



Minutes

City of Tempe Sustainability and Resilience Commission March 18, 2024

Minutes of the Tempe Sustainability Commission meeting held on Monday, March 18, 2024, 4:30 p.m. in person at Tempe Transportation Center, Don Cassano Community Room, 200 E. 5th Street, Tempe, Arizona.

(MEMBERS) Present:

Shawn Swisher (Chair)	Taylor Conley
Kendon Jung (Vice Chair)	Ben Paulat
Barbie Burke	Joshua Randall
Morgan Winburn	Jacob Bethem
Erin Boyd	
Jake Swanson	

(MEMBERS) Absent:

City Staff Present:

Eric Iwersen
Brienne Fisher
Ambika Adhikari
Jacob Payne
Maddie Mercer
Carissa Fowler
Evelyn Brumfield
Tom Duensing

Guests Present:

None

Agenda Item 1 – Welcome and SRC Mission

Chair Swisher called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m. and read the commissions' charge and mission.

Agenda Item 2 – Public Appearances

No public comments were shared.

Agenda Item 3 – Review of Meeting Minutes

The minutes of the February 26, 2024, meeting were accepted.

Motion: Commissioner Barbie Burke

Second: Commissioner Jake Swanson

Voted to Approve: 9-0

Agenda Item 4 – General Plan 2050 – Approved by Voters

Brianne Fisher, Transportation and Sustainability Department, gave an overview of the General Plans 2050, recently approved by Tempe voters. The Sustainability Commission drafted a letter of support identifying some crucial aspects that demonstrate a significant step forward in shaping more a sustainable and inclusive future for the city. A stronger language in the sustainability policies, mix-use density and increase mixed-use land, was incorporated into the latest draft.

Brianne put together a slide compiling how the general plan works for the city, what its whole in decision making, zoning and land use, and how the commission going forward could point out some developments to the general plan. She highlighted some of the main sustainability-related elements within the plan chapters and assembled some guiding questions for the commission to use as a tool in future presentations /conversations.

- How is this development, plan or project meeting the goals of the General Plan 2050?
- Is this aligned with the General Plan 2050?

Comments:

- Chair Swisher requested future agenda items related to the general plan, to refer to the slide created by Brianne, and address these comments in the presentation. He also asked the commission to have the same mindset moving forward, by referring to the general plan, and where they see folks not be in alignment with it, use the general plan as a push back tool.

Agenda Item 5 – Character Area 6 Planning

Ambika Adhikari, Community Development Principal Planner, and Jacob Payne, Community Development Sr Planner, gave an overview of the Character Area 6 Southwest. A Character Area Plan is a way of conveying the vision and goals of an area to create positive change. He explained the concept and use of Character Area, which is a policy level plan, a guiding plan, but not a legal document. It can't change land use or density, zoning, private property rights, residential and commercial code compliance, and public safety. The most important aspect of the plan is the design guidelines. Tempe is divided into eight Character Areas, and six areas have been completed and adopted. They are in the development process plans for Character Area Six, and

in 2025 they will start the planning for Character Area Two, which will be the final one. He shared a map with the character areas boundaries.

Character Area Six has 6.21 miles, with a population of 28,450, median age 33.6, median household income \$72,769, house units 12,630 with 30% owner, and 70% renters. The largest employers are Kyrene District and Honeywell, and key industries are manufacturing and Information Technology. The planning process for Character Area 6 is underway with phase one, Engagement Processes, recently started. The kickoff meeting was on January 24, and an online survey, launched from January 24 through February 16, was set out to community members who live or work in that area. Jacob explained the Survey Highlights. The top five most important areas this community would like emphasis are Heat mitigation, Enhanced streetscape, Canalside trails, Affordable houses, and Sustainability Measures. Open Space was the top one of land use category. They also had focus group meetings with non-profit, religious groups, business, and senior community, and presentations to boards and commission. The first planning draft will be presented around May or June. In late 2024, after additional input opportunities and revisions, a final planning proposal will be presented to the Development Review Commission and, subsequently, to the Tempe City Council for potential adoption.

Questions:

- Chair Swisher brought up the highlights presented from the survey, which demonstrated how this area is interested in the impacts of heat and shade. Also, have gone to this area quite a bit for the different commercial zones, it seems like it's a desolate place for pedestrians. Could we use our studies on heat folder ability, and point out where we should be potentially targeting some of those?
- How is the Forestry Masterplan might be integrated into this?
- How are you identifying Open space opportunities since it ties into to shade and access to greenspace cooler areas?
 - o Jacob explained that the general plan designated open space, therefore they are limited in that capacity. It can't be private property; it can only be government own property. This area might have two potential open spaces, both freeway detention basins. One is located on I-10, and the second one south of US-60, between Kyren and Harder. Ambika said because of the nature of this particular area, heat mitigation is very important to them. They will identify some locations, consult the heat map prepared by ASU and City of Tempe, to create some opportunities and draft policies that will be included in the plan. He also emphasized the importance of the quality, not just the quantity, of open space. He pointed out that Parks and Recreation Department has been working diligently on improving the current amenities and qualities open spaces, by adding more trees, providing more landscape, improving the linear parks and more. He mentioned the international green construction code adopted by the city in November will bring creative more opportunities in a nearby the future.

- Chair Swisher asked if there were any outcomes from the Transportation Commission presentation about meeting our targets for greenhouse gas reduction. Are there any plans for improving transportation infrastructure that might incentivize fewer cars on the road, or greater density, and transportation options?
 - Ambika said one of the feedback items from the focus group meetings, especially with the seniors, was the expansion of the circulators, particularly the Orbit Route. He said there were a lot of comments about the bike paths, and walkability along the canal sides, and opportunities to clean up walking trails.

- Commissioner Boyd asked since this area is the home of a few large companies, what role they have played, and what feedback did they give? And if renters are looking for more greenspace, open space, and they make 70% of the house units, how are the existing multifamily complexes being engaged in this process, since the international green construction code was just approved and will affect new developers only?
 - Jacob explained they had a business focus group and reached out to some of the largest businesses to be involved, which they were very receptive to it. They will continue with this outreach and will also reach out to management companies of apartment communities.

- Commissioner Swanson asked how the sustainability measures were defined in the survey?
 - Joshua explained the survey had 17 principles and six were sustainability related. Ambika said since sustainability is a very vague and broad term, they had gone into a lot more details in defining what they really mean. At the in-person meetings and presentations, they had the opportunity to educate and explain each of them and add self-explanatory sentences to the posters as well.

Agenda Item 6 – Growing Together – IRA Grant Funding Program

Maddie Mercer, Transportation & Sustainability Department, and Richard Adkins, Community Services Department, gave an overview of the Growing Together Program focusing on the Tree Stewardship & Workforce Development Program. The main goal is to expand Tempe's urban forest and canopy to mitigate extreme heat. The two areas they will be focusing on are the Northeast Tempe, and Southwest Tempe/Town of Guadalupe, which is one of our partners. A grant of \$1.6 million is allocated to build up programs over the next three years to build up some programs. The growing Together Goals are:

- Expand the urban forest and increase the tree canopy.
- Promote equitable urban cooling and resilience.
- Create workforce opportunities throughout the neighborhood.
- Focus on some green water opportunities.
- Work with the city to bring together some initiative and demonstrate how we are inter-connectivity of the departments.

The program will have three different components.

The first one will focus on Community Tree Stewards, a community store tree program. It is a cohort-based, on-the-job training program with 6 cohorts and 10 residents, totaling 60 participants per year. The participants will be paid \$20/hour with a total of 12 hours a month. They will be learning how to grow plants and care for trees in classrooms, nurseries, communities and afterward will share this knowledge with their neighbors.

Secondly, School Greening and Grounds Maintenance will focus on expanding the school districts' capacity to plant and maintain trees on the school campus. Since maintenance personnel within the school district is very limited, there will be three positions funded by the program to work directly with the district maintenance staff. It will include training, cross training, scholarship, and professional development opportunities.

Finally, the Food Forest Pilot Program will develop two community food forests, one at a public school, McClintock High School, and at city-owned property, Envision Center. The program will grow an amount of food, in an urban environment, creating professional opportunities and hands on experience to help serve their needs.

The project will kick off in April, by August they will start recruiting, and in September/October they will have the first of six cohort trainings. The training will probably last a month to a month and a half. Cohort training will be happening in the fall and early spring.

Questions:

- Chair Swisher asked if SRP and APS have been engaged or showing any interest in this program? How are they going to track down the Community Tree Stewart component?
 - o Richard reached out to SRP, and since they have their own community tree program, they have not talked about putting those two together yet. He foresees, over the next two years, SRP coming to different communities with us and maybe share the program. APS has a very small section on the west side of Tempe. They currently have a community program where they will put grants out up to \$10,000. They met last week and are working on some ideas. They also met recently with the city GIS group and are in a process to select and finalize all the needed data that will be plugged on to the map and will encourage individual homeowners to enter their information.

- Commissioner Swanson asked if there is any sort of engagement with HOAs?
 - o Richard said there is not a lot of HOA designated land in this area, but within the community outreach and steward program, they will address any HOAs, neighborhood communities and multifamily complexes.

- Vice Chair Jung said this is an incredible program. Ten years ago, when he first started getting into sustainability, they had community partnership, living wages, food access, education integration, but not all of them together. And it is beautiful to see you are thinking holistically. He asked if there any plans for the food forest, whatever isn't harvested by community members, can it be harvested by someone else? Is it pay or volunteer work?

- Maddie explained they allocated funding for a third-party group to maintain and harvest the food for a period, but they also want to encourage the entire community, build relationships, and after the grant period, they can still have a strong connection to the study. They are still evaluating ideas, want to work with the neighborhoods, before designating a place to donate the harvest.
- Chair Swisher inquired when having these parallel programs and plans in mind, how could they make sure those are working into the Resilient Tempe Masterplan? And when should they expect to hear about the progress of the program?
 - Brianne, Transportation & Sustainability Department, mentioned that Richard has been part of the resilient masterplan process since there is an urban forestry update in the masterplan effort. Tomorrow, there will be a group meeting to look at the codes and standards. After they have narrowed down the codes and standard prioritization list, they can come back to give the Commission an update.
- Commissioner Paulat asked for how long is the funding secure, and after the three years, how would they integrate this group into anything else beyond the program?
 - Maddie explained they are putting a few proposals together to provide options to different pathways versus scholarship, by offering additional training. Once people go through this program, they would have a base level knowledge, where they can pursue a smart skype certification, become a master gardener, or a certified arbor among other options. Secondly, they are looking into creating pathways to city jobs by training them in skills they would need to qualify for it. Lastly, they are also considering a partnership with ASU to focus on entrepreneurship, and building a new enterprise focused on infrastructure maintenance where this group would have knowledge.

Agenda Item 7 – Sustainability and Resilience Office Budget

Brianne Fisher, Transportation and Sustainability, added a few budget weeks in the Commission calendar to give them opportunities to be involved. She provided an update and overview of this year's budget. Since a legislative bill was approved last year, cities are no longer allowed to collect rental taxes. Tempe is impacted the most of any other city in Arizona since we it is a residential rental city. This will reduce the city of Tempe revenue by \$21 million. The main impact will be on the general fund, which finances our programs, and the Transit fund.

Questions:

- Chair Swisher asked what would happen with the transit fund if prop 479 doesn't pass the ballots in November?
 - Tom said the budget office and transit staff would get together, look into several years to adjust our spending, since we are sitting on a pretty sizable fund balance. There are also a few other options down the road where Council could also recommend a transit tax increase in order to absorb the cost.

- Chair Swisher asked if we could measure the impact of the climate action plan without any new supplementals?
 - o Brianne said since this is coming at a time where there is a historic investment at the federal level, and you seeing our division going after funding aggressively, we were able to secure some access to a few federal grants. We have also grown our capacity, we are partnering with staff from other departments, and now paired up with the transportation division and becoming a larger department. At this time, the loss of the supplemental is not a major concern for meeting our climate action goals.

- Chair Swisher raised a question to Eric and the team, how the Budget Office will look to measure the impact of not spending on certain investments having to do with Community Resiliency through heat mitigation?
 - o Eric Iwersen, Transportation and Sustainability Director, mentioned if Prop 479 passes, higher performing public transit routes will receive more money, and our community meets this criterion. There is also a transportation study looking into the transit tax, which they will talk about in the next meeting, and the Commission will have a chance to weigh in on it.

- Commissioner Burke mentioned the Governor announced the creation of the country's first state level heat officer, and asked how will this impact our goal and keep heat mitigation, and would we have opportunities coming from this?
 - o Brianne said there are a lot of good things in there that's been relying on municipal staff perspective and expertise. They have added capacity, especially looking for federal grants.

Agenda Item 8 – Sustainability and Resilience Commission Dates of Interest Calendar

Eric brought up the Commission calendar of events and highlighted a couple events that will be happening before next month's meeting. They talked about today's presentation from Maddie and Richard at the next Sustainability and Economic Vitality Council Committee.

Conversation about upcoming presentations.

Agenda Item 9 – Sustainability and Resilience Updates and Housekeeping

Eric Iwersen gave an update about the city reorganization, and as of two weeks ago, Sustainability Office officially partnered with the Transportation Division becoming now a division under Transportation and Sustainability Department. This is the evidence of our growing program and the impact they are having throughout the community. It is an alignment of the community and Council priorities, giving us opportunities for partner projects like streetscapes, pathways and more.

Agenda Item 10 – Future Agenda Item

Commissioner Burke requested:

Follow-up on the golf courses updates

IGCC process
Apache Central Updates

Commissioner Burke motions to adjourn the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

Motion: Commissioner Barbie Burke

Second: Commissioner Winburn

Decision: Approved 9-0

The meeting was adjourned at 6:30pm.

Prepared by: Carla Sidi

Reviewed by: