

SUSTAINABILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SAC) MEETING NOTES

Wednesday, December 10, 2014, 5:30 p.m – 7:30 p.m.

In attendance: Joe Coffey, Pete Fleischer, Jillian Kasow (Chair), Scott Kellogg, Shadi Khadivi (Co-Secretary), Kate Lawrence, Amanda Mansfield (Vice-Chair), Randy Milano, Lori Quillen (Co-Secretary) Peter Sheehan, Chris Spencer, Bill Trudeau, and Frank Zeoli

1. Call to Order. Amanda Mansfield called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.; SAC members were provided agendas.
2. A moment of silence was observed to recognize the passing of Brother Yusef Burgess, SAC member and pioneer in urban environmental education.
3. A motion was made to adopt the October 23, 2014 meeting minutes. Motion was made by Amanda Mansfield and seconded by Pete Fleischer. The motion carried.
4. Kate Lawrence announced the public comment period. Members of the public were present; no one opted to address the committee.
5. Due to Amanda Mansfield's impending move to Spokane, Washington, Jillian Kasow solicited Vice-Chair nominations. Peter Sheehan was nominated by Amanda Mansfield and seconded by Pete Fleischer. The motion carried.
6. The SAC welcomed Frank Zeoli, Director of Recycling at the Department of General Services and a new addition to the SAC. Frank Zeoli is the SAC designee for the Commissioner of General Services, Dan Mirabile. Brief introductions were made around the table.
7. The committee discussed several external communication issues, among them: adopting a form letter, to be used in response to public queries to the SAC and mechanisms for making SAC meeting dates and minutes available to the public.
 - a. A draft form letter was circulated for review and adopted by the committee. Motion was made by Jillian Kasow and seconded by Shadi Khadivi. The motion carried. An updated form letter will be available in the SAC Dropbox folder. It will include edits gathered at the meeting.
 - b. Notice of SAC meetings will be posted on the Albany Times Union web page, on Facebook, and at www.albanysustainability.org. Minutes will be made available to the public at www.albanysustainability.org pending committee approval.

8. Presentation by Dan McEneny and Elizabeth Martin of the [State Historic Preservation Office](#) (SHPO) on the environmental, social, and economic benefits of historic preservation.
 - a. McEneny discussed how SHPO resources rebuild communities and minimizing building waste. The City of Buffalo was hailed as preservation leader; lessons learned could be implemented in Albany, which is structurally similar. [National Register of Historic Places](#) cited as gateway to opening the benefits that come with historic preservation. In Albany, most historic districts are downtown, not uptown.
 - b. McEneny reviewed the [Certified Local Government](#) (CLG) Program, which is jointly administered through SHPO and the National Park Service. CLG certification opens up technical and financial assistance via the [Federal Historic Preservation Program](#). Preservation-ready surveys, funded by CLG, identify buildings that can take advantage of tax credits and other incentives. To benefit, buildings must be in historic district. In Albany, new surveys could open up funding and expand preservation.
 - c. Historic tax credit program represents 1 billion in investment. For commercial properties, a 20% federal credit + 20% NYS credit = 40% credit. For homeowners, a 20% credit on work < \$5,000, with 5% on front of home. Building owners can apply yearly; tax credit covers walls, masonry, windows, roofs, etc.; is underused.
 - d. Martin reviewed why historic preservation complements sustainability, citing embodied energy, passive solar, ventilation, window lighting, walkable communities, and the quality of historic materials like old growth wood. Sustainable new construction can take 30 years to recoup costs; reuse is often greener and more economical. [The Hub](#), an apartment building in Buffalo, was profiled as an example of historic renovation in a mixed-use, downtown setting.
 - e. Q&A
 - i. Scott Kellogg raised the question of reconciling pollution remediation with goals of historic renewal. Martin noted land banks are working with SHPO when state and federal funds are involved. McEneny mentioned homeowners can access tax credits to help pay for abatements.
 - ii. Peter Sheehan inquired about the steps needed to establish a preservation district. McEneny stated the application process should not be unduly difficult, given that Albany has a functioning [Historic Resources Commission](#). He also mentioned the possibility of grant assistance, and that Albany's historian, Tony Opalka, worked in the SHPO office.
 - iii. Shadi Khadivi asked if developers in Buffalo had sustainability concerns. Martin cited the example of insulating historic stucco. McEneny reiterated the robustness of the tax credits (once 20%, now at 40%) and the competition among developers for historic

properties. Martin noted some Buffalo projects exceed government recommendations by 30% based on materials.

- iv. A question was entertained from the public: *“What five things are most needed to move historic preservation forward?”* McEneny replied (1) designating locally to preserve neighborhoods, (2) revisiting older maps, (3) surveying neighborhoods, (4) promoting residential tax credits, and (5) educating the public, who often thinks ‘preservation’ is a dirty word. It’s not just regulations; it builds community, tourism, and economic vitality.

9. Presentation by SAC committee member Joe Coffey, Commissioner of the City of Albany Department of Water & Water Supply on sustainability initiatives in his department.

- a. Albany had one of the best surface water supplies in the nation, keeping things clean and flowing involves managing 140 employees, MS4 permits, 900 miles of aging sewer pipes, 370 miles of water pipes, 3,000 fire hydrants, and flooding issues, among other things. Customers want good water pressure, toilets that flush, and sewers that flow out (never in).
- b. The City of Albany is supplied by the Alcove Reservoir, which has excellent water quality. Treatment is done at the Feura Bush Filtration Facility. The Loudonville Reservoir floats a 7-10 day water supply. Treatment facility built in 1930s, designed in 1920s. Water is gravity fed from Alcove to Loudonville.
- c. Coffey noted that the department wants to do an asset management plan, to identify and prioritize portions of the system that need major repairs. Some 30% of pipes date before 1900, and some newer materials have aged poorly. Green infrastructure, water gardens, and bio-retention ponds are all opportunities.
- d. The Water Department is in talks with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) about allowing limited access to Basic Creek Reservoir. The water body is impaired by blue green algae and rarely used by the city. Opening it to fishing would require monitoring invasive species. TNC is also advising the department on managing 1,500 acres of timber as a carbon asset.
- e. Q&A
 - i. Shadi Khadivi asked if the Department of General Services and Water Department coordinated on projects, given overlapping infrastructure. Coffey mentioned the importance of coordinating strategic thinking with the Department of General Services.
 - ii. Jillian Kasow asked about the timeline for the Quail Street project. Coffey expected it would be completed by December 15, 2015.

10. Presentation by Chris Spencer, Director of Planning for the City of Albany, providing an update on ReZone Albany: The Vibrant City Initiative.

- a. The two-year project was made possible by a NYSEDA grant, and will begin in January. Current zoning dates to the 1960s; updated plans will be easier for developers to navigate, while providing legal protection to neighborhoods. Current code is framed by ‘what the city does not want’ – rezoning will embrace ‘what the city wants.’
- b. Form-based codes will envision an area and create code that guides building in a way that conforms to neighborhood typology. Infill and development will be contextual. ReZone Albany will move us away from the culture of doing everything by variance, which creates an unpredictable environment.
- c. Zoning will be made consistent with the vision in the Albany 2030 Plan, the first comprehensive plan in the city’s history. The goal: to attract businesses and development, including downtown residential opportunities, with a focus on improved public transportation (such as car share), alternative energy, and sustainable practices.
- d. Q&A
 - i. Jillian Kasow noted that the SAC would appreciate updates as Rezone Albany hits milestones, so that members can weigh in on progress and plans. Spencer suggested the project consultant speak at a future SAC meeting.
 - ii. Shadi Khadivi requested an explanation of ‘form-based building code.’ Spencer defined it as using physical form as the organizing principle – taking into account the street, curb, sidewalk, and public realm surrounding a built area. Establish code for what you want (such as sidewalk cafes) to create more predictability. Commercial-to-residential conversions were discussed, as were finer mixes of uses throughout the downtown area – with a focus on a live/work environment.
 - iii. Peter Sheehan mentioned difficulty in converting a commercial building on Dove Street into residences; a variance was needed and correspondence from the Zoning Board was rigid. When the city is perceived as inflexible, it discourages renovation and creative evolution of urban space. Spencer commented new zoning will focus on creating a fair and predictable process, with less dependence on variances and special use permits.
 - iv. Amanda Mansfield asked about the feasibility of dense, mixed-use development, given costs and available developers. Spencer expressed that there were mixed-use -capable developers in the area, but many avoided Albany due to the roadblocks discussed.

11. Subcommittee Reports

- a. Transportation Subcommittee, Amanda Mansfield reporting
 - i. The committee has had three meetings; several people outside of the SAC participated: James Waugaman, John O’ Grady, and

Wayne Bequette. Minutes are available in the SAC Dropbox folder.

- ii. Salient topics: electric vehicles (including incentivizing charging stations, updating building code to accommodate EV infrastructure, and streamlining permitting for EVSE), guidance on the Complete Streets Design Manual and Guidebook, promotion of traffic safety education resources and Safe Routes to School, a city-wide parking review, bike transit issues (NACTO's Cities for Cycling Program, Bike Masterplan), promotion of car share, bike share, and walking/cycling to and from work, and developing a recommendation memo for the city.
 - iii. Due to Mansfield's departure, Jen Ceponis was nominated as subcommittee chair by Bill Trudeau, and seconded by Shadi Khadivi. The motion carried.
- b. Built Environment and Land Use Subcommittee, Shadi Khadivi reporting
- i. The committee has had one meeting; two people outside of the SAC participated: Seth Rosenblum and Rebekah Rice. Minutes are available in the SAC Dropbox folder.
 - ii. Salient topics: incentives for green building practices, environmental survey for the land, agro-farming issues (ensuring urban-raised food is safe to eat, rearing hens, etc.), green roofs, engaging CDTA as a stakeholder (transit bonuses), raising awareness about existing parking stock, promoting 'one car' per family ethos, and raising awareness of building code.
- c. Energy Subcommittee, Peter Sheehan reporting.
- i. The committee has had two meetings so far; one person outside of the SAC, Julien Bouget, has been in attendance. Minutes are available in the SAC Dropbox folder.
 - ii. Salient topics: generating electricity via water turbines to power the City of Albany's filtration plant, placement of solar photovoltaic panels on buildings at the Alcove Reservoir, promoting NYSERDA's energy audit program to residents, centralizing energy-related efforts taking place in the city, educating the next generation of sustainable energy stewards (focus on urban youth), and exploring distributed energy networks in lieu of the grid.
 - i. Two resolutions were set forth by the Energy Subcommittee. The first recommends the City of Albany hire an Energy Manager. The second recommends recording sustainability components of new projects undertaken by the City.
 - ii. Discussion
 - 1. Kate Lawrence noted SAC recommendations were to be presented to the Common Council in an Annual Report,

and suggested that too much back-and-forth in the interim could dilute messaging.

2. Joe Coffey suggested that SAC commissioners act as messengers, and help get buy in from their respective departments. Frank Zeoli concurred that more change was likely to come from commissioners than resolutions.
 3. Jillian Kasow noted that a City Energy Manager had been added to the 2015 budget, and suggested a letter of support to the mayor might be more appropriate at this juncture.
- d. Outreach Subcommittee, Lori Quillen reporting.
- i. The committee has had one meeting; minutes are available in the SAC Dropbox folder.
 - ii. Salient topics: connecting sustainability messaging and resources with residents in the City of Albany, including bolstering existing resources (with a focus on updating the MOES website www.albanyustainability.org), getting the word out on ongoing initiatives, communicating new priorities identified by the SAC and its committees, and promoting success stories. Audiences, communications outlets, and an over-arching communications strategy are a focus, as is networking with existing outreach capacity and learning from other cities engagement efforts.

12. Next Steps

- a. Joe Coffey suggested the February SAC meeting focus on the content of the Annual Report to the Common Council, noting that the final report from the Energy Master Plan needs to be embedded in the process.
- b. The motion to establish the water sub-committee was made by Lori Quillen and seconded by Peter Fleischer.
- c. The Committee would like to continue having a regular presentation spot for SAC members who are also department commissioners or representatives; a speaker needs to be secured for the next meeting.

13. Adjournment – Meeting was adjourned at 7:45 PM.

LMQ, 12/10/2014