

Borough of Doylestown

Environmental Advisory Council

Minutes of the meeting held Tuesday, January 18, 2022

Attendance: Faran Savitz (Penn Environment, attended remotely), George Mullikin, Kristin Winters, Karyn Hyland, Wendy Margolis, Grant Alger, Steve Nelson, Dennis Livrone (Borough Council)

1) Call to order: George M. called the meeting to order at 5:33 pm.

2) Single-Use Plastics (Grant A.; Penn Environment):

- The group introduced themselves to Faran S. Grant A. noted that he shared Faran S.'s input with us re: the Phila ordinance. Faran S. provided background re: efforts toward reducing single-use plastics elsewhere in PA. Penn Environment (PE) focuses quite a bit on the reduction of single-use plastics; our system can't handle the amount of litter and waste. PE feels the best solution is to cut off single-use plastics at the source – don't give them to consumers. One of the easiest ways to do this is single-use plastic bag bans. 2019 was when the bans in PA really kicked off; Narberth was first, then PE helped Westchester Borough and Phila with their bans (hybrid models). While they were working on them, PA passed the ban on bans (preemption), so this work was halted. The preemption has expired and has not been renewed, so can municipalities address single-use plastics again, but there is no guarantee that the preemption will stay away forever. The best way to stop it from coming back is to pass as many local ordinances as possible. Phila has amended theirs; Pittsburgh is working on one; Media, Haverford, Newtown, Newtown Township, Doylestown Twp, Solebury, New Hope, and Lehigh County have been working on ordinances, resolutions, or other measures. There's a lot of momentum.
- He noted that one of the bigger questions is ban vs. fee. Faran S. provided the group with a ban/fee hybrid model that many municipalities are using. The ban gets rid of the plastic bags (the most important part); then, since part of the goal is to reduce overall bag use (paper as well), a small fee is included to encourage people to use fewer bags. This also helps retailers, since they keep the fee. PA law prohibits the fee going to the municipality. This encourages retailers to participate. Phila took the fee out and lost some support from retailers and unions; Pittsburgh has received support for theirs because it includes the fee. In Phila, Acme has voluntarily adopted a fee since they're doing it in other municipalities.
- Wendy M. asked about best practices for getting businesses on board. Faran S. said communication is important. He said in Pittsburgh they called small businesses, asked if they support the measure, and then discussed it if needed. They found that many businesses supported it already. Larger businesses may be less communicative, but may still be on board (e.g. Wawa in Phila, Eagle in Pittsburgh), since they may already be doing this in other locations. Reaching out to businesses is important and should encourage discussion.
- Karyn H. asked if any other municipalities have incorporated straw requirements. Narberth and Westchester, maybe Media and Haverford, and some other municipalities have done so. PE feels straws are good to tackle, but bags are easier to work on since there are substitutes, their reduction has more of an impact, and the measures get more support. Often the municipalities don't ban straws but require customers to request them, which tends to work better. Faran S. has language regarding straws in another sample ordinance that he could provide if we'd like it. There's language for other types of plastic as well. Faran S. noted that it's often easier to start

with bags then move on to other plastics – keep it simple, straightforward, and easy to understand.

- Grant A. noted that we've discussed whether this should apply to food trucks, markets, etc. Faran S. said in their example they've covered everyone, since everyone should be able to have an alternative. Exceptions include meat wrappings, bags to package loose items (like nuts), produce, and newspaper bags, but all general use bags shouldn't be used. The more broadly we apply it, the more people understand it and the more people get used to the change. Part of the education needs to be that this is for everyone, not just grocery stores. Clarity is important in the ordinance, website, and outreach.
- George M. noted that when we last talked about the issue we were discussing whether to ban plastic bags or implement a fee on plastic bags. He asked if anyone has tried a fee for plastic bags? Would there be a reason to do this? Faran S. said that if we think that politically a ban might be difficult, it would make sense to put a fee on plastic bags. But it's stronger to just do the hybrid discussed above, since it gets rid of more plastic and is easier for people to understand. Wendy M. noted that respondents to the survey and businesses have indicated support for a ban.
- Grant A. asked re: timing. Faran S. said we should introduce the idea asap, since we're in the window without a PA ban on bans. We've already done a lot of what we need to do to get started; then it would probably be a few months for Council to vote. Rollout is where there's more wiggle room. We need to allow retailers time to get rid of their plastic bag stock. As one idea for a general guide: within 30 days retailers should put up signs (samples have been provided, and we can get other examples) to let people know it's happening, then 90 days after the effective date of the ordinance, businesses need to stop using plastic. This also allows time for businesses to find alternative bags. Phila's rollout was much longer, which led to a lot of confusion and less compliance; give it long enough, but not too long. Pittsburgh and Media are both doing 6 months which seems like a good alternative.
- George M. asked re: enforcement. Faran S. said PE recommends a tiered fine structure; more infractions equals higher fines. Other locations have flat fines. One municipality recommended jail time; this is not suggested by PE in their example. Enforcement depends on the Borough's capacity - we need to have someone to enforce it. Phila has a citizen reporting system, Philly 311; residents can report various issues, including businesses using plastic bags. Lower Merion also has a reporting system. Having the fee on paper is somewhat self-enforcing.
- Grant A. asked if there are other organizations like PE that are engaged in this. Faran S. said locally PE is the most active organization. Larger orgs (e.g. Sierra Club) will send municipalities to PE for information. Clean Water Action, the Sierra Club local chapter, and some other local groups are also helping municipalities. There are other groups doing things statewide too, although PE is the lead.
- Wendy M. asked if Faran S. is tapped into the EACs around the state so he'd hear if another prohibition on bans is in the works. He said they have a good network of EACs, local leaders, etc. who help keep them in the loop; they rely on local contacts to spread the word.
- The group continued to discuss if enforcement would be an issue and if there is anything else we should do to get the businesses on board; they have already been prepped quite a bit. Karyn H. said it won't be surprising to get some complaints at first, although Narberth said they haven't actually had that many issues with enforcement. Since COVID and the ban hit right at the height of our outreach, we should refocus on outreach. Also, businesses have changed since then, so we will need to prime the businesses.

- Faran S. asked if there are any materials he can send or if there is anything else they can do to help us. He spoke to Mayor West before the holidays, who was supportive of these efforts. Steve N. said any press releases or other public communications to residents/businesses would be helpful, or names of local media to contact. Wendy M. said Phila has a lot of material – flyers for businesses, info on website – that we could also use. Faran S. said he'll send outreach materials, and they have some contacts with local media (e.g., *BC Herald, Patch, Reporter*) that could be helpful.
- Faran S. asked if we have a timeline. George M. said we haven't developed a timeline yet, since we're determining the structure (fee, ban), but asap would be good. Wendy M. agreed that getting it to Council soon is a priority, and we are figuring out how to split up the responsibilities. The group agreed to aim to get it through Council in 2022. Faran S. said to contact him if there is anything PE can do to help put things in place.
- The group thanked Faran S. for his time and he signed off.
- Steve N. asked how the PE model compares to our info from our last mtg. Grant A. said that the ban/fee hybrid seems to be the innovation. Also, the PE model is very concise and straightforward. We have much more detail, so simplifying it will help.
- Karyn H. suggested we decide what our major goals are. Dennis L. asked if we could put the ordinance in effect within 2022; the group agreed that this might not be feasible, since we need to put it together and advertise it.
- Steve N. asked if the outreach should occur before it goes to Council, since at that point it will go public. Wendy M. said with our previous survey and public support, there probably isn't much more that needs to happen before it goes to Council. We could go to the press to advertise that it's going to Council.
- The group discussed the PE model and agreed that we want to use the hybrid model.
- The PE model has very few exemptions, but it also is very specific about being applicable to retail establishments. Karyn H. noted that craft fairs could be difficult to enforce, or events from outside vendors at churches. We might not be able to enforce it, but we could provide education ahead of time (e.g., tell the church about our goals for these events).
- For next time, we should all read the model, look at the exemptions, and compare it to our previous draft. Wendy M. noted that it's good to keep in mind that this model is being used in many other municipalities. George M. suggested that after reading the model we should be ready at the next meeting to finalize our recommended ordinance. Wendy M. noted that if we decide to adapt ours into the PE one, we should just be careful with definitions. Karyn H. said the one we originally did was based on Narberth's. The PE one has made some changes.
- Steve N. suggested we also think about how we will roll it out, both before and after it goes to Council. The group agreed to do this. Wendy M. said she is available to help call businesses if needed. Karyn H. said we'll need a cover memo, a mission statement letter, a rollout plan, and the recommended ordinance. We did not originally have a detailed timeline in the rollout plan, but should include that this time, along with steps for adoption. Council adopting an ordinance is a 2-month process. The group agreed that 6 months is a good amount of time for businesses to adapt after adoption; this can include the outreach time.

3) Renewable Energy:

- PE can speak to this as well. We can talk to them about it on a later date. Steve N. was wondering if they are working with local municipalities. He has reached out to PE. Grant A.

spoke to someone at PE about this and was referred to Faran S., since he also asked about plastics. Grant A. and Steve N. will exchange info about renewable energy.

- Steve N. asked if the EAC is still interested in pursuing renewable energy as a topic. George M. and Grant A. said yes, and the group agreed to discuss this in our goals.

4) Approval of minutes: Kristin W. will fix the spelling of George M.'s name. Grant A. moved to approve the minutes, George M. seconded, and the minutes were approved with the noted change with Steve N. abstaining.

5) Goals for 2022

- Plastics will be **Goal 1**.
- Advocate for renewable energy will be **Goal 2**. Grant A. suggested we look at the comprehensive plan and how the EAC can support renewable energy in this process. Karyn H. solicited a proposal from the Bucks County Planning Commission (BCPC); they haven't been officially hired to do the comprehensive plan, but will be considered by Council next week. They have done comprehensive plans and review/provide comment on projects that come through the Borough, so they have a good idea what we're working on. They will hold several meetings (workshop style) and work with the Borough Planning Commission and Council. The scope of work hasn't been finalized yet. Teams will be formed to work on particular topics, including Environment and Resiliency. The first meeting will be to fine-tune the teams.
- George M. asked where there will be opportunities for us to participate. Karyn H. said we don't have a timeline yet, but most likely during the second workshop would be a good time. The group discussed that perhaps the earlier we participate the better, and that there are two ways to look at this: housing, transportation, etc., (the way they are currently thinking to divide it) vs. more cross-cutting topics like energy, resiliency, quality of life. We should think about how we want to participate and what issues we want to bring forward.
- Karyn H. said there will be a public survey to kick things off. After the survey will be the first meeting. All of the meetings are public. The BCPC will provide the overall framework with 5 workshops; they facilitate the meetings.
- The group discussed whether we want to figure out our questions/what we want to advocate for ahead of the first meeting, or if we want to see what comes out of the first meeting and use the resulting structure to develop more specific questions. The group also discussed if the EAC should provide some questions to be included in the survey that will be sent before the first meeting, or wait to get a little further in the process so we're not reinventing some parts. George M. asked if we could look at past surveys; Karyn H. said she wasn't sure where we'd find that info.
- This will be **Goal 3**; we want to participate in and add value to the Comprehensive Plan. It will probably be about 18 months until the draft is done. The group will continue to discuss.
- Karyn H. noted that there is an opening on the Borough Planning Commission. Traditionally there has been someone who is on both the Borough Planning Commission and the EAC. The last person who did this was on them a number of years ago. This may be a good opportunity with the upcoming comprehensive plan to have someone on both.
- **Goal 4** will be community/other EAC/other organization engagement. The group agreed it would be good to engage the public and engage more with other EACs. Kristin W. said BirdTown involvement and activities could help us meet this goal. Wendy M. said it would be good to figure out new ways to engage the public. Grant A. has been working on keeping the website

current. Wendy M. said we can do our own survey before the comp plan survey, and George M. asked if this would interfere with the one from BCPC; Karyn H. said as long as it is soon, so it wouldn't create confusion, that would be ok. Karyn H. suggested it would be good to have smaller projects that get the community excited and involved. BirdTown and volunteer events could be good for this. Wendy M. said it would be helpful to know what skills we would be looking for in future EAC members.

- For next time we should try to set some objectives for these goals. At the next meeting we'll finalize these 4 goals and everyone should bring any other ideas they have. Kristin W. will send the notes to the entire group earlier and will copy Wendy M.

6) Outreach & Communication (Grant A.):

- Grant A. posted some photos from the Farmers Market on the website.

7) Old/New Business:

- Steve N. asked when Council will be selecting our two new members. Wendy M. said that the openings have just been advertised again, and it depends on the responses we get.

8) Adjournment: Steve N. moved to adjourn the meeting, Grant A. seconded, and the meeting was adjourned by common consent at 7:16 pm.

9) Next meeting: The next EAC meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 15, 2022, at 5:30 pm.