

Chairperson Gaasch called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

ROLL CALL:

Members Present - Cynn timer Gaasch, Chairperson
Robert Amadon
Ryan Harrington,
Evelyn Hicks, Co-Vice Chairperson
Leane Schultz, Associate Member

Absent - Danielle Bagley
Jacqueline Balikowski
Michael Beltz
Tracy Skalski, Co-Vice Chairperson

A quorum was not met for the meeting, governance items will be held until the May 1, 2023, meeting.

Issues of the Public

No comments were received.

Ongoing Commission Projects

Bike friendliness letter

Chairperson Gaasch stated the letter from Chris Holmes of West Seneca Bikes was forwarded to the Town Board.

Tree Inventory Grant

Mr. Amadon provided the following updates:

- Receiving assistance with the application to the NYSDEC from the Town Grant Writer
- Grant amount was increased to \$75,000
- Inventory includes counting and classifying trees on town owned property and final report
- Should also apply for a Forest Maintenance/Urban Forestry Plan
- Awaiting the RFA (Request for Application) from the NYSDEC

Councilmember Piekarec stated the application will be presented to the Town Board for approval as the town will have to cover any cost overruns. Chairperson Gaasch stated a consultant will be paid to complete the work. Ms. Schultz questioned the type of consultant that would be hired and the timeframe. Councilmember Piekarec stated the consultants are arborists and two entities have provided costs; the inventory would take a year. Chairperson Gaasch stated it is her understanding that the grant does not require the town to match the funds. Councilmember Piekarec stated he recalls that the town would cover a cost overrun. Chairperson Gaasch stated it may be worthwhile for the commission to put together an argument to advocate for completing the full plan and request the Town Board not to limit the capacity to complete the full plan. Councilmember Piekarec stated the town can apply for additional grants if this is not possible under this grant. Ms. Schultz questioned if she could accompany the consultant to observe the process. Chairperson Gaasch stated she is certain the Environmental Commission could incorporate an element of community awareness and advised state grants can take up to a year for a decision.

Tree planting with ReTree

Chairperson Gaasch noted Ms. Bagley was not present to provide an update and asked Councilmember Piekarec to comment. Councilmember Piekarec stated he will submit a resolution for the upcoming Town Board meeting for acceptance of ten trees at the Burchfield Nature and Arts Center Park. Chairperson Gaasch stated she has communicated with Carol Yetter of the BNAC regarding this donation and noted there are areas under water. Ms. Hicks questioned if the trees will be water loving as it will help with erosion. Councilmember Piekarec stated he does not believe the species have not yet been selected. Chairperson Gaasch stated the time and date of the planting will be posted on the Environmental Commission's page and the town's social media.

Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper/Flood Plain Report

Ms. Hicks stated the report has been released and asked if Councilmember Piekarec is aware of the town receiving it. Councilmember Piekarec stated he is not certain. Ms. Hicks advised that the report is to be reviewed by town departments and then the next round of funding can be applied for. The Environmental Commission will also make a presentation to the Town Board and noted National Grid's response regarding work to be performed on their property is outstanding. Ms. Hicks stated the pre-proposal for the next grant is just opening now and anticipates submitting the pre-proposal to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation by the middle to end of April. Ms. Hicks further explained the project for the students in the audience.

Governance

Chairperson Gaasch noted Alex Goodwin and Brittany Hernon have received approval from their employers to be Associate Members of the Environmental Commission.

Chairperson Gaasch noted the following changes for the assignment of duties:

- Michael Beltz has taken on the responsibility of moving the Deer Management Plan forward with volunteers and Town Staff
- Robert Amadon is joining Danielle Bagley in working on the grant request to the NYSDEC for the creation of a tree inventory

Chairperson Gaasch stated there is a need for a Recording Secretary to assist with the meeting agendas and maintain records for the commission; they would also help prepare the annual report. Ms. Hicks stated she will prepare the Buffalo River Re-Connection Project. Mr. Harrington agreed to review the meeting minutes and prepare a report. Chairperson Gaasch requested the reports be submitted to her by April 18, 2023, and asked Mr. Harrington to include the membership from the beginning and end of the year, thank the people that left and Ms. Hicks for their service.

Strategic Planning Process

Chairperson Gaasch invited Ms. Hernon to explain what strategic planning is. Ms. Hernon stated a group lists their goals, the strategies to achieve them, and measurable outcomes.

Chairperson Gaasch stated creating a strategic plan would provide the opportunity for the Environmental Commission to focus on its purpose, what is important in West Seneca, what is important in 2023, and what the commission's focus should be going forward.

Ms. Hicks referred to the Public Strategy Session and asked if this includes public education, for example National Night Out or other outreach. Chairperson Gaasch stated the commission decides how much educating is their responsibility. Ms. Hicks questioned if Public Education and Outreach should be added to the list of tasks. Chairperson Gaasch stated Outreach could be added and explained the strategic planning process identifies what

people think and what they know, a future priority would be what to educate people on, or, to not undertake education at all.

Mr. Amadon asked if the members will prioritize the list of items as a group. Chairperson Gaasch stated after the research phase identifying what is important is completed, all the possibilities are listed, and their importance and impact are ranked.

Mr. Harrington volunteered to review the West Seneca Comprehensive Plan.

Chairperson Gaasch stated she would like Ms. Schultz to prepare something to share from the Erie County Water Management Council. Ms. Hicks stated there is another group, the Lake Erie Watershed Protection Agency (LEWPA) that meets.

Mr. Amadon questioned what the Storm Water Coalition entails. Ms. Hicks stated the coalition is the regional group of towns and cities that must be a part of NYS Storm Water Management. Annual reports and compliance with NYS metrics are required for the Town of West Seneca to receive funding for infrastructure and mitigate NYSDEC fines for direct discharge of sewage into the water system. Ms. Hicks stated a previous project was the placement of storm drain medallions identifying where the water drains directly to the creek and stated Richard Rutkowski was a good reference person to speak with. Additionally, rainwater was collected for gardening to mitigate the amount of storm water entering the sewer system. Mr. Amadon volunteered to take the storm water coalition item. Chairperson Gaasch asked Mr. Amadon to investigate what the town can do, what actions would have the largest impact, timelines, and costs involved.

National Night Out

Chairperson Gaasch stated the commission participates every year with a table of items that prompt conversations and requested volunteers to participate. Ms. Hicks stated it is the first Tuesday in August and the commission brings taxidermy that draws attention to the table. Mr. Harrington volunteered to participate.

Ms. Hicks shared that a Hellbender Salamander was sighted in West Seneca and stated that is very rare. West Seneca is very rich in wildlife and referred to a previous grant that studied migratory birds.

Burchfield Nature and Arts Center

Chairperson Gaasch stated she received an update that the building is going to re-open and the commission may be given an office, storage, and exhibition area. If this were to occur the commission would need to transfer items from the Christian Metz House. Ms. Hicks stated she supports this, but previously the alarm system was prohibitive due to town offices in the building; if the alarm system is different, it should not be an issue. Chairperson Gaasch stated she understands that only volunteer organizations will occupy the space. Councilmember Piekarec stated the uses have not been approved yet. Chairperson Gaasch stated the commission may move the meetings to Burchfield, also.

The meeting ended at 7:11 P.M.



Margaret A. Martin

Deputy Town Clerk/Secretary to the Environmental Commission