

**GREENSBORO COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY COUNCIL**  
**greensboro-nc.gov/csc**  
**Minutes, Regular Meeting**

4pm, Monday, January 10, 2022  
Virtual Meeting, using the Zoom videoconferencing tool

**CSC Members Present:**

Dr. Vicki Foust, Chair	Jacques Pierre, Vice Chair	Veda Howell
Nicole Gaines	Dr. Marcia Hale	Taylor Jones-Curtis

**Staff and Others Present:**

Will Yearns, CSC Advisor	Doug Bender, Human Rights Commission
Marikay Abuzuaiteer, City Council	Hugh Holston, City Council
Dr. Goldie Wells, City Council	Jim Young, CoG Libraries
Chris Marriott, CoG Field Operations	Lorien Deaton, CoG Field Operations
Richard Lovett, CoG Field Operations	Sergey Kobelev, CoG Engineering & Inspections
Elizabeth Link, CoG Planning	Judson Clinton, CoG Planning
Jeff Sovich, CoG Planning	Sean MacInness, UNCG Sustainability Office
Elizabeth Bowen, NC Clean Energy Technology Center	Laura Oxner, A Simple Gesture / RePurpose Food Recovery
Skip Yeakel, GIA Link, Inc.	Margaret Rowlett, Solar Power Now Coalition
Raleigh Stout, resident	

**1. Chair Greeting / Welcome Visitors**

Chair Foust called the meeting to order at 4:08 pm and welcomed visitors and city staff in attendance.

**2. SolSmart Designation Process**

Since a quorum had not yet been established, Chair Foust adjusted the order of the agenda to hear this informational item next. Jeff Sovich noted that the City was receiving technical assistance from staff at the NC Clean Energy Technology Center (aka NC CleanTech) to go through the process of becoming designated in the SolSmart program. Chair Foust clarified that SolSmart is an initiative developed by the US Department of Energy, which also provides funding so that organizations such as NC CleanTech can offer technical assistance. Mr. Sovich explained that NC CleanTech staff, led by David Sarkisian, had been working with the Planning Department carry out an initial assessment of Greensboro's level of support for and facilitation of solar PV development. The assessment found that with just a few actions, Greensboro would be able to achieve the Bronze or possibly Silver level designation. With additional steps, which may take more time to complete, Greensboro may be able to reach the Gold level designation. The technical assistance grant allows NC CleanTech to work with us on this process only through the end of February, at which point all of the documentation materials must be submitted for verification.

Liz Bowen of NC CleanTech congratulated the City of Greensboro for taking the first steps toward SolSmart designation. She stated that NC CleanTech staff had completed an initial review of publicly available documents related to Greensboro's support for solar development, and found that the City has already done a lot of work in this regard. She noted that based on this review and feedback from Greensboro, the team is developing an array of the most streamlined ways of reaching designation. There are a variety of options, and we're trying to identify the paths that will best reflect Greensboro's priorities. She added that if the CSC has further questions they are welcome to contact her. Jeff Sovich noted that this item is being presented today for information only; no CSC action is requested. Chair Foust thanked Liz Bowen for all the work by NC CleanTech, and for attending today's meeting.

### **3. Approval of November 8, 2021 CSC Meeting Minutes**

Since the CSC had attained a quorum, Chair Foust resumed the order of the agenda items as published. She called for a motion for approval of the minutes of the last CSC meeting. Nicole Gaines moved to approve the minutes of the November 8, 2021 meeting, as presented. The motion was seconded by Dr. Hale. The CSC approved the motion unanimously.

### **4. Approval of 2022 CSC Meeting Calendar**

Dr. Hale moved to approve the calendar of CSC meetings for 2022. Nicole Gaines seconded the motion. The CSC approved the motion unanimously.

Chair Foust recognized City Council Member Hugh Holston. Mr. Holston thanked the Chair for the invitation to attend the meeting as a visitor, and the opportunity to address the CSC. He stated that he was recently appointed to the City Council to fill a vacancy. He has worked with some CSC members previously in other capacities. Regarding the SolSmart designation process, he asked whether there was a significantly greater effort involved in reaching the Gold or Silver levels, compared with the Bronze level, and whether the higher designation levels could be reached in the near term, or if that would require action over a longer timeframe. Mr. Sovich stated that the initial review from NC CleanTech identified, for each requirement, whether there was a) clear evidence that Greensboro has met the requirement, or b) evidence suggesting that the City may have met the requirement, or c) no evidence available. The review found that the City met enough requirements to score at least 45 points in the Permitting & Inspections category, in which 20 points are needed to reach Bronze. In the Planning & Zoning category, however, the City is currently at 0 points, out of the 20 needed to reach Bronze. In the remaining optional categories, the City met requirements for 75 points of the 20 needed for Bronze. There are several relatively quick and easy steps we should be able to take to gain those 20 points in the Planning & Zoning category to reach Bronze. And the Silver level involves just a few additional steps, that are also fairly quick and easy. Making the jump from Silver to Gold however, would involve making some text amendments to the Land Development Ordinance, which would be somewhat more complex and time-consuming. Mr. Holston expressed his thanks for the information. Chair Foust thanked Mr. Holston for attending the meeting and noted that there appears to be adequate opportunity to meet the additional requirements and reach a higher designation level.

Mr. Holston noted that he was aware that there are several vacancies on the CSC and that he and other members of the City Council are working on making appointments to fill those vacancies as soon as possible.

## **5. Proposed Lights-Out Initiative**

Chair Foust stated that the Lights Out for Bird Protection proclamation has been a joint effort between the City and the local chapter of the Audubon Society. Mr. Sovich, noted that the proposal was inspired by a similar recent initiative by the City of Raleigh, and that several dozen cities have enacted Lights Out programs. The Lights Out for Bird Protection program aims to reduce the deaths of migratory birds during peak migration seasons, but asking the owners, managers, and tenants of large multi-story buildings to voluntarily dim, screen, or turn off unnecessary interior and exterior lighting during the hours of 11pm to 6am, from March 15 to May 31, and from September 10 to November 30. Estimates by the Audubon Society indicate that as many as 1 billion bird deaths in the US per year are the result of collisions with window glass. Intense light on and inside buildings can cause birds to collide with windows or walls, or cause them to circle in confusion, leaving them too weak to complete their migration.

Mr. Sovich added that the City's ongoing efforts to reduce its own energy use and increase energy efficiency mean that its facilities are already implementing the provisions of the Lights Out program year-round. The Audubon Society will be contacting the owners and tenants of large buildings to ask for their participation in the Lights Out program. Marcia Hale asked if there were any potential down sides to this proposal. Mr. Sovich stated that the staff team who worked to develop the proposal examined the issue thoroughly and were not able to identify any cause for concern. The program would be seeking voluntary participation and would involve outreach efforts to raise awareness of the need to protect migratory birds by reducing excess lighting.

Margaret Rowlett asked how the City would be publicizing this program. Mr. Sovich stated that the City's Communications department is developing marketing materials that will be used in announcing the program on the City's website, on its social media accounts, and through a traditional news release. And of course the announcement will also be sent out to the CSC email distribution list. The proclamation itself is intended to be read aloud by Mayor Vaughan at a public ceremony, similar to the one that was held for the native plants proclamation. Ms Rowlett also asked if the Lights Out timeframes would overlap with times when there would be baseball games with the stadium lights on. Elizabeth Link noted that because the program focuses on the 11pm to 6am period, there is not likely to be significant overlap with baseball games. Ms Rowlett also asked if there would be follow-up to track the level of participation and whether the program is achieving results. Chair Foust indicated that this aspect is something that the Audubon Society members would be taking the lead on. She also thanked the City staff team that developed the proclamation, including Elizabeth Link, Sergey Kobelev, Michael Romano, Debby Davis, and Interim City Manager Chris Wilson.

Marcia Hale moved to recommend in favor of the Lights Out proclamation. Nicole Gaines seconded the motion. The CSC voted unanimously to recommend in favor of the proclamation.

## **6. Election of CSC Officers**

Chair Foust stated that each year, the CSC elects a Chair and Vice Chair from among its members. She then called for nominations for the position of Chair. Nicole Gaines asked if members of the public could make nominations. Chair Foust stated that only current CSC members can make nominations. Nicole Gaines asked whether Chair Foust's term is ending and if the elections needed to be held during this meeting. Chair Foust stated that it was discussed during the CSC's informal work session in December, that officer elections would be on the agenda in January. The CSC Bylaws state that "Elections shall occur at

the first meeting of each calendar year, or as required to fill a vacancy.” She added that the CSC previously voted to extend her term as Chair, in order to provide additional time for completion of the Strategic Energy Plan. Instead of proceeding with officer elections during today’s meeting, the CSC could vote to further extend her term or to postpone elections to a future meeting.

Ms Gaines stated that Chair Foust has provided excellent leadership. She noted that conditions are changing and the CSC is likely to play an increasingly prominent role in Greensboro. City Council Member Marikay Abuzuaiter has given the CSC excellent representation, the CSC is being heard. She urged interested attendees to submit an interest form, in order to be considered for appointment to fill the current vacancies on the CSC.

Dr. Hale noted that Ms Jones-Curtis previously stated she might be willing to serve in a Co-Chair role. Chair Foust stated that establishing a Co-Chair option would involve adopting an amendment to the CSC bylaws.

Ms Gaines stated she was concerned about the current number of vacancies on the CSC and recommended that the election of officers be postponed. This would provide time for some of the vacancies to be filled, and create additional opportunities for others to be nominated for the Chair and Vice Chair positions.

Veda Howell asked whether Chair Foust could continue to lead the CSC if the officer elections are postponed. Chair Foust stated that she didn’t know, since this situation had not arisen before. She added that regardless of when the CSC elects a new officers, she felt it was important that the Chair position be held by someone with sufficient experience in serving on the CSC. Will Yearns agreed, that an experienced CSC member should hold the Chair position. He also recommended that if the CSC wants to postpone officer elections to the March meeting, the provision in the bylaws to extend officers’ terms should be used today. He clarified that creating a new Co-Chair position would simply require a vote by the CSC, rather than an amendment to the Bylaws.

Chair Foust stated that she did not know whether Vice Chair Pierre would be interested in serving in the Chair position, but that his previous term as Vice Chair may prevent him from being elected. Jeff Sovich noted that the term limits for CSC officer positions only apply to consecutive terms, so this would not affect Mr. Pierre’s situation. Ms Gaines stated that she was uncomfortable voting to elect new officers until Mr. Pierre was present, so that at least all of the current CSC members could vote. She moved to suspend the term limit on officer positions, and postpone elections until the March 14 CSC meeting. Veda Howell seconded the motion.

Dr. Hale noted that the desire to have an experienced CSC member elected to the Chair position seemed to be unanimous, and asked what additional options, among experienced CSC members, would become available by postponing elections until March, so that Mr. Pierre could vote. Dr. Hale asked if anyone else was interested in the Vice Chair or Chair positions? Ms Gaines said she would be interested but did not want to nominate herself. Ms Jones-Curtis nominated Ms Gaines for the position of Chair. Ms Gaines nominated Ms Jones-Curtis to serve as Vice Chair.

Mr. Pierre arrived in the meeting at 5:00 pm. He stated that he was not interested in continuing in the position of Vice Chair. With Mr. Pierre now present, Dr. Hale noted that since Dr. Foust had already given more service than was expected of her, and since Ms

Gaines and Ms Jones-Curtis are interested in serving as Chair and Vice Chair, respectively, it seemed that the obstacles to completing the officer elections had been cleared.

Dr. Foust called for any further nominations for 2022 CSC officer positions. There being none, she asked the CSC to vote on the nomination of Nicole Gaines as Chair. The CSC voted unanimously to elect Ms Gaines as Chair. She then asked the CSC to vote on the nomination of Taylor Jones-Curtis as Vice Chair. The CSC voted unanimously to elect Ms Jones-Curtis as Vice Chair.

## **7. Break (10 Minutes)**

The CSC adjourned for a brief break at 5:06 pm and reconvened at 5:16 pm.

## **8. 2022 CSC Focus Areas Presentation – “Trees”**

Chair Foust introduced City Arborist Judson Clinton, of the Planning Department. Mr. Clinton stated that Greensboro’s urban forest is so large that it could have its own TV channel with series after series about all the possible topics to discuss. But today his presentation would address ways of reaching the City’s tree canopy goals and would be pretty interactive.

Greensboro has a total land area of over 134 square miles or 85,952 acres. Our tree canopy coverage has been reduced to under 40% and continues to decline. As a broad goal, we aim to maintain tree canopy coverage of approximately 50%. So what can we do to reverse the trend of declining canopy? To gain just 1% more canopy would require planting 859.52 acres of trees, and waiting for them to reach maturity.

This raises other questions. What can be done to improve tree the quality and health of our remaining tree canopy? What land is available for tree planting? How much maintenance is involved with existing canopy vs afforestation and establishment of new trees? What areas of the City should be the priorities for canopy enhancement or expansion efforts? What about minority and low-income areas of town?

- It would be helpful to create thresholds which define the prioritized areas. Departments involved in this action step would be Parks & Recreation, Planning, and Neighborhood Development.
- It will be important to collaborate with residents in prioritizing areas for tree planting projects.
- A key point to consider is whether the residents and businesses in these areas want trees, and are able to provide the maintenance needed to ensure the trees survive and remain healthy, especially during the critical first 2 years in order for the trees to become established.
- A transparent and equitable process would be needed to bring stakeholders in these areas together, to identify community leaders, build shared interests, and preserve heritage narratives.
- Creating a successful tree canopy program would need to include incentives and other resources so that trees receive needed maintenance. Such a program could provide an opportunity for students to complete service learning requirements, and community volunteers to build neighborhood unity. A warranty on planted trees and follow-up by the City may also be needed in order for the program to succeed.

Alternative approaches could promote afforestation through a City wide planting program. In this model, the Parks & Recreation Department and Greensboro Beautiful, Inc. could assist with the distribution of trees on the condition of participating to help plant them.

- Neighborhood garden plots could be used to grow native tree seedlings which could later be planted elsewhere in the corresponding neighborhoods.
- The NC Forest Service offers a roughly \$15k grant on an annual cycle, each March. With interest and support, we could develop a methodology to install native tree nurseries in cemeteries, under transmission lines, in neighborhood gardens, etc. Maintenance of these nurseries would be a key issue.

Among the issues limiting success of the City's current tree planting projects are:

- Plant availability is limited by the maximum number of trees that can be successfully each season on city property.
- Lack of vested interest among neighborhoods due to history tree damage resulting from storms, maintenance.
- Establishment of plants requires resources such as water, keeping weeds, and competing vegetation away, and protecting from damage.
- Ongoing loss of existing tree canopy.
- Setting appropriate canopy goals that balance neighborhood perspectives with the needs of the City and beyond.

Mr. Clinton stated that trees help address a wide array of urban issues: trees absorb CO<sub>2</sub>, the most common greenhouse gas, from the atmosphere to make chlorophyll and release oxygen. A healthy, abundant tree canopy helps counteract the urban heat island effect produced by rooftops and paved surfaces. And the shade produced by trees helps reduce water and energy consumption, and prolongs pavement life. Just being within sight of trees on a regular basis can have a dramatic effect on both physical and psychological health. Everyone can benefit equally from trees, but not everyone wants trees, or has the capacity to care for trees or is willing to accept the risks involved with having trees nearby. The City will need to do some outreach about the benefits of trees, as well as some research to understand who wants trees, and how to offer trees to everyone but minimize the burdens imposed on vulnerable residents by trees.

Chair Foust thanked Mr. Clinton for his informative presentation and stated that the CSC was eager to continue collaborating with him and other City staff on this issue in the near future. She noted that there are abundant opportunities for community service associated with tree planting and maintenance efforts, and thanked Richard Lovett of the Field Operations Department for his suggestion of including Scouts as a source of volunteer hours to help with tree planting activities.

## **9. Acknowledgement of Absences**

None.

## 10. Incidentals and Announcements

- **Items from Chair** – Chair Foust noted that the City is hiring for a Chief Sustainability Officer, which is something the CSC has wanted and has been advocating for, for a long time. She thanked everyone who was involved in the research, discussion, and other work that went into preparing the formal CSC recommendation to the City Council on this item. She also thanked City Council Member Marikay Abuzuaiter for the role she played in promoting the creation of this position. These are exciting times for Greensboro!

She noted that the recent re-drawing of City Council district boundaries has resulted in one CSC member residing in a different district, while another CSC member has moved to a new address in a different City Council district. The CSC has 3 vacant seats, which were previously appointed from City Council District 3, District 5, and At-Large. However, these changes may affect which City Council district the current CSC vacancies are appointed from. Efforts are underway to get these issues resolved and the vacancies filled. Finally, there is a CSC member whose current term was scheduled to end on December 31, 2021, who is seeking re-appointment.

She stated that a final draft of the Strategic Energy Plan is very near to completion and would hopefully be available for public review soon.

- **Items from Vice-Chair** – None.
- **Items from CSC Members** – Dr. Hale, Ms Howell, and Council Member Abuzuaiter thanked Chair Foust for her leadership, dedication, and exceptional work in developing the Strategic Energy Plan and shepherding it through the long process which is now nearly finished.
- **Items from Public** –None.
- **Items from Staff** – None.

**11. Adjournment** - Chair Foust adjourned the meeting at 6:02 pm.