



ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, January 5, 2011 at 6:30 p.m.
Burgess Recreation Center
700 Alma Street, Menlo Park

CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order at 6:35 PM.

Commissioners Present: Lawrence Byers (Chair), Kathy Schrenk (Vice Chair), Dan Kocher, Doug Scott, Mitch Slomiak, Christina Smolke, Kristin Kuntz-Duriseti (for approximately last 45 minutes of meeting).

Commissioners Absent: None.

Staff Present: Rebecca Fotu, Environmental Programs Manager.

Public Present: Allan Bedwell (Friends of Bedwell Bayfront Park, FBBP) (from approximately 7:00PM on), Davena Gentry (FBBP, Menlo Park GRCC), Robin Smith (FBBP, Sequoia Audubon Society), Chris McIntosh (FBBP), Nancy Borgeson (FBBP), Anne Moser (FBBP, Menlo Park Housing Commission), Nicole Baldocchi (patch.com).

A. PUBLIC COMMENTS: None

B. BUSINESS ITEMS:

1. Welcome New Commissioner Christina Smolke. Ms. Smolke was warmly greeted as she brings Commission up to its full complement of Commissioners. Background is chemical engineering, works in research at Stanford University. Recently participated in the 240 University Avenue heritage tree appeal process as a member of the public, this is where she first became aware of EQC. Sitting Commissioners introduced themselves in turn.
2. Approval of December 1, 2010 Minutes. Commissioners unanimously approved minutes after first determining that Commissioner Schrenk was amenable to her nomination as Vice Chair, which had been made in her absence.
3. Environmental Review for Highway 84 Carbon Offset Project. Discussion on this item was briefly postponed until after discussion of Item #4 below, so that Allan Bedwell of the Friends of Bedwell Bayfront Park could be in attendance.
4. Two Year Work Plan. Commissioners thanked city staff and Commissioner Kuntz-Duriseti for accurately capturing so much discussion/comment from previous meeting. Ms. Fotu gave a brief synopsis of plan and its purpose to Commissioners Schrenk and Smolke, who hadn't been present for the December discussions, and answered their questions. Commissioners Scott and Kocher inquired as to which of the identified "goals

and priorities” were the most urgent. Discussion ensued, focused on the Sustainable Building Policy (Goal #2), Climate Action Plan (Goal #4), and Heritage Tree Ordinance Improvement Plan (Goal #3). Discussion specific to Goals #2 and #4 planned for February meeting; #3 planned for March or April meeting; others to be addressed at future meetings.

M/S (Slomiak/Scott) “Approve the Two Year Work Plan as submitted, subject to any further changes by Commissioner Kuntz-Duriseti” (who was out of the room due to family emergency during discussion of this item).

3. . Environmental Review for Highway 84 Carbon Offset Project. Ms. Fotu provided an overview of the proposed project and its associated Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND). Formal comments on the MND are due to the City by January 17. Commissioner Byers stated that he thought the Commission’s alternatives with respect to this item might include: (1) support the MND “as is” (2) support the MND with suggested revisions (3) request further evaluation of the environmental impacts through an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) or (4) take no action.

The attending members of the Friends of the Bedwell Bayfront Park introduced themselves and donated their time to Allan Bedwell so that he could make a presentation on the Friends’ perspective on the subject project. Mr. Bedwell reviewed the project from the Friends standpoint and highlighted the Friends concerns with respect to the following impacts: (1) aesthetics / open space look of the park (2) water quality (3) safety / hazards (4) biological / wildlife impacts, including tree survivability, and bird habitat. Mr. Bedwell also highlighted that he felt there were far more cost-effective ways to help the City achieve carbon reduction goals than the proposed project, outlining at least three, and stated the Friends willingness and interest to help the City achieve those goals.

Key take-aways from the Friends’ presentation included: (1) the MND addressed a number of the Friends’ concerns (reference the four biological mitigation measures specified) (2) however, even with the changes, the Friends feel the proposed project is inappropriate for the park because of its significant impacts (3) there are more cost effective solutions to offset Highway 84 related carbon emissions – some might even generate revenue for the City, and (4) the Friends would like to serve as a resource to the City to help identify more cost-effective solutions for offsetting carbon emissions.

Questions were asked of Mr. Bedwell and other attending Friends by the Commissioners about potential impacts, focused primarily on the biological, water quality, and greenhouse gas impact portions of the MND, and also about other carbon emission reduction solutions touched on by the Friends during the presentation. The Friends were encouraged to participate in the forthcoming discussions about the City’s Climate Action Plan.

Questions were asked of City staff about the grant process. The previous occasion on which the proposed project went before Council was to request approval to submit the grant application for \$350,000. The next occasion on which the project will go before

Council will be to request approval of the MND, which the City needs to submit to the State grant agency to “complete” its grant application. The State deadline for completion of the application is February 28, 2010. Subsequently, a decision on whether the State will grant the City funds for the subject project is tentatively expected March 2010.

The Friends clarified that they had not spoken directly with the State grant agency about their concerns about the proposed project’s potential environmental impacts because of their understanding that such interaction might negatively impact the City’s eligibility for future state grants.

Mr. Bedwell reiterated that he felt there were many better uses of taxpayers’ \$350,000 for the purpose of carbon emission offsets. (Note that the \$350,000 comes out of a state grant pool rather than the City’s general fund or other local/self-funding sources).

The Commission then narrowed its discussion focus to the greenhouse gas (GHG) section of the MND. Commissioners Kuntz-Duriseti and Byers pointed out that the Marsh Road landfill represents ~ 10% of the City-wide GHG emissions (based on the City’s original GHG inventory) because of methane releases, a far greater amount than any sequestration expected to result from the subject project. However, the MND doesn’t address the issue of whether GHG emissions might actually increase on a net basis if the subject project were to be implemented (due to potential breaches of the landfill cap by tree roots). Questions were asked of City staff about cap thicknesses, tree root zones, and resulting potential for cap being breached, but answers were not available at this time.

M/S/A (Scott/Schrenk/Kuntz-Duriseti) “The Commission believes the Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) provides insufficient information to assess the risk of increased greenhouse gas emissions resulting from the prospect of the landfill cap being breached from the subject project. Given this lack of clarity, the Commission cannot take a position on the adequacy of the MND”.

5. Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) Discussion. Ms. Fotu provided an overview of the City’s proposed CIP. The City staff’s study session of the CIP is planned for the end of February, so staff is interested in receiving EQC comments this evening or at the latest by EQC’s February meeting.

In no particular order, Commissioner comments included: (1) very positive about BBP gas collection project (2) what is the relationship of streetlight LED conversion project in this year’s CIP to last year’s LED conversion project as described by Lisa Ekers to the Commission? (3) what is the relationship of the “ECR Tree Planting” noted in this year’s CIP to the “Trees for Menlo” projects that have been discussed at the Commission over the years? (4) is there some sort of grouping of projects that involve what Menlo Park spends on pedestrians, bicycles, trees, and the environment versus what Menlo Park spends on cars? (5) where does a revisit of last year’s water conservation regulations factor into CIP? (6) where do tree planting projects (such as more trees on parking areas, or green roof, or community planting opportunities) show up in the CIP?

Commissioner Byers encouraged everyone to continue to review the plan and come prepared to further discuss at February's Commission meeting.

C. REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1. Climate Action Plan Update. Ms. Fotu stated that the City had completed a "supplemental report" to the Climate Action Plan originally adopted by Council in 2009. The EQC climate action subcommittee received the supplemental report in December 2010 and provided staff with preliminary comments. Plan from here is to place discussion of the supplemental report on EQC's February agenda and invite interested parties (GRCC, previous commenters, etc.) to participate in the review, with eventual submittal to Council.
2. Environmental Programs on Facebook and Twitter. Ms. Fotu stated that Vanessa Marcadejas, a city intern, had recently completed set-up of a City environmental programs presence on both Facebook and Twitter. She stated that EQC members could expect to receive some details from Ms. Marcadejas within the coming week, and should feel free to provide any feedback.

While on topic of digital information distribution, the desirability of moving away from paper distribution of meeting agendas, minutes, supplementary to digital distribution was discussed. Several commissioners expressed their preference for all digital distribution; while others stated that they find themselves using the hard copy packets the city distributes. Lack of Wi-Fi availability during EQC meetings is an issue inhibiting move to all-digital distribution, staff to investigate.

MEETING ADJOURNED APPROXIMATELY 08:45 PM.

Meeting minutes prepared by Commissioner Byers.