

**MINUTES
CITY OF COCOA
SUSTAINABILITY ADVISORY BOARD
REGULAR MEETING**

August 10, 2023

A Regular meeting of the Sustainability Advisory Meeting was held on August 10, 2023 at City Hall, 65 Stone Street, Cocoa, FL, as publicly noted.

I. CALL TO ORDER:

City Manager Whitten called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM.

Vice Chair Shannon Lathem led the Pledge of Allegiance and the Invocation.

ROLL CALL:

Mike Mervis	Chairperson
Shan Lathem	Vice Chairperson
Dick Bankhead	Board Member
Cynthia Johnson	Board Member
Kimberly Prosser	Board Member
Jennifer Riggs	Board Member
Joy Rutherford	Board Member

PRESENT:

Shannon Lathem	Vice Chairperson
Dick Bankhead	Board Member
Kimberly Prosser	Board Member
Jennifer Riggs	Board Member

ABSENT:

Mike Mervis	Chairman
Cynthia Johnson	Board Member
Joy Rutherford	Board Member

STAFF PRESENT:

City Manager Stockton Whitten and Lori Chabot, Recording Secretary were present.

Chairperson Mike Mervis advised he will no longer be on the Board.

Board Member Riggs provided members with additional documents and requested they be added to the Agenda as item number 2.

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA & MINUTES:

- a) AGENDA: Meeting of August 10, 2023
- b) MINUTES: Meeting of April 6, 2023

* **MOTION by Board Member RIGGS; SECONDED by Board Member BANKHEAD to approve the agenda of August 10, 2023 along with the addition of Ms. Riggs' handouts and to approve the Minutes of April 6, 2023.**

AYES: Lathem, Bankhead, Prosser, Riggs

Motion passed unanimously (4-0).

III. NEW BUSINESS:

1. Chairperson Remarks

Vice Chairperson Lathem lead the meeting as Acting Chair as Chairperson Mervis was not in attendance. She thanked all for coming.

2. Priority Setting

Board Member Riggs added items to the Agenda as noted above. The items that were submitted are:

- a. Memo Dated August 10, 2023¹ re: Municipal or County Purchase of Repetitive Flood Loss Properties
- b. Article titled Parks Protect Communities Against Climate Change²
- c. 2nd Memo dated August 10, 2023 ³re: Other Recommendations

Board Member Riggs outlined the following, stating that within Cocoa there are several properties that lie within repetitive flood zones and coastal high hazard areas, and thus seem very unsuitable for development. She talked about two areas along the corners of Indian River Drive and Dixon Blvd. There are other repetitive loss/flood zone areas in Cocoa.

¹ Exhibit A – Memo Dated August 10

² Exhibit B - Article titled Parks Protect Communities Against Climate Change²

³ Exhibit C – 2nd Memo Dated August 10

She further explained that other communities in Florida, and across the nation, have purchased such properties in order to use them as a stormwater absorption area, buffer zone, or in some cases have converted them into greenspaces and parks. The idea is both

to prevent repetitive flood loss and to use the water rich properties to improve stormwater and environmental management for the surrounding areas.

There are several areas in Cocoa where such an approach might make sense, she added.

Board Member Riggs continued, in response to her questions to staff from the Eastern Florida Regional Planning Council, that they provided several leads on such programs.

There are programs that buy vulnerable/at risk properties so that they can become buffer zones and part of green infrastructure. Seminole County has purchased repetitive flood loss properties from citizens through the grant program and have torn down the buildings and created green space. She mentioned that perhaps City Council could consider asking staff to provide current research on these and similar programs, and develop options for converting repetitive loss or flood zone properties into greenspaces that improve stormwater and environmental management in Cocoa and for the IRL.

Board Member Riggs asked members if there should be a motion requesting information from City Staff with regard to this. City Manager Whitten replied that was up to the Board, however he would provide them with the information. No motion was made.

Board Member Bankhead mentioned the grant programs. Some discussion was held among Board Members with regard to the items listed in Board Member Riggs memo as well as current County programs such as EEL and SORO funding and how it could apply to the City. City Manager Whitten replied to a question from Board Member Bankhead about the Countywide programs, and how they could or could not be applied, processes, and if it was possible to combine funding.

Board Member Riggs continued discussing the article she provided - Parks Project Community Against Climate Change - and where it could apply in the City, as well as her second Memo re: Other Recommendations and asked staff for information about the Tree Grant and if it could be provided in two weeks. She also asked about the Master Parks Plan and would like to get a copy. **City Manager Whitten noted that he could provide that information to her.**

Additionally, Board Member Riggs requested a regular meeting date be set. In response, Vice Chairperson Lathem said she understands staff is short handed and would defer the question to City Manager Whitten who recalled their prior discussion and with reiterated that with the current staffing shortage it would be difficult to have monthly meetings. Vice

Chairperson Lathem said she is good with quarterly meetings or to coordinate accordingly as the Board moves forward.

Board Member Prosser reiterated the challenges with shortage of staff.

Board Member Riggs also discussed the need for primary medical care within the Cocoa area, a budget for SAB with matching funds and other resources for pursuing Sustainability Projects.

Board Member Bankhead stated he would have more interest in community needs, i.e., hungry kids, etc.

Vice Chairperson Lathem also expressed a greater interest in local City needs.

Board Member Bankhead agreed adding that using the resources that are available to the City is where priorities lie.

Vice Chairperson Lathem stated that she liked the idea of shorter term, midterm and long-term goals.

City Manager Whitten began discussing items within the Sustainability Action Plan and outlined how City staff are currently working on projects or on future projects that address the items within the plan, and provided examples. Within the plan City Manager Whitten addressed:

- Build Environment
- Equity and Empowerment
- Health and Safety
- Natural Systems
- Climate and Energy
- Education, training

Board Members agreed to initially focus on local community needs using the resources that are available to them.

Vice Chairperson Lathem asked how to move forward from here. **In response, City Manager Whitten replied that he would return with example initiatives that the Board could assist with to move the initiatives forward. He asked the Board to consider how they could help, i.e., how to encourage and create green space, look at police and fire, or assist with training and education.**

Vice Chairperson Lathem asked about the next meeting date. In response, City Manager Whitten replied that he would reach out to schedule the next meeting.

Board Member Prosser suggested using an application called Doodle Poll for scheduling. City Manager Whitten stated he would look into that.

IV. NEXT MEETING DATE:

The next scheduled meeting for the Sustainability Advisory Board is TBD in Cocoa City Hall, 65 Stone St, Cocoa, FL 32922.

V. ADJOURNMENT:

- * **The Sustainability Advisory Board meeting was adjourned at 8:04 PM.**


Shannon Lathem, Vice Chairperson

ATTEST:


Lori Chabot, Recording Secretary

Jennifer Lovitt Riggs
Cocoa Sustainability Advisory Board
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Regarding Municipal or County Purchase of Repetitive Flood Loss Properties

Within Cocoa there are several properties that lie within in repetitive flood zones and coastal high hazard areas, and thus seem very unsuitable for development. Two areas are along the corners of Indian River Drive and Dixon. There are other repetitive loss/flood zone areas in Cocoa.

Other communities in Florida, and across the nation, have purchased such properties in order to use them as a stormwater absorption area, buffer zone, or in some cases have converted them into greenspaces and parks.

The idea is both to prevent repetitive flood loss, and to use the water rich properties to improve stormwater and environmental management for the surrounding areas.

There are several areas in Cocoa where such an approach might make sense.

In response to my questions about the THIRA (Threat Hazard Identification and Reduction) Plan, staff from the Eastern Florida Regional Planning Council, provided several leads on such programs.

Staff of the Eastern Florida Regional Planning Council
Luis Nieves-Ruiz luis@ecfrpc.org
Michelle Cechowski, michelle@ecfrpc.org>
MSiebert@ecfrpc.org

Thursday, July 11, 2019

"There are programs that buy vulnerable/at risk properties so that they can become buffer zones and part of green infrastructure. Seminole County has purchased repetitive flood loss properties from citizens through the grant program and have torn down the buildings and created green space."

<https://www.fema.gov/news-release/2014/05/28/communities-plagued-repeated-flooding-property-acquisition-may-be-answer>

<https://www.fema.gov/news-release/2018/11/13/fact-sheet-acquisition-property-after-flood-event>

<https://www.npr.org/2019/03/05/696995788/search-the-thousands-of-disaster-buyouts-fema-didnt-want-you-to-see>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/06/climate/nashville-floods-buybacks.html>

Perhaps Cocoa Council could consider asking staff to provide current research on these and similar programs, and develop an array of options for converting repetitive loss or flood zone properties into greenspaces that improve stormwater and environmental management in Cocoa and for the IRL.

I move the SAB recommends to Council to pursue research on funding that helps convert repetitive loss and flood zone properties into greenspaces, and request that staff provide a brief written report of findings within the next month to Council and the SAB.

<https://www.tpl.org/parks-address-climate-change-report>

Excerpted from

The Power of Parks to Address Climate Change

Lisa Foderaro

May 4, 2022

Parks Protect Communities Against Climate Change

As a warming planet leads to worsening risks and impacts, American cities are taking matters into their own hands. Cities are not only pledging to slash carbon emissions in the coming decades. They are also figuring out how to be more resilient. Because one thing is clear: disadvantaged communities that have been historically neglected will suffer the most as the planet warms.

Park acres, it turns out, are very good at buffering the effects of climate change. Green space has the power to lower air temperature and absorb floodwater, and can be designed in such a way as to significantly enhance those climate benefits.

As part of its 2022 ParkScore® index, Trust for Public Land (TPL) asked parks departments in the 100 most populous cities what they're doing about climate change. Bottom line: many cities are doing a great deal. But cities are not taking action in a vacuum. Neighborhood associations, climate-justice groups, arts organizations, and environmental activists have all pushed cities to move aggressively on climate measures.

[How well is your city meeting the need for parks? [Explore the 2022 ParkScore rankings.](#)]

Even where progress is being made, it's not nearly enough to address the climate crisis, given that many cities lack the funds to adequately care for their parks, let alone invest in major new infrastructure.

We also analyzed access to park space in those same cities, breaking down the results by race/ethnicity and household income. We found:

- Eighty-five percent of cities are adapting parks and recreation facilities to address climate change.
- Eighty percent are enlisting parks to counter urban heat.
- Seventy-six percent are improving surfaces to reduce flooding and runoff from rains.
- Twenty percent are actively managing parks and woodlands to sequester carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas responsible for climate change.
- Other cities are managing parks to reduce the risk of wildfire, restoring shorelines to absorb storm surges, and opting for renewable sources of energy.
- Cooling green space is not equitably distributed, however. Trust for Public Land analyzed the 100 most populous cities and found that the neighborhoods where most residents identify as people of color had access to an average of 43 percent less park acreage than predominantly white neighborhoods.

Parks Emerge as Vital Defense

Climate change is bearing down on the world faster than scientists predicted, making life in cities especially challenging. Densely built environments, dominated by concrete and pavement, absorb and hold heat longer than natural landscapes. They are also more prone to flooding as extreme precipitation dumps so-called rain bombs on urban areas that become inundated with dangerous—even lethal—amounts of stormwater.

As damage from climate change escalates in the form of extreme weather, parks and green spaces have an outsized role to play in making cities safe and more livable. Increasingly intense heat waves and heavier rainfalls are becoming more frequent. Cities can design parks with abundant tree canopy and shade structures that keep residents cool in summer and with rain gardens, bioswales, retention ponds, and other nature-inspired solutions that capture stormwater to reduce flooding and improve water quality.

Earlier this year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a group of experts assembled by the United Nations, issued a major new report warning that the ravages of climate change were outpacing the ability of both nature and nations to adapt. The report represented a grim catalogue of the recent toll climate change has taken:

storms and floods causing billions of dollars in damage; heat waves killing hundreds in the Pacific Northwest; and extreme heat and droughts leading to crop failures, devastated forests, and threatened water sources. And, the panel cautioned, cities need to rapidly ramp up efforts to protect against these hazards, whether blistering heat waves or sea-level rise.

"Communities are struggling with real threats from the climate crisis, like flooding and extreme heat," says Diane Regas, president and CEO of Trust for Public Land. "And areas with the least amount of park space, namely communities of color and low-income neighborhoods, suffer the most. The good news is we have the tools to counter some of the worst impacts of climate change by using our public parks and schoolyards."

CASE STUDY: ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA

In St. Petersburg, parks officials are waging their own battle against a warming climate. The city's resilience master plan makes plain that parks are critical in that fight, calling on officials to "plan and design for a future where city green space and parks can serve as a first defense against the vulnerabilities of climate change and storm surge."

To that end, St. Petersburg recently committed to expanding its tree canopy so that a third of all neighborhoods are shaded by 2035. Last year, it made a down payment on that pledge, planting 1,034 native trees in parks and along streets. With waterfront parks on Tampa Bay and the Intracoastal Waterway, the city is especially attuned to the risks of sea-level rise and rainwater runoff. Currently, work is underway in a few parks and preserves to restore wetlands and create "living shorelines," both of which absorb storm surges and filter pollutants.

In Lassing Park, which overlooks Tampa Bay, the parks department, in partnership with Tampa Bay Watch, is in the process of installing oyster reefs and planting native grasses along 700 feet of shore to halt erosion triggered by storms and cope with sea-level rise. Presently, the shore consists only of sand.

"The goal is to solidify the shoreline and use oysters to actually clean the water since they act as a natural filtration system," says Bryan Eichler, assistant director of parks and recreation with the City of St. Petersburg. "When we get a hurricane or tropical storm, it just devastates our shoreline."

Jennifer Lovitt Riggs
Cocoa Sustainability Advisory Board
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Regarding Other Recommendations

I ask the SAB consider the following:

1. Ask for a written update from Cocoa staff on the Tree Grant, to be provided to the SAB within the next two weeks. Answering specifically:
 1. What money did Cocoa receive?
 2. How has this money been used so far?
 3. Where will the trees be planted?
 4. What is the plan to water the trees during the first five years or so until they are established?

2. Request a brief written update on the Master Parks Plan, and all other ongoing related work toward developing Cocoa's green infrastructure in a way that promotes stormwater management, recreation, transportation, and other benefits associated with contiguous green spaces. (This could be as simple as a link to the final version of the MPP, other related documents such as the updated stormwater plan, and a list of ongoing projects resulting from those and similar efforts.)

3. Develop a regular meeting date for the SAB, once monthly, so that it can establish momentum, and avoid the extra work and inconvenience of rescheduled meetings.

Other Priority Topics

1. Access to primary medical care within the geography of Cocoa?
2. What is the budget of the SAB for matching funding? What other resources does Cocoa have for pursuing Sustainability Projects?

Exhibit C