



City of Harrisonburg Environmental Performance Standards Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

January 29, 2025 5:00-7:15 p.m.

City Hall (Room 11)

Members in attendance: Laura Dent, City Council Representative; Andy Kohen, School Board Representative; Dave Powell (Virtual); Doug Hendren; Jeff Heie; Joy Loving (Virtual); Rob Alexander; Ferwerdin Barzanji

Staff in attendance: Tom Hartman, Keith Thomas, Shayna Carter, Brittany Clem-Hott

Others in attendance: Brian O'Dell, General Manager of HEC

Call to Order

Rob Alexander called the meeting to order. He took a moment to thank staff and those working in public administration, especially those doing work in the environmental space.

Approval of Virtual Participation

Rob Alexander advised the Committee that David Powell requested to participate in the meeting virtually as allowed in the Bylaws and in accordance with § 2.2-3708.3 of the Code of Virginia. David Powell noted a work trip prevented him from physically attending tonight's EPSAC meeting. Rob Alexander called for a motion to allow for his participation. Andy Kohen motioned to approve David Powell's virtual participation. Ferwerdin Barzanji seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Per § 2.2-3708.3 of the Code of Virginia, David Powell may make motions, vote, join in closed meetings, and otherwise participate fully as if he or she was physically present.

Rob Alexander advised the Committee that Joy Loving requested to participate in the meeting virtually as allowed in the Bylaws and in accordance with § 2.2-3708.3 of the Code of Virginia. Joy Loving noted a personal medical reason prevented her from physically attending tonight's EPSAC meeting. Rob Alexander called for a motion to allow for his participation. Jeff Heie motioned to approve Joy Loving's virtual participation. Ferwerdin Barzanji seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Per § 2.2-3708.3 of the Code of Virginia, Joy Loving may make motions, vote, join in closed meetings, and otherwise participate fully as if he or she was physically present.

Review and Adopt Meeting Summary

Andy Kohen moved to approve the October 30, 2024 EPSAC Meeting Summary. Jeff Heie seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Focus Area Updates

Rob Alexander noted that the agenda was structured differently this time to better cover topics across all Focus Areas and to provide a new section for updates on the Community Goals. He added that at 5:45, the meeting would pause for a presentation from the invited guests and then resume agenda items afterward.

Keith Thomas gave an update on Focus Area #2: Land Use and Greenspace, noting that two handouts related to tree canopy were attached to the agenda. Rob Alexander asked how staff use the maps in decision-making. Keith explained that all the underlying data is added to the City's GIS maps along with other layers, such as utility locations and heat islands, to help identify potential planting locations within the City's Right of Way. Doug Hendren asked how staff select climate-adapted species. Keith Thomas responded that they typically choose species from regions farther east or south, as those are considered more climate-adapted for our area. He added that staff have stopped planting certain species that are no longer performing well. Tom Hartman noted that some of this information is also covered in the Urban Forestry Management Plan.

Laura Dent asked for clarification on NHD catchment areas. Keith explained that these are smaller, localized watersheds. Rob Alexander asked about staff plans for outreach and education on tree maintenance. Brittany Clem-Hott explained that staff promote the "right tree, right place" philosophy and that the City received a Virginia Department of Forestry grant to create a tree maintenance video series this spring. She also mentioned that the City's websites include a lot of information on this topic. Ferwerdin Barzanji asked if there were any programs offering free trees. Brittany Clem-Hott noted that the JMU Arboretum and Virginia Department of Forestry occasionally have such programs. She added that the City's Harrisonburg Conservation Assistance Program (HCAP) includes a practice that provides financial support for planting trees on private property.

Tom Hartman then provided an update on the City's new cardboard collection process. He explained that residents and businesses can now request cardboard collection, and staff will create routes based on the requests. The goal is to increase the tonnage of cardboard collected. Andy Kohen asked if the process is available for City schools. Tom Hartman said he would check with staff but believes schools have a cardboard dumpster. Ferwerdin Barzanji asked how staff are promoting the effort. Brittany Clem-Hott said the City shared the information through a press release, social media, and an email listserv for trash notifications, and will continue outreach efforts.

Rob Alexander asked about the procedures for getting messages translated into other languages. Brittany Clem-Hott explained that the City translates messages based on the type of message and intended audience and works with a translation company to provide translations upon request.

Community Goals Updates

Keith Thomas noted that the City was still waiting on the 2023 GHG inventory from Dr. McGinnis. He added that staff would begin collecting 2024 data to submit to Dr. McGinnis in the summer.

Keith Thomas provided an update on Phase 2 of the Solar Implementation Plan, explaining that this phase will include technical details for use in future procurement solicitations. He noted that the Turner Pavilion report was nearly complete, after which staff would begin drafting the procurement solicitation. He also shared that the consultant had visited the Community Activities Center to evaluate the roof and begin preparing their report.

Keith Thomas advised that Luke Morgan, the City's Grants Analyst, had taken employment elsewhere. He acknowledged Luke's contributions in supporting staff across the City with grant research, writing, and reporting.

Keith also mentioned ongoing uncertainty regarding federal funding for sustainability-related projects.

Special Presentation- ICLEI Community COP- Virtual

Rob Alexander welcomed the presenters from ICLEI and thanked them for joining the meeting to share more information. Laura Dent gave a brief background on why she invited the group, noting that the City had Community Goals and she appreciated the public engagement component. She felt the next big step for the Committee was to focus more on public engagement and education.

The Committee listened to the presentation about ICLEI's Town Hall COP process for local governments and how the information would be presented to national governments during the upcoming COP 30 at the 2025 United Nations Climate Change Conference.

Tom Hartman asked if the Town Hall COP was a new initiative and whether they could provide examples of other localities. Madison explained that the Town Hall process was new this year, but noted that in 2023 a similar process called Stocktake was held, with four U.S. localities participating. Tom also asked about the level of effort and logistics needed to run the meeting. Madison advised that the specifics would be determined by each locality and that they did not yet have hard data, as the Town Hall process was still very new.

Rob Alexander thanked Caio and Madison for presenting and dismissed them. He then asked the Committee for initial reactions to the presentation. Tom Hartman noted that the presentation reminded him of the Bike Walk Summit, an annual public event that brings in regional partners and a guest speaker to connect national topics to the local level. He added that moving forward with something similar would require a plan for staff to review with the City Manager. The group discussed what such an event could look like and whether it could be tied into efforts by local organizations.

Jeff Heie motioned to request staff to increase its understanding of the ICLEI Town Hall framework and consider how it, or another process, could be used in Harrisonburg and to present ideas and a framework at the April 30th meeting. Andy Kohen seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Updates from Sustainability & Environmental Manager

Rob Alexander noted in the interest of time that any member who had questions about the information in this item should email Keith Thomas.

GHG Inventory & Modeling Update

Keith Thomas noted that while this section appeared in the agenda, this information will be given in the Community Goals section going forward.

Other Committee Topics

Rob Alexander presented his draft question to the City Manager regarding Focus Area 1. Rob Alexander read the following:

Given that the EAP states "Encourage producers of electricity supplied to the City to include more carbon free sources" (Goal 1 of Focus Area 1), and that Strategy 1.1 is "Identify opportunities to Increase Carbon Free Sources of Electricity" and that a Task is to "Encourage HEC and its supplier Dominion Energy to find opportunities for including more carbon free sources of electricity", EPSA seeks clarification and guidance from the City Council regarding the appropriate Responsible Party for this task and the means of encouraging HEC and Dominion Energy to shift their energy portfolio. Specifically,

1. Who is the lead Responsible Party on this Goal and Strategy?
2. Which mechanisms should this Responsible Party use to encourage electricity providers?

3. What role, if any, should EPSAC play in ensuring implementation of this strategy and achievement of this goal?

Andy Kohen motioned to have staff provide the City Manager with the clarifying question as presented, along with the applicable section of the EAP. Doug Hendren seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Next Meeting Dates**2025 Dates**

- April 30, 2025
- July 30, 2025
- October 29, 2025