

## **Environment and Energy Conservation Commission** Draft

Summary of February 23, 2015 Meeting  
2100 Clarendon Blvd, Azalea Conference Room

Members Present: Scott Dicke, Sarah Meservey, Christine Ng, Terry Whitehead, Patrick Kenney, Gabriel Thoumi, Mike Hanna, Noor Khalidi, Alex Sanders,

Members Absent: Claire O'Dea, Eric Schreiber,

Guests: Irwin Kim, Greg Miller, Richard Stern, John Seymour

Staff Present: Adam Segel-Moss (DES), Joan Kelsch (DES), Aileen Winqvist (DES)

### **1. Public comment**

Greg Miller noted concern about road salt and sanding. The Commission briefly discussed the issue and expressed thanks for bringing the issue up.

### **2. Budget Update**

Joan Kelsch provided a short update to the Commission about the budget process. She noted that the Manager proposed a balanced budget. Ms. Kelsch noted that the Manager focused on a budget that emphasizes core services which the County Manager, Barbara Donnellan, noted as emergency management, human services, affordable housing, environmental sustainability, and Schools.

Ms. Kelsch noted that this budget was drafted by the Manager based on the community priorities that she feels meet the needs and wants of the community. Following the Board's direction, Donnellan also provided the Board with service and budget reductions totaling one percent of the County's department operating expenditures – approximately \$4 million in proposed cuts that the Board could make if it chooses.

The largest of the proposed cuts would be \$2.4 million in service reductions, including bike/pedestrian programs; transportation planning; Arlington Initiative to Rethink Energy (AIRE) and the district energy initiative; urban agriculture and employment services and cluster care for seniors, closing Artisphere and redirecting some of that funding to Cultural Affairs. Another \$1.4 million would be saved by converting some Metro Bus service to less expensive ART service; utility and fleet savings and eliminating a redundant after-school care program done in collaboration with APS.

Ms. Kelsch noted that the Commission should simply be aware of these cuts and that the Commission should weigh in on the issues that it feels are important to them. She iterated that the Board needs to go through and exercise specific options that make individual programmatic decisions. If other funds are needed for APS or other elements then the Board could decide to implement some or all of these cuts, in addition to other unspecified items.

Joan also noted that at the inception of the AIRE program in 2007 that the funding was created through a utility tax. This tax already existed in neighboring jurisdictions and that the fund would directly support AIRE Program implementation. During a recent Board work session in March there was discussion of redirecting these funds to the general fund.

Mike Hanna noted that the dedicated funding issue is a notable issue and should be taken up by the Commission. Mike noted that the Community Energy Plan is now part of the Comprehensive Plan and needs full funding in order to implement the previously approved elements. He also noted that no program should be expected to work with such uncertainty of staff or program funds, especially since the utility fund is intended to be a dedicated source.

The Commission asked that a copy of the budget be sent to them. The Commission also requested a copy of the 2007 Board Report that notes the funding source when AIRE was created. The Commission discussed the budget and how best to address it. Gabriel, Scott, and Noor all volunteered to collaborate with Scott on the Commission's budget stance prior to the March 24<sup>th</sup> public Hearing. Claire O. was also noted as a possible collaborator. The public hearing will take place in April and the Commission Chair will provide comment at the March 18<sup>th</sup> Board work session.

The Commission agreed to draft and circulate a letter in advance of the March meeting. Staff will send links to budget information as well as the 2007 Board Report that notes the source of the AIRE Program funding.

### **3. EA 4.4 Update – Joan Kelsch (DES)**

Joan Kelsch provided insights into the evolution of the EA 4.4 process. She noted that the process began in the '70s and has roots in the original NEPA reporting. Until recently the EA 4.4 process was more rigorous and difficult.

LEED and other state and federal requirements came along in the mid '90s and supplanted much of the EA process. Joan noted that the County now has institutionalized processes to capture much of what was intended in the original EA 4.4 but some things still fall through the cracks, such as natural resources. E2C2 developed a checklist to help staff complete the EA 4.4 process. The checklist streamlined the process and distilled the EA 4.4 process.

Greg Zell and Alonso Abugattas put together a separate process to address the gaps that have been identified to protect natural resources. The intent of the process is that any project, including curb and gutter, shall be reviewed using the GIS layer for natural resources. This simple check would take just a few minutes and most projects would fall outside of any protected areas. The goal is to make sure that issues such as the Claremont Magnolia Bog incursion don't happen again. These are easily preventable incidents when decision makers have the right information at the right time.

Ms. Kelsch noted that the two biggest issues are how to get a consolidated list of County projects and how to amend the existing EA 4.4 checklist.

The process to aggregate County projects requires multiple agencies and budget cycles. Parks has agreed to provide a list every six months. DES also has several areas where projects originate, including Facilities Design and Construction, Transportation, and stormwater retrofit projects. Lastly, the Neighborhood Conservation Program is another area where projects are generated. Every 6 months, projects are approved and funded. Ms. Kelsch noted that she is working to put together a system that filters a list every 6 months.

The ordinance was crafted more than 40 years ago to mitigate the environmental impacts of County projects. The concern is that this process is now 40 years old, has already been incorporated into many federal, state, and local requirements and doesn't serve the Board, staff, Commission, or residents well.

Ms. Kelsch handed out a spreadsheet that detailed environmental elements that are now addressed under local, state, and federal regulations (e.g. tree replacement, stormwater management, LEED, etc.). Some elements are still not addressed such as water quantity, energy targets, dark sky lighting, ADA, and safety.

Christine asked if the Commission could meet with a group of or subset of the pending projects to influence their thinking in some way. Staff are reticent to come to another meeting and are asking to have the Commission attend and integrate into existing processes for project development.

Patrick asked if there is a standard for open space. Joan noted that there is Parks and Open Space Master Plan, but no specific guidance exists for each individual project. Gabriel also noted that the Commission is interested in clarifying the terms green, open space, natural, and park.

Joan listed the specific projects that are moving forward and noted which are subject to the EA 4.4 process and which are not.

The Commission discussed various perceptions and definitions of the exceptions and exemptions.

Mike Hanna asked if the public hearing process would still occur and noted the value of the hearing. Joan agreed that the public hearing process is very important and should still be provided for residents to express their comments.

Gabriel asked if changing the EA process would change the Commission's charter. It is unclear at this time until the EA process is revised how it might impact the charter.

Mike asked if they would want to replace the EA process with milestones of when the Commission should weigh in on projects or for specific thresholds (e.g. % of building renovated, square feet of disturbance, amount of impervious area, etc.). Joan noted that the County's green building policy covers buildings and interior work.

Scott D. noted that the PFRC with schools has given the Commission a good model of how to engage. The other areas are less collaborative such as Parks. Mike H. suggested that the Commission should liaise better with the Parks Commission to establish a new process.

The Commission decided to continue this conversation in the EA working group and meet with staff again.

#### **4. Four Mile Run Update**

Aileen Winquist introduced herself to the Commission. She provided background on the Four Mile Run area. Some of the items noted included:

- Watershed Area is 20 square miles.
- During the 1960s and 1970s, Four Mile Run experience significant flooding events as the watershed became more urbanized.
- In 1974, Congress authorized the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to design and construct a flood control channel that would contain the increased flows.
- Conditions of the federal project were cost sharing and maintenance agreements from Alexandria and Arlington County.

In 2000, the City of Alexandria, Arlington County and the Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NRVC) began to explore the stream's water quality and recreation potentials. A Formal study was proposed to assess modifications to the channel to improve water quality without decreasing flood control capacity. USACE partnered with team to conduct a feasibility study on a restoration plan.

In 2008, Arlington County and Alexandria received a Federal State and Tribal Grant (STAG) matched with local funding for the design and construction of a portion of the Master Plan. Combined, the jurisdictions have approximately \$6 million. Grant funds had an initial deadline of September 2015 (later extended to December, 2016).

A "demonstration project" was selected to complete stream enhancements from Mt. Vernon Ave to Route-1. Tidal Restoration design proceeded on project from 2008-2011. At that time, a change in ACOE policies for flood channels necessitated a revised design.

The inter-jurisdiction project team (ACG) developed an alternative design to the Tidal Restoration Project, including bank and wetland restoration. The new scope for the design was:

- Meets authorized capacity and minimizes flood risk
- Includes no rise in water surface elevation
- Improves pedestrian access to water
- Improves stream habitat with living shorelines
- Restore native plant habitat through landscape design
- Continue as a joint effort between Arlington and Alexandria

The Plan B design option includes a naturalized the bank along the corridor and improve access to the stream through overlooks and terracing. It also plans to:

- Minimize sediment transport by capturing it in accessible area (site 1)
- Replace rip-rap with vegetation and create Living Shorelines on Arlington side (site 2)
- Establish historical tidal wetland condition in Four Mile Run Park (site 3)

Mike Hanna asked about the previously proposed bike bridge. Aileen noted that the funding isn't available at this time. She noted that it is still an item that the public and staff hope to implement as time and funds become available.

Aileen also noted that aesthetic improvements are planned for the Water Pollution Control Plant fence. The fence enhancement consists of over 800 linear feet of decorative additions including brightly colored "widgets" that reference the importance of microorganisms in the Plant's treatment processes, shaped fence panels overlaid on the existing fence to create a moiré effect for trail users, and a bench to create an inviting area for relaxation.

The enhancement project intends to serve as a unifying element for the four projects within this portion of the Four Mile Run corridor: Parks' Four Mile Run Master Plan, the future pedestrian/cyclist bridge, the planned stream restoration, and the Plant's landscaping.

The current timeline for the project includes:

- Bidding spring, 2015
- Construction start summer, 2015
- No road or bike trail closures for project
- May have short term bike trail stoppage with flaggers as vehicles cross the trail
- Contractor will access site from Mt. Vernon parking lot or S. Eads St.

## 5. Abingdon Update

Christine Ng provided an update on the Abingdon School planning process. Since October the PFRC has been meeting to discuss design options for the existing elementary school. The school expanded in previous decades and is exploring more space for additional capacity.

Christine noted the need for more parking and the play areas will be reduced as a result. There is also a bus and car loop that is being proposed to handle the increased staff and student **capacity and for safety**.

Originally Fort Reynolds Park was discussed as a vehicular access point to the school, which has since been nixed. There was also a lane being proposed that circled the play fields. No stakeholders were interested in this option.

There are many tradeoffs with this project to achieve project goals. The walkways and driveways must be impervious which will result in less green space. The project hopes to approve by March 4<sup>th</sup>. What would be a walkway or driveway it needs to be impervious.

Scott noted that he has had similar conversations with APS on other projects regarding impervious area. Scott noted that the stance seems a little extreme and could be outdated given the pace of technological development and market transformation.

Christine asked if the Commission felt that a letter was warranted and asked for input on how to formulate it. The Commission agreed to delay on a letter until a later date. The consensus was that continued engagement and feedback during the process was the best action at this time.

**6. Solid Waste Committee Chair Update**

A motion was made to make Noor Khalidi the Chair of Solid Waste Committee. The Commission voted unanimously to approve Ms. Khalidi. She will meet with the previous chair and staff liaison Shani Kruljac to get up to speed on the position responsibilities and upcoming meeting items.

**7. Meeting Summary Review – January 2014**

Approved as amended.

**8. Old/New Business**

Mike Hanna noted that Capital Bikeshare members may see their membership prices increased.

Sarah M. noted that the County staff stormwater outreach specialist has been researching pollutant loads. She noted that staff and volunteers have gotten savvy about monitoring and analysis of stream pollutants to isolate the largest contributors. Staff knows that picking up dog poop is a hugely impactful act for stream quality and staff is moving forward on an outreach program to educate dog owners.