

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

4pm, Monday, August 14, 2023
Hybrid Meeting Format:

Transportation Conference Room, 3rd Floor (In Person)
Melvin Municipal Office Building
West Washington Street

Using the Microsoft Teams videoconferencing tool (Virtual)

CSC Members Present:

Nicole Gaines, Chair	Eric Ireland, Vice Chair	Jerry Leimenstoll
Jailah White	Dr. Vicki Foust	Jacques Pierre
Conor Baker		

Staff and Others Present:

Marikay Abuzuaite, City Council	Will Yearns, CSC Advisor
Dr. S. Shree Dorestant, Chief Sustainability Officer	Sergey Kobelev, CoG OSR
Michelle Gill-Moffatt, CoG OSR	Jeff Sovich, CoG OSR
Richard Lovett, CoG OSR	Hank Henning, Duke Energy
Ellen Van Velsor, Citizens Climate Lobby	Angie Kenny, Sustainable Furnishings Council
Etsuko Kinefuchi, UNCG Sustainability	Raleigh Stout, Resident
Steve Randall, Resident	

1. Chair Greeting / Welcome Visitors

Chair Gaines called the meeting to order at 4:05 pm and welcomed City Council Member Marikay Abuzuaite, visitors, and city staff in attendance.

2. Approval of April 10, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Chair Gaines invited the CSC to discuss the draft minutes of the June 12, 2023 CSC meeting. There being no comments on the minutes, Chair Gaines called for a motion to approve the minutes, as presented. Vice Chair Ireland moved the item, which was seconded by Dr. Foust. The CSC voted to approve the motion unanimously.

3. Strategic Energy Plan Implementation & Annual Reporting

Chair Gaines stated that the CSC held a retreat on Saturday, July 29 at the Kathleen Clay Edwards Library, in order to discuss upcoming preparation of the first annual progress report on implementation of the Strategic Energy Plan. The retreat was well attended by the CSC and community members, and the discussion was productive. Dr. Dorestant provided a summary of implementation actions that had been completed or were in progress at that time.

Mr. Leimenstoll stated that he was grateful for the strong turnout by community members who contributed freely to the discussion. He also stated that the staff members who were present did an excellent job of responding to the questions and comments raised.

Dr. Dorestant noted that there were many great comments made and it was very interesting to hear the questions and concerns about the SEP, and about sustainability generally, mentioned by stakeholders. Chair Gaines thanked City staff who attended and provided excellent responses and information during the discussion, and also thanked Dr. Dorestant for the refreshments.

Dr. Foust, who was not able to attend the retreat, asked what was discussed. Mr. Sovich noted that Dr. Dorestant's summary presentation was a review of the SEP's 8 organization-wide Recommendations and the Strategies sub-ordinate to each Recommendation. The discussion did not delve into department-level goals.

Chair Gaines recognized Mr. Yeakel, who noted that during the Retreat meeting, he had raised the issue of small modular nuclear reactors (SMRs). Since that time, he has learned that in its long-term planning for replacement of the Belews Creek Station power plant, Duke Energy has added SMR as a possible consideration. Hank Henning of Duke Energy noted that Duke recently released its Carbon Plan, and will be issuing a report on recommendations, but he was not at liberty to discuss any details. Mr. Kobelev stated that he recently had an opportunity at the State Energy Conference to meet representatives of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, who pointed out that there is a growing number of communities who have expressed support for deployment of SMRs to replace fossil fuel burning power stations. He suggested that if the CSC develops some recommendations, and with the City Council's approval, he could get Greensboro added to that list.

Chair Gaines noted that the original intent of the Retreat was to include a review of the SEP Evaluation Plan on page 71, which lists the 8 Recommendations, and describes Evaluations Methods for each Recommendation. Because of the number of stakeholders in attendance and the amount of discussion generated, especially on Recommendation 6 related to tree canopy, there was not enough time for the CSC to reach this point in the Retreat agenda. Stakeholders expressed significant concern about ongoing loss of tree canopy due to development and clear-cutting. She added that the most recent tree canopy inventory was conducted in 2009, so the time has come for an updated study. City Arborist Judson Clinton and Dr. Dorestant have been developing partnerships in the community, including with Dr. Shaleen Miller at UNCG, that will be valuable in facilitating that update. Dr. Miller is developing curriculum for a class that will teach students how to conduct a tree inventory.

She stated that although the full agenda was not covered, the discussion and connection with stakeholders was a valuable outcome. It was also very helpful to receive the update regarding internal transfers of 10 City staff from several departments into the Office of Sustainability & Resilience, and to learn that the OSR team is already working on coordinating throughout the organization. But in general, the questions and concerns raised by stakeholders, were centered around a desire to understand what work was being done to implement the SEP and whether that was moving in the right direction.

Vice Chair Ireland noted that he is interested in learning whether the OSR is moving forward with developing the policy recommendations that are outlined in the SEP and whether a policy development has been established. Dr. Dorestant responded that during the first year, the Office of Sustainability & Resilience was focused primarily on getting the SEP adopted and on establishing working relationships with staff in various other departments. Now that OSR has been expanded to a team of 11, they are much better equipped to begin working on specific tasks and strategies identified in the SEP, such as

developing formal policies. OSR is also organizing an Internal Sustainability Committee, comprised of staff representatives from all departments, that will meet on a regular basis to share information, knowledge, and expertise about sustainability issues, and collaborate on efforts such as developing recommended policies. In addition to the annual progress report on implementation of the SEP, OSR will need to prepare an annual report on the overall activities, outcomes, and metrics of its work throughout out the year. As OSR develops these reports, we will be bringing information and drafts to the CSC for review and feedback.

Chair Gaines responded that at the CSC level and at the staff level, it appears that the City is doing what it has said it would do, and what it needs to do, in order to implement the SEP and advance sustainability. The CSC is one of Greensboro's most outward-facing appointed boards, and as such, will have an increasingly important role as public engagement on sustainability issues is expanded and amplified. She noted that the level of transparency and accessibility provided by offering a Zoom option for attending CSC meetings, and by livestreaming the meetings on Facebook, sets a strong model for the City's other boards and commissions. Stakeholders will want to stay informed about whether the City is maintaining its momentum towards the goal of 100% renewable energy, and CSC meetings will be a key way for them to stay informed about progress.

City Council Member Abuzuaiter stated that on the topic of public engagement in and awareness about progress toward sustainability goals, the City Council would be considering adoption of proposed changes to the City's yard waste ordinance during its meeting the following evening, Tuesday, August 15. The proposal would phase out the curbside collection of loose leaves in the fall, prohibit the use of plastic bags for yard waste, issue all residential customers a new yard waste bin, and require that all yard waste be disposed of either in the bin, or in compostable paper bags. So far the Council has received a significant volume of emails and phone calls from residents opposed, but very few in favor of these changes. She encouraged CSC members and attendees to contact the City Council expressing their support for the proposal as soon as possible, as the changes will be highly beneficial with regard to cost, efficiency, safety, and sustainability. The changes would be implemented starting in the Spring, after this year's loose leaf collection period has been completed. Mr. Sovich noted that interested individuals can email all City Council members at once, by filling out a single form at: <https://www.greensboro-nc.gov/government/city-council/e-mail-city-council>.

4. Office of Sustainability & Resilience - Summary of Accomplishments

Dr. Dorestant reviewed accomplishments and highlights from the first year of the Office of Sustainability & Resilience, which included:

- Creation of the office on June 1, 2022;
- Adoption of the Strategic Energy Plan on December 20, 2022;
- Submitting numerous applications for grant funding from the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bi-Partisan Infrastructure Law (announcement of awards should begin soon);
- Facilitating an Arbor Day tree planting event on March 17 at Dudley High School;
- Co-hosting a food waste solutions symposium on March 22 at the NCA&T Farm Pavilion;
- Co-hosting the Greensboro Earth Day celebration and the first annual LiveGreen Awards ceremony on Saturday, April 22 at the Farmers Curb Market;
- Formation of an Internal Sustainability Committee;
- Being selected as part of the Clean Energy to Communities cohort led by the US Department of Energy;

- Being approved to host an Americorps volunteer who will assist with climate change and resiliency work; and
- Establishing collaborations with professors at UNCG and Bennett College.

Chair Gaines thanked Dr. Dorestant for her excellent leadership and the long list of year one accomplishments by the Office of Sustainability & Resilience. She added that she looks forward to even more great work in the years ahead.

5. Status of Candidates for CSC At-Large Vacancy

Chair Gaines noted that there is currently a vacant at-large seat on the CSC, which resulted when Dr. Marcia Hale resigned earlier this year. Council Member Abuzuaiter noted that it will be Mayor Vaughan's turn to select an appointee to fill this vacancy, and that it will be important to try to balance representation among the 5 City Council Districts. Currently 3 CSC member reside in District 3, 2 reside in District 1, and only 1 each reside in Districts 2, 4, and 5. She encouraged any interested individuals, who reside within Greensboro city limits, to apply for consideration using the online interest form at: <https://form.jotform.com/202574701191046>

6. Updates from CSC Members

Mr. Baker noted that while in downtown over the weekend, he saw the new Hopper Trolley in operation, but unfortunately it was stuck in traffic on Elm Street. There were only a few people riding at that time, since transit is really only effective if it can move freely, and in order for it to move, we need to get cars out of the way. He asked if ridership numbers from the first month of operation are available. Council Member Abuzuaiter stated that ridership figures from the first week of operation indicated that the service was very heavily used initially. She noted that when she rode the Hopper on Saturday, the level of ridership was more moderate. Mr. Baker stated that he would like to see more ridership data as the service continues, and would like the City to consider some way to prohibit or reduce auto traffic on Elm Street on the weekends. This would make the downtown more safe and walkable and would really enhance the atmosphere for people shopping, dining, etc.

Etsuko Kinefuchi of UNCG noted that in her involvement with the local chapter of Beyond Plastics, she is hoping to see systemic change happen in Greensboro related to single use plastics. She and other members have been talking with local restaurant owners to convince them to skip providing plastic utensils, containers, and straws by default, and only provide them if requested by the customer. Some have been very receptive and others have been reluctant. These things are not necessary every time, and people can learn new practices. Beyond Plastics would like to see some support from the City and the CSC on this front, and we would also like to know what we can do to help make that happen – we have volunteers who will do it. Chair Gaines stated that this would be an excellent direction for OSR's new Education and Outreach Specialist, Michelle Gill-Moffat to pursue, because there is definitely a lot of awareness work to be done. Plastics have become ubiquitous in our culture and systemic change is hard.

7. Acknowledgement of Absences

Chair Gaines acknowledged the Authorized Absence of Mr. Randall.

8. Incidentals and Announcements

- **Items from Chair** – The September CSC Informal Work Session will include a knowledge networking presentation from representatives of the Haw River Assembly about their work with the “Trash Trap” devices that remove trash from the water way, which is a tributary to Buffalo Creek. The Water Resources Department will probably want to know about this work.
- **Items from Vice-Chair** – None.
- **Items from CSC Members** – Mr. Leimenstoll noted that the Tree Canopy Subcommittee met last week with representatives of a tree service company from Raleigh called Leaf & Limb. They will be meeting again this week to put together a proposal to bring forward to the CSC.
- **Items from Public** – None.
- **Items from Chief Sustainability Officer / City Staff** – None.

9. **Adjournment** - Chair Gaines adjourned the meeting at 5:47 pm.