

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS COMMITTEE

2017 ANNUAL REPORT

City of Kalamazoo
Environmental Concerns Committee
Summary Report of 2017 Committee Activities

2017 MEMBERSHIP/CITY STAFF CHANGES AND UPDATES

Resignations

James Timmons, Chair
George Russo
Margy Belchek

New Members

Aaron Wright
Katie Stevenson
David Kroening

New Officers

Paul Manstrom, Chair
Matt Fletcher, Vice-chair

City Staff

John Paquin continued to be the primary City staff liaison to the ECC. Christine Kosmowski assisted John and represented the City at most ECC meetings until she ended her employment with the City in October. John then appointed Malissa Drzick (Lab Supervisor at the Wastewater Treatment Plant) to take Christine's place and to eventually become the primary liaison to the Committee.

City Commission Liaison

During 2017, the appointed City Commission liaison did not attend ECC meetings. Commissioner David Anderson, who had been the liaison in the past, did attend several meetings and helped by unofficially fulfilling the liaison role. David was reappointed Commission liaison in 2018.

2017 PRESENTATIONS TO THE ECC

January

Ryan Koziatek (Kalamazoo Nature Center) and Les Tung (President, Parkwyn Village Neighborhood Association) presented on deer population issues in the City of Kalamazoo and options for management of that population.

March

Chris Bovid (President Woods Lake Association) and other members of the WLA presented a list of issues concerning the environmental degradation of the lake. The issues were concentrated on the lack of timely removal of roadside leaves and the use of road salt by the City and the effect those practices were having on the increasing salinity of the lake.

April

Members of a Kalamazoo Christian high school class gave a presentation summarizing the results of their field study of the urban deer population levels on the southwest side of the City of Kalamazoo (neighborhoods adjacent to the Asylum Lake Preserve). Mark

Mills (MDNR) also spoke to the committee about options for dealing with urban deer overpopulation.

October

Hannah Hudson (City of Kalamazoo Seasonal Weed Inspector) gave the ECC an update of the Japanese Knotweed infestation in the City and the current efforts to combat that infestation.

MAJOR ISSUES FOR THE ECC IN 2017

ECC Membership

The ECC's effectiveness continued to be hampered by open seats and attendance issues. The ECC meetings failed to satisfy the quorum requirement in January, April and November. The October meeting was shortened by the lack of a quorum at meeting time. The ECC did not meet in December. The committee made several changes to streamline the candidate evaluation and interview process. The committee also recommended amending to the ECC bylaws to ease quorum requirements (that change was approved in 2018).

Communications with City Staff and City Commission

In 2017 the ECC struggled with how to communicate committee recommendations and to whom those recommendations should be directed to. The ECC approved two resolutions during the year that were to be sent to the City Commission for consideration. The resolutions were not sent after discussions with City staff. City staff felt the resolutions were too prescriptive and would not give staff the necessary flexibility to deal with the issues. Staff preferred that those communications come in the form of recommendations and be directed to the staff not the commissioners. The ECC referred to the statute in the Code of Ordinances that formed the ECC and that statute appears to confirm that the committee's opinions should be expressed in the form of recommendations. The statute does not restrict where those recommendations can be sent. The ECC, in the future, will determine on a case by case basis whether recommendations coming out of the committee should be sent to City staff, City commissioners or both.

Urban Deer Overpopulation

The ECC spent the better part of the year watching presentations, listening to citizen concerns, doing research, and engaging in lengthy discussions about the problem of deer overpopulation in the City of Kalamazoo. It is a subject not new to the ECC. In 2009 the ECC sent a resolution to the City Commission for approval that recognized the problem and directed City staff to work towards solutions. The resolution was never passed. The current ECC's efforts did not yield any palatable solutions and the committee tabled the discussions without any recommendations. An email was sent to all the participants in the multiple committee meetings covering this issue. The email informed them that the ECC would not be making recommendations but was open to receiving additional information and research on the problem. Key City staff were copied on the email.

Woods Lake Environmental Degradation

Representatives of the Woods Lake Association appeared at several meetings during the year to express concerns about the health of the lake. The ECC did approve a resolution for approval by the City Commission that would prioritize some best practices by Public Services in the area surrounding Woods Lake. The resolution was not sent to the commissioners for reasons previously mentioned in the communications issue above. A productive response by Public Services to some of the concerns of the WLA helped satisfy the Association that some progress had been made. Woods Lake remained on the ECC agenda at the end of the year and the issues would be discussed again in 2018.

Palisades Nuclear Plant Decommissioning

In July 2017 the ECC chair and Staff Liaison met with two representatives the organization Beyond Nuclear. The representatives expressed grave concerns about the both the means and methods and the financial viability of the pending decommissioning of the Palisades nuclear power plant. The concerns were regional and could include serious environmental consequences for Kalamazoo. It was decided that this issue was certainly within the purview of the ECC and was placed on meeting agendas. The committee maintained a brief correspondence with Beyond Nuclear but also completed some independent research. This research was aided by a committee member's connection with an individual with experience in designing and implementing similar decommissioning projects. The research produced a series of questions that were then sent to the Beyond Nuclear reps. They never responded. This, combined with the fact that it appeared that Consumers Energy was uncertain that it would proceed with the decommissioning anytime soon, caused the ECC to table the issue until further developments would warrant discussing it in future meetings

Kalamazoo Climate Action Plan

ECC interest in strategies to mitigate climate change and enhance climate resiliency coincided with Imagine Kalamazoo 2025 planning which also addressed climate change and eventually resulted in a commitment by the City to develop a climate action plan. The timing of all this led the committee to focus on the draft Kalamazoo Climate Action Plan published by WMU graduate students in 2016. ECC members spent the first part of the year analyzing the document and cataloging aspects of the plan that complemented the goals in the emerging City Master Plan. The implementation section included in the Master Plan that was approved later in 2017, cites the ECC as one of the critical participants in drafting the final version of the KCAP. This committee activity did produce the other resolution approved by the ECC in 2017 for referral to the City Commission. The resolution was overly prescriptive, contained several factual errors and misunderstood the status of the WMU version of the KCAP. These flaws and the clearer understanding of the process of communicating recommendations to the City Commission caused the ECC to withdraw this resolution. The committee did reaffirm by consensus its desire to play an active role in the drafting of the final version of the KCAP and began the process of scheduling the City Planner and the KCAP coordinator to appear before the committee in early 2018 to help define that role.

CHANGES TO ECC BLAWS

The committee approved several changes to the ECC bylaws. These changes involved simplifying the election of ECC officers and clarification of the definition of chronic absenteeism of committee members at the monthly meetings. The changes gave the officers more independence in dealing with that absenteeism.

This summary report is meant to give an overview only of ECC activities during 2017. Further details can be found in the published ECC meeting minutes. Questions may be directed to the ECC Chair Paul Manstrom at manstrom@kzoo.edu .