

DOWNERS GROVE
ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS COMMISSION

Minutes

December 12, 2019

I. Roll Call – Meeting Start: 7:00 p.m.

Chair Pelloso asked for a Roll Call:

Present: Chair Pelloso, Commissioner Ellis, Commissioner Farley, Commissioner Marron, Commissioner Kuchar, Commissioner Dantoft

Absent: Commissioner Bement

Staff Member: Mr. Daniel Carlsen

Chair Pelloso asked for a motion to allow for Commissioner Dantoft to participate electronically. Commissioner Ellis made a motion to allow Commissioner Dantoft to participate electronically. Commissioner Kuchar seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

II. Visitor Welcome

Chair Pelloso welcomed Mayor Barnett and the rest of the visitors present at the meeting and asked them to introduce themselves. Brad Phillips is a resident that recently got involved in the Clean Energy Task Force. Ken Lerner from the Pierce Downers Heritage Alliance introduced himself. David Rose introduced himself.

III. Public Comment

None

IV. View and Approval of October 10, 2019 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Commissioner Kuchar seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

V. New Business

Role of Environmental Concerns Commission

Chair Pelloso welcomed Mayor Barnett to discuss the role of the Environmental Concerns Commission. Mayor Barnett thanked the Environmental Concerns Commission for allowing him to attend the meeting, and wanted to discuss the proposed changes to the Environmental Concerns Commission that the Commission brought to Village Council's attention in the first half of 2019 as well as the letter Mayor Barnett sent to the

commission members in response to the requested changes. Mayor Barnett stated he wanted to attend tonight's meeting to make sure that the Commission members and Village Council members are on the same page as to what is expected from the Environmental Concerns Commission now and in the future, and if there are any questions that the Mayor could answer. Chair Pelloso thanked Mayor Barnett for giving the Environmental Concerns Commission this opportunity to discuss the Commission with the Mayor and started by giving a full summation of the letter Mayor Barnett sent to the Commission members which reiterated that the Village Council made a unanimous decision to defer the review of the roles of Board and Commissions.

Chair Pelloso stated that she understands that there is work capacity issues and does not want the Environmental Concerns Commission to be a resource burden, but feels that the Environmental Concerns Commission has been used as a valuable resource to help staff in the past, rather than being a burden, and stated possible action items the Commission would be able to provide benefit to the Village.

Chair Pelloso stated that the Environmental Concerns Commission can be utilized to ease the workload on the staff employees, the Commissioners stated that the unique abilities of the Commissioners can assist the staff in legwork for specific sustainability initiatives, which is why the Environmental Concerns Commission requested changes to their role in the Village. Mayor Barnett stated that members of the Council would like to review the structure of Boards and Commissions, but reiterated that the workload of High Priority Action Items need to be understood before the timing of that process can be determined, and until then the Village Council would assign items to Boards and Commissions as they had continued to do so. Commissioner Dantoft and Commissioner Marron stated that they believe the Environmental Concerns Commission could assist with High Priority Action Items like the Facilities Replacement and Sustainability Plan (FRSP). Commissioner Farley stated she feels like the seven council members like to be in control of every decision. Mayor Barnett stated that there could be opportunity for input but the plan is in very early stages and Council needs to make many more decisions related to the plan before environmental factors are up for consideration.

Commissioner Ellis asked when the requested changes were presented to the Village Council members and when they were considered. Mayor Barnett stated that the Village Council members meet individually or in pairs with Village Staff and the items were considered in late May and June in 2019, and reiterated that the requested changes were not rejected, but that during the Long Range Planning process the Council decided not to review the role of boards and commissions at this time. Mayor Barnett added that all boards and commissions may be reviewed and that Village Council may have different ideas on how each board or commission should serve, but that will be decided during the review period.

The Environmental Concerns Commission stated their frustration with not being directed by Council for any of the requested items that were submitted. Mayor Barnett stated that there could be a possibility to review the list of requests submitted to Council and find an "easy win" for the Environmental Concerns Commission, and that the list can be redistributed to the Commissioners for review.

Chair Pelloso asked if the Facilities Replacement and Sustainability Plan discussions are

supposed to start at the December 17th Council Meeting. Mayor Barnett stated that the discussions are starting on December 17th to serve as high level discussions on scope that the Village Council can begin to agree upon, granular items such as environmental sustainability factors will be a discussion point much further in the process after the high level discussions on project scope has been agreed upon. Chair Pelloso expressed her concern about how the Environmental Concerns Commission will be utilized during the interim period. Commissioner Ellis reiterated that there is opportunity for the Commission to operate in the interim within the current powers and duties but would like feedback from Council if the Commission does submit anything for Council consideration. Mayor Barnett agreed with the concept, but stated that workload capacity for Village staff is still an issue, and before that workload capacity is reduced it will be difficult to find staff members that can implement any requested changes to current boards and commissions.

Resident Brad Phillips commented that he is hoping that the Village Council will seek input from groups like the Environmental Concerns Commission for the FRSP. Mayor Barnett stated that there will be several meetings for public input in general and the scope of public input will need to be agreed upon by the Village Council.

Resident David Rose stated he is concerned that the Village Council is not allowing the Environmental Concerns Commission to have discussions about ways to promote environmental sustainability and public discussion on their own initiative. Mayor Barnett stated that this concern is something that will be reviewed during the greater discussion on the role of each board and commission. Mr. Rose stated that residents may feel they can make a greater difference as an independent resident rather than as part of a board or commission. Commissioner Farley stated that organizations such as the Downers Grove Public Library have filled in as a leader in environmental initiatives.

Resident Ken Lerner stated he was glad to hear that employee workload capacity is identified is in issue and that Village Council is being active at addressing. Mr. Lerner wanted to notify the Mayor that while he understands the environmental issues of the FRSP will be decided at a later time in the process, there might be a possibility for the commission to provide input earlier in the process. Mayor Barnett stated that the Village was able to leverage the previous versions of the FRSP to identify certain environmental concerns from the early stages of the project.

VI. Staff update on ongoing projects

Green Leadership Award Winner

Mr. Carlsen stated that the Chicago Area Clean Cities Coalition (CACC) named the Village of Downers Grove as one of its 2019 Leadership Award winners. The awards are given annually to organizations that take actions to reduce petroleum consumption and improve air quality locally. The CACC is one of nearly 100 coalitions across the country affiliated with the U.S. Department of Energy's Clean Cities program. "The individuals and organizations we are honoring are terrific examples for others to follow to learn about the advantages of clean-vehicle and alternative-fuel technologies," said Samantha Bingham, coordinator of Chicago Area Clean Cities.

VII. Adjournment

Chair Pelloso asked for a motion to adjourn.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Farley seconded the motion. The motion to adjourn was passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Meeting adjourned.

Attachments

Addendum to 12.12.2019 Minutes

Letter from Mayor Barnett to the ECC

December 12, 2019 Amended Minutes: Addendum

At the January 9, 2020 Environmental Concerns Commission (ECC), Commissioner Ellis made a motion to amend the December 12, 2019 Minutes to be presented as an Addendum.

Commissioner Kuchar seconded the motion, and the motion was approved unanimously.

Full call for ECC to be utilized

- The Environmental Concerns Commission understands that items are directed by Village Council, and most commissioners would be okay with that, but the issue is that commissions are not being leveraged and not being directed to receive any Council direction. The lack of direction left commissioners feeling unmotivated and it took a while to get passion back into the Commission. The Environmental Concerns Commission reached out to Village Council so that the Council understands the valuable resources and skill sets available that the Commission members have to offer. Not only could the Environmental Concerns Commission assist Village Council, the Commission could also assist staff members in endeavors for environmental sustainability with an intent to reduce staff burden or be neutral to staff burden, rather than increase it.

List of 12 requests to Village Council were denied in May/June and not communicated to ECC until December

- The Environmental Concerns Commission was not aware that the Village Council reviewed the list of 12 requests in May and June of 2019 until it was communicated to the Commission at the December meeting, at which time they were notified none of the requests were accepted at that time.

Suggest that a member of the ECC be present during conversations with Village Staff

- The ECC suggested that a member of the ECC could be present during conversations with Village Staff to provide context and intent of any request and receive feedback.

More detail on purpose of Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Sustainability

- Having input from Village Council on issues such as the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Sustainability would improve communications between the Commission and Village Council. The goal of the Ad Hoc Subcommittee is to assess the Village's current state of environmental sustainability, look at what other municipalities and organizations are doing as best practices, and recommend actions that the Village could take that would save costs or be budget neutral. The Commission is disappointed that feedback and input was not given by the Council after submitting the recommendation.



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
ROBERT T. BARNETT

Liz Pellosi
Environment Concerns Commission Chair

Dear Chair Pellosi,

Thank you for serving your community – we truly appreciate your willingness to devote time, energy and expertise in the service of others.

It's important that we work to align expectations and while I had hoped to attend this week's meeting but am unable to do so thus, this note.

I have spoken a lot over the last year or so about how I believe we can, and should, do more as a community. This includes the work done by our Boards and Commissions. I think we can serve our community better by leveraging the good will and giving spirit of volunteers such as yourselves. It remains my intention to work with the balance of the Council to rethink and restructure how our Boards and Commissions operate.

That said, irrespective of the organizational structure, you are in some ways an extension of the Village Council. The appointed members of Boards and Commissions serve at the will of the elected members of the Council.

There are some realities we must face about resources and time – and they cannot be disconnected from responsibility that ultimately lies with the Council. We do not currently have the necessary resources to accomplish all the things we might hope of our Boards and Commissions.

To be effective in public policy you must have credibility and confidence in the data. Interactions between policies in one area and policies in another must be understood from an overall organizational standpoint.

For instance, you may have heard we are revising our rules as it relates to parkway tree regulations in an effort to prevent accidental destruction of trees do to careless construction practices. Most would agree this is a “good thing”. But making such a change required review of actual experience to identify the details around the types of failure we were trying to prevent. It involved legal review of the proposed changes for conflict with other ordinances that may be present locally or more broadly and review of related court experiences. We do not operate in a vacuum and investment in our community is important thus a review of neighboring municipal ordinances was also warranted. If/when this change is adopted by the Council, the permitting process will now include at least one additional on-site meeting by our Community Development team and additional correspondence with builders and owners prior to the issuance of a permit. This one, important change, has consumed a great number of hours in preparation and will continue to consume additional resources beyond those expended prior to the change ad infinitum for implementation.

Your Village is stretched.

On the immediate horizon, we have directed our staff to focus on several issues the Village Council has deemed to be the top priorities for the short term (12-18 months) and we believe these efforts, combined with the day-to-day operation of the Village and those issues which pop up (experience shows there are always some) will consume all of our available resources.

The roles of Boards and Commissions was specifically discussed by the Village Council earlier this year and while there is interest within the Council in reviewing the structure and considering changes, there is unanimous consent that such consideration does not rise to the level of priority above the 2020 High Priority Action Items list. And your Village Council also decided quite specifically that until such consideration was taken up by the Council, our Boards and Commissions are to continue to function as recommending bodies whose work is provided to them by the Council on an as-needed basis.

In other words, we have decided – for the time being – that the Environmental Concerns Commission will operate in the manner it has for quite some time. It will remain a valued resource for study of issues which originate at the Council but will not be provided the resources necessary to function in consideration of any topics generated by the ECC or other parties. Changes to the structure and charge of the ECC are not going to be made by the Council any time soon. We are planning a 2020Q1/2020Q2 check-in as it relates to the 2020 HPAI and this, as well as several other un-met resource demands, will be brought up again to see what the previous six-months-ish has proven to be in terms of workload.

Several of the 2020 HPAI components may well lend themselves to opportunities for the ECC to provide service to the Village – but if and when those come about, will be determined by the Village Council.

No doubt, this sounds lousy to a group of dedicated volunteers who are passionate about an urgent issue that affects us all, daily. I get that. But for a very long time your Village has resisted adding resources. And, as an extension of the Village any work done by the ECC must include Village staff review and input. We simply do not have the resources to provide to the ECC and the ECC cannot function as an extension of the Village without those resources being part of the process.

I do plan to attend the ECC meeting on December 12th and would welcome additional conversation then, or anytime.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bob Barnett', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Bob Barnett

CC:

Commissioner Bement
Commissioner Dantoft
Commissioner Ellis
Commissioner Farley
Commissioner Kuchar
Commissioner Marron

801 Burlington
Avenue Downers
Grove, Illinois 60515
E-mail:
rtbarnett@downers.us