

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

4pm, Monday, October 9, 2023
Hybrid Meeting Format:

Plaza Level Conference Room (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
Conor Baker	Dr. Vicki Foust	Jacques Pierre

Staff and Others Present:

Marikay Abuzuaiter, City Council	Will Yearns, CSC Advisor
Dr. S. Shree Dorestant, Chief Sustainability Officer	Jeff Sovich, CoG OSR
Sergey Kobelev, CoG OSR	Sarah Montgomery, CoG OSR
Michelle Gill-Moffatt, CoG OSR	Ethan Savino, CoG OSR
Richard Lovett, CoG OSR	Judson Clinton, CoG Planning
Chris Marriott, CoG Field Operations	Johnette Walser, 7 Directions of Service
Shaleen Miller, UNCG	Kasey Kinsella, 7 Directions of Service
Sean MacInnes, UNCG	Jim Josephson, Johnson Controls, Inc.
Ellen Van Velsor, Citizens Climate Lobby	Morgan Glover, 7 Directions of Service
Etsuko Kinefuchi, UNCG Sustainability	Raleigh Stout, Resident
Tim Ramsey, WGHP	Skip Yeakel, Resident
Laura Oxner, A Simple Gesture / RePurpose Food Recovery	

1. Chair Greeting / Welcome Visitors

Chair Gaines called the meeting to order at 4:02 pm and welcomed City Council Member Marikay Abuzuaiter, visitors, and city staff in attendance.

2. Approval of August 14, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Chair Gaines invited the CSC to discuss the draft minutes of the August 14, 2023 CSC meeting. There being no comments on the minutes, Chair Gaines called for a motion to approve the minutes, as presented. Mr. Leimenstoll moved the item, which was seconded by Vice Chair Ireland. The CSC voted to approve the motion unanimously.

3. Welcome All Members of the New OSR

Chair Gaines asked for members of the newly expanded [Office of Sustainability & Resilience](#) present to introduce themselves. Energy Management Engineer Sergey Kobelev, Sustainability Analyst Michelle Gill-Moffat, Environmental Compliance Support Manager Richard Lovett, Environmental Compliance Specialist Sarah Montgomery, Sustainability Intern Ethan Savino, Urban Sustainability Planner Jeff Sovich, and Chief

Sustainability Officer Dr. S. Shree Dorestant introduced themselves in turn. Chair Gaines welcomed them to their new roles in OSR, stating she and the rest of the CSC looked forward to working with them more in upcoming months.

4. OSR Urban & Community Forestry Grant Awarded by USDA

Dr. Dorestant stated that OSR was recently notified that its application to the US Department of Agriculture's [Urban & Community Forestry](#) competitive grant program was selected for \$825,000 in funding. The 5 year project will include conducting a comprehensive inventory of Greensboro's tree canopy, analyzing changes in the canopy since the previous inventory, working with disadvantaged communities to expand the tree canopy, and engaging residents in urban forestry planning and management. The project will also include education and outreach efforts, and workforce development opportunities. This project will help to implement a goal from the Strategic Energy Plan, calling for no net loss of tree canopy by 2040. She noted that the formal funding agreement was in progress, and that OSR would receive the funds according to the terms outlined therein. OSR will share more information about this exciting project as it becomes available.

Mr. Leimenstoll asked Dr. Dorestant to elaborate on how disadvantaged communities figure into this grant project. Dr. Dorestant stated that the federal Justice40 initiative requires that 40% of the benefits of certain federal funding sources flow to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized, underserved, and overburdened by pollution. The Justice40 requirements apply to the programs funded by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), and the American Recovery Plan (ARP). Although the full details of how this requirement will be implemented have not yet been published, several web-based mapping tools have been provided by federal agencies (such as EPA's Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool, aka CEJST), which local governments can use to identify disadvantaged communities and focus the activities of projects funded through these sources, in order to attain the 40% benefit threshold.

Chair Gaines stated that in light of the fact that the SEP was adopted less than one year ago, she is very excited about the progress represented by this remarkable grant award, and grateful to Dr. Dorestant for her efforts in pursuing this funding opportunity.

5. Scheduling 2024 City Earth Day Celebration and LiveGreen Awards

Ms Gill-Moffat stated that OSR will be responsible for planning and coordinating Greensboro's [2024 Earth Day Celebration](#), which has been scheduled for 1 to 4pm, on Saturday, April 20, at Keeley Park. The event will be presented in collaboration with the Water Resources Department, the Parks & Recreation Department, the Libraries Department, and others. The event will include informational displays, hands-on activities, mini-training sessions, food trucks, and the 2nd annual [LiveGreen Awards](#) ceremony. All interested parties are encouraged to save the date and spread the word. More information will be announced soon, including an online form for reserving exhibitor space. There will not be a fee for exhibitors, however no retail sales will be permitted at the event other than the arranged food trucks.

6. NCA&TSU "Climate Resiliency Center (CRC)" Grant Awarded by US DOE

Dr. Dorestant stated that a multi-university consortium, including a team from NC A&T State University led by Dr. Solomon Bililign was recently awarded a grant of \$850,000 by the US Department of Energy. The grant will fund development of a "[Climate Resiliency Center](#)" at NCA&T, which will study the links between the effects of changing climate on

air quality and urban heat and the subsequent undue burden this phenomenon places on marginalized communities in major cities across NC, including Greensboro, Winston-Salem, and Charlotte. OSR will collaborate with Dr. Bililign's team in the public education and outreach component of the project. This project dovetails closely with OSR's Urban and Community Forestry Grant project, with regard to analyzing and addressing urban heat island effect and environmental justice in disadvantaged communities. OSR will assist with creating an email distribution list and organizing focus groups that will help inform the project's research and outreach. Dr. Bililign, along with Dr. George Stone will be available to present a more detailed overview of the project during an upcoming CSC meeting.

7. Presentation on the Rights of Nature

Dr. Etsuko Kinefuchi of UNCG introduced herself and her colleagues, Kasey Kinsella and Morgan Glover of [7 Directions of Service](#). She presented a [video](#) that provided a brief historical background of the Rights of Nature movement and the significance of the movement for conservation efforts in North Carolina. The Rights of Nature concept is based on Native American indigenous values, in which the natural environment and all living things have legally protected rights to exist, regenerate, flourish, and be free from harm just as humans do. The Rights of Nature movement aims to strengthen environmental and community protections by incorporating these rights into the current legal frameworks of cities and states. The result would be that ordinary citizens would have standing to sue in order to repair damage to a watershed caused by a development project, or to appeal permits for a project, in order to prevent damage.

Dr. Kinefuchi stated that 7 Directions of Service would like to bring forward a proposed resolution for consideration by the City Council that would recognize the rights of the Reedy Fork River and its watershed. Ms Kinsella stated that In order to develop support for this proposal, the group is presenting an sample resolution to the CSC for review and discussion. Members of 7 Directions of Service would like to collaborate with the CSC to customize the resolution to the needs and preferences of Greensboro's residents. This sample resolution was developed in consultation with the legal expert who help craft the 2008 Constitutional Amendment adopted by Ecuador, to recognize the rights of nature, the first country in the world to do so. She then read the preamble of the draft resolution. Ms Glover then read the operative clauses of the draft resolution. Dr. Kinefuchi introduced her colleague Johnette Walser (attending virtually), who stated that she is a professor of social work at UNCG and a local eco-therapist.

Mr. Leimenstoll asked if the Reedy Fork River is where the City discharges its wastewater. Mr. Sovich stated that the City treats wastewater to state required water quality levels before discharging to waterways. In the case of the TZ Osbourne Wastewater Treatment Plant, the discharge point is in the North Buffalo Creek sub-basin, which is a tributary of Reedy Fork River. Mr. Kobelev asked what the legal background is for granting legal rights to rivers or ecosystems, and whether there have been conversations with lawyers about this concept. Ms Kinsella stated that 7 Directions of Service has worked with Thomas Linzey, senior legal counsel for the [Center for Democratic and Environmental Rights](#), to develop this draft resolution. Although the Rights of Nature movement is an emerging area of environmental law, there is substantial legal theory and case law that supports the concept, as documented in a 1972 article by law professor Christopher D. Stone, in the Southern California Law Review, titled "Should Trees Have Standing?—Towards Legal Rights for Natural Objects."

State Representative Pricey Harrison introduced a bill to recognize the rights of the Haw River in the NC General Assembly last year, but that bill, [HB795](#) has not advanced. In response, 7 Directions of Service is seeking to raise awareness and demonstrate support for the movement at the local level by asking municipalities to adopt Rights of Nature

resolutions. Dr. Dorestant asked if any other cities in North Carolina have adopted a Rights of Nature resolution. Ms Kinsella stated that if Greensboro adopted the resolution, it would be the first in the state. Dr. Dorestant thanked the presenters and stated that staff in OSR and the Legal Department would review the sample resolution and consider how best to proceed. Mr. Baker noted that 7 Directions of Service is a North Carolina based organization, and asked whether they are coordinating with any organization that has a broader national reach? Ms Kinsella responded that the women- and indigenous-led organization [Movement Rights](#) works on a national level to advance the idea that human laws and culture must be aligned with the laws of the natural world. Chair Gaines thanked the presenters and stated that this topic was especially relevant for this meeting both because today is Indigenous Peoples' Day, and because of the tremendous increase in growth and development Greensboro is experiencing.

8. Sustainability Awareness Campaign – City Initiatives to Advance Sustainability

Chair Gaines noted that Mr. Sovich had requested CSC members to poll their friends, neighbors, and colleagues to determine from what sources they receive either general information about local announcements, events, and news, or environmental and sustainability related local announcements, events, and news. Mr. Sovich stated that knowing what these sources of information are, will help OSR target its communications, fill any gaps, broaden the reach of its education and awareness efforts. Ms Gill-Moffat asked whether the intent was to improve communication related to activities of the CSC, or related to the work of OSR. Mr. Sovich stated that the intent was related to both. Ms Gill-Moffat stated that going forward it will be important that communication with interested parties in the community include opportunities for them to be engaged and involved in sustainability related events and initiatives, and in CSC subcommittees.

9. Recap of Tree Canopy Assessment Discussion – City Ordinance Revisions

Mr. Leimenstoll stated that Tree Canopy Subcommittee is meeting on a regular basis and the last meeting was on Sunday, October 1, from 6 to 9pm at Maxie B's. The subcommittee has been reviewing Articles 10 and 12 of the Greensboro Land Development Ordinance (LDO). Article 10 relates to landscaping and Article 12 relates to natural resources and tree conservation. The subcommittee is going through these two articles in detail and developing recommendations for improving the level of protection for trees when development activity happens. This review will continue at the next meeting which is scheduled for Tuesday, October 17, from 6 to 9pm. This will probably be a lengthy process, but the product will be a proposal to present to the full CSC.

Chair Gaines thanked Mr. Leimenstoll for the update and noted that Robin Davis of Maxie B's has been a gracious and generous host for this subcommittee, and a strong champion for the cause of protecting Greensboro's trees. She stated that Will Yearn, the CSC's advisor related to the development industry, has also been a strong advocate regarding tree protection. She added that she looks forward to the upcoming presentation by the students in Dr. Shaleen Miller's class at UNCG regarding the overall state of Greensboro's tree canopy. Mr. Baker recommended that the subcommittee include Article 11, related to off-street parking requirements, in its review because the amount of space devoted to parking has a significant impact on the ability to preserve existing trees.

10. Acknowledgement of Absences

Chair Gaines acknowledged the Absences of Mr. Randall and Ms White.

11. Incidentals and Announcements

- **Items from Chair** – Chair Gaines stated that she would be conducting a nature-journaling class at the [Chinqua-Penn Trail](#) in Reidsville on Saturday, October 21, from 10:30am to 12:30pm. All the journaling materials are provided, thanks to the Haw River Assembly.
- **Items from Vice-Chair** – None.
- **Items from CSC Members** – Mr. Leimenstoll stated that engagement means sitting down with members of the public and hearing what they understand, what they want, where they're coming from, how they feel, and the implications of these points for how the local government does its job. This approach engagement is difficult and time-consuming, but it's fundamental for dealing with all of the issues we're facing around the planet today.
- **Items from Public** – City Council Member Abuzuaiter stated that she is thrilled with the work of the CSC and the rapid pace of projects and initiatives from the Office of Sustainability & Resilience. She noted that OSR assisted with preparing a resolution recognizing the first Wednesday in October as Energy Efficiency Day, which was adopted by the City Council on Tuesday, October 3rd. The City Council is definitely receptive to considering such resolutions, although the process takes time and the text needs to be reviewed by the City Manager's Office, Legal, and others to make sure it's appropriate and within the City's authority. But if this helps even one person become aware of the need to conserve energy, then it will be worth it.
- **Items from Chief Sustainability Officer / City Staff** – Mr. Sovich noted that on the subject of listening and public engagement, the Planning Department is working on an application for a grant from the US Department of Housing & Urban Development. The PRO-Housing grant program is aimed at removing regulatory and procedural barriers to the production and preservation of an adequate supply of housing. The Planning Department has [created a survey](#) to help elicit public input on the types of activities Greensboro should use the requested \$1.35M in grant funding for, if awarded. There will also be a public hearing regarding the [full draft grant project proposal](#), during the Planning & Zoning Commission meeting at 5:30pm, on Monday, October 16, in the Katie Dorsett Council Chamber of the Melvin Municipal Office Building, 300 W. Washington St.

12. Adjournment - Chair Gaines adjourned the meeting at 5:52 pm.