group.

Nick inquired about upcoming events for public science programming in February and March. Kate responded that the Nurture Nature Center's biggest event is the Youth Climate Summit, which will be partnering with the youth Mosaic Choir this year. She expressed hope that more people would attend to support the students.

Ian suggested organizing a Zoom meeting for those planning to attend the Youth Climate Summit. He felt it would be helpful to clarify everyone's roles and ensure alignment ahead of the event. Kate agreed and noted that the Zoom meeting could also be a good chance for collaboration and logistical planning.

Waste & Recycling Committee:

Mary and Stacy attended the Composting Symposium, and Mary shared some insights from the event. She mentioned the possibility of connecting with Mark Reed from Easton Community Gardens to explore potential collaboration. Miranda also pointed out that there might be future opportunities to work with Conner Elliott-Knaggs, the Climate Action & Circularity Manager at Lafayette College, regarding their composting program.

Tom provided an update on the CAP Task Force meeting, where composting was a topic of discussion. Mary expressed interest in learning more and attending a potential tour of Lafayette College's composting site. Ian suggested organizing an EAC tour of the site to give everyone a

firsthand look. Nick proposed inviting Mark, Conner, and Delicia to the next meeting to further discuss composting and how they can collaborate moving forward.

Transportation Committee:

LANTA's bus service frequency was briefly discussed. Nick asked Todd about the upcoming summit, and Todd shared details about the Blue Zones Summit. Nick wouldn't be able to attend, but Miranda and Stacy would be going to the Built Environment session. Rob said he'd try to attend both events, or at least the one focused on the environment.

Greenspace Committee:

Ian reported on the progress of the green space's initiative, updating the group on the information they received from the city. He mentioned that they reviewed the original amendments to Section 435, noting only a few minor wording differences. Class 1 and Class 2 invasive species were incorporated into the ordinance.

However, the land development shade tree requirements still haven't been finalized, and it's unclear whether they were officially submitted in April. Some concerns were raised about overly aggressive plant height restrictions. Ian explained that they had previously tried to get the code updated, but the amendment addressing invasive plants on private properties hadn't been fully addressed yet.

He also pointed out a potential issue with the current wording around "weeds." According to the code, a "weed" is defined as any non-native or non-maintained plant. The code specifies that grass taller than 8 inches is considered long grass, which Ian suggested might need further review for consistency. He mentioned that the updated code might need to clarify that native or cultivated plants do not have to be maintained at 8 inches, unlike other types of grass.

Nick expressed concern about the 8-inch limit on grass height, and Ian suggested the city could offer a special program to address this issue. Tom proposed that if there's a grass height limit, it should be publicized more clearly so people know the expectations. Ian agreed, adding that there should be a more formal sign-up process or better regulations.

Rob supported Ian's view, emphasizing that if a property is renting out parking spaces, clearer signage and better enforcement would be important. Ian confirmed that he would take these points to the council and hoped to have the amendment adopted from April 2024. He also mentioned that Section 520, which focuses on native plants in landscaping, might need some adjustments.

Nick raised concerns about a few zoning packages in progress, and Rob said he plans to attend the meeting on the 12th to request an advanced copy of the work being done. Ian also shared that they are reassessing the green space survey (GIS) and considering a more formal sign-up process to help streamline participation.

Communications Committee:

Robert discussed the idea of having an associate member or dedicated person to take the meeting minutes. Nick suggested rotating the minute-taking responsibility so everyone could have a turn, while also recommending that Robert oversee the final version of the minutes.

Miranda proposed that Robert should just take the minutes himself.

Nick emphasized the importance of the minutes, saying, "They're the memories of the organization, capturing what we can look back on, and they hold the bulk of the information discussed." Currently, Robert reviews the minutes drafted by the note taker before they are sent out.

Ian proposed using an AI tool for transcribing the minutes, and Miranda suggested reaching out to Dave or another member about exploring AI options. Nick mentioned that Teams has a recording feature that could create an AI summary.

To test it out, Ian moved to record tonight's meeting, Nick seconded the motion, and everyone agreed with consent to proceed with the recording.

Ian suggested creating and maintaining a volunteer list for communications within the EAC group. Rob recommended using a chat list in Teams to manage the volunteer list, and he offered to handle sending out any emails. He also mentioned signing up for a free version of Teams to keep things organized. Nick suggested using a free city account, which Rob agreed would make things more official.

Ian expressed concern about potential challenges with managing sublevels in the list and suggested that emails could be sent directly to individuals for clarity. Nick mentioned using an enterprise account and looking into AI tools, such as those from Zoom, to help keep things streamlined. Rob then asked about how the Planning Commission handles sending out meeting minutes. Tom said he would check with the ADC to see if there's another option and email the information directly to Rob.

Miranda offered to find the list of volunteers and send it to Rob, while Ian said he'd search through his emails for the list as well. Moving forward, Ian proposed using a signup sheet similar to the one for the Hazelnut Fest, with email signups being sent directly to Robert. Ian also mentioned that he'd look into using MailChimp for managing the list.

City Urban Forestry Update

Miranda shared that Rob was out this week, so she's been busy handling paperwork and preparing for upcoming events. One major event she's working on with Tracey is the Tree Tender event, which is being organized in collaboration with Penn State Extension. The event will take place from 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM and will focus on tree care, including a key session on pruning for optimal growth, as Ian mentioned. The goal is to attract people interested in street trees and volunteering, with a hands-on workshop designed to engage the right individuals who want to continue their efforts.

Miranda stressed the importance of having consistent volunteers with the right skills and knowledge, as well as maintaining communication with her and Rob. The event will be hosted at an urban farm location, and they've found that having people sign up from outside the city limits helps identify those who can bring valuable skills to assist the city. The training workshop is scheduled for March 31st on the South Side, from 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM, and registration is currently open.

In addition, Miranda and Rob will be at the Seed Swap at the Public Market on February 23rd from 9 to 11 AM, where they'll be exchanging and giving away seeds. Miranda is also preparing for Arbor Fest and is extending an invitation to vendors and anyone interested in attending.

Old Business

2024 Annual Report:

Nick asked if everyone had reviewed the 2024 annual report. Ian mentioned that the property maintenance code was adopted in 2024, and the native plants ordinance was also addressed when it was handed off. Nick pointed out that the Climate Action Plan was listed as the second item, above the monthly cleanup events. The group then voted with the approval of the report, with Ian making the motion, Mary seconding, and the motion passing 5-0.

Nick suggested putting the report on the agenda for the next city council meeting. Ian said he would coordinate with Crystal, Karen, and the mayor to determine when the 2024 report could be added to the agenda. Nick added that he was looking forward to presenting it in March, and Ian mentioned preparing a PowerPoint to accompany the presentation, focusing on the key points. Ian expressed excitement to showcase the group's accomplishments from the past year.

Wilson Warehouse Letter:

Regarding the Wilson Warehouse letter, Nick mentioned that the warehouse isn't on the agenda for tomorrow's meeting but noted they still have time to draft a letter. Rob has not yet drafted the letter, and Nick clarified that they don't need to vote on it because it will be sent directly to the mayor and Ken, not the developer. The warehouse meeting is scheduled for March 5th. Rob said once the letter is drafted, he would send it to all EAC members for review. Nick confirmed that it would be sent to members before it went out.

New Business

Upcoming Zoning Changes:

Nick spoke about the upcoming zoning changes, mentioning that there are some small adjustments, like building height revisions, which have been pushed back to be part of a broader package. The last major zoning revisions were about a year and a half ago, and Nick noted that if they receive the new zoning package, they should review the text changes carefully, particularly with regard to the native plants ordinance. He emphasized the importance of double-checking that all the necessary changes are included to ensure the EAC maintains a solid position and can make a strong case.

Tom requested a copy of Chapter 250, which includes the zoning information, and Nick confirmed that building heights are part of the revisions. Rob suggested getting a revised list of proposed height changes to review and determine whether they agree with them or need to

advise on adjustments. He also expressed interest in attending the Planning Commission meeting and bringing the comprehensive plan back to the EAC for further recommendations.

Nick said he would email Dawyne Twilmen and send out the comprehensive plan for review. Ian asked if the group has a planning department, and Miranda replied that Dawyne might be looking to take it over, but she wasn't sure. Nick clarified that there's no immediate action required, other than reviewing the changes, and then they can decide whether to send a letter.

"It sounds like the review process is still in the early stages. Do you think getting input from the Planning Commission will help shape the EAC's position on the proposed zoning changes?"

Mary talked about Salt Awareness Week, giving an overview of the city's current salt usage practices and exploring potential greener alternatives, both within the city and across the larger Lehigh Valley. She raised concerns about the types of salt used, especially on city sidewalks, and touched on the existing policies around it. Nick proposed creating educational materials to inform the public about the different kinds of salt in use and mentioned hearing that Easton doesn't use pet-friendly salt.

She then raised the question of establishing a baseline for salt usage and exploring what actions can be taken moving forward. Ian brought up the Salt Watch community program, where residents test their water regularly as citizen scientists. Mary said she would look into this initiative further.

Nick asked Miranda if she had any advice for residents on what to look for in salt alternatives. Ian mentioned that Public Works has a section about salt usage from 2015-2016. Nick proposed starting a public education campaign focused on salt alternatives and noted that the salt discussion would be added to the next agenda.

Additionally, Analise will be reaching out to Conner about Lafayette's composting program.

Meeting adjourned at 7:31pm; motioned by Mary, seconded by Ian - passed 5-0-0.