



## Town of Manchester Sustainability Commission

Wednesday, September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024

6:30 p.m.

**Location:** Work\_Space (903 Main Street) & Zoom Virtual Meeting

### MINUTES

**Attendees (9):** Peg Hackett (Chair), Gene DeJoannis (Co-Chair), William Chudzik, Rebecca Fowler, Shannon Baldassario, Geoff King, Terry Robinson, Victoria McBrien, Edwina Mik-Lumor

**Absent (5):** Oksan Bayulgen, Paris Bazemore, Zachary DelGaizo, Patrick McKee, Jeffrey Schegelmilch

**Attendees, Other (2):** Austin Murray, Rachel Schnabel

#### 1. Introductions

##### a. Call to Order

P. Hackett called the meeting to order at 6:35 pm.

##### b. Public Comment

There were no comments by members of the public.

##### c. Communications

P. Hackett informed attendees that there is still one vacancy remaining on the Commission, and members were encouraged to share that with their networks. Technically the open seat is a Republican appointment, but the person nominated can be from either political party, pending approval. There had been one interested individual, but that candidacy was rescinded for personal/work related reasons.

##### d. Adoption of the following minutes [Town of Manchester, CT Public Documents \(ecode360.com\)](https://www.ecode360.com)

###### i. August Commission Meeting

Motion to approve the August Commission meeting minutes made by T. Robinson.

Seconded by W. Chudzik.

In Favor: Peg Hackett, William Chudzik, Rebecca Fowler, Shannon Baldassario, Geoff King, Terry Robinson, Victoria McBrien

Opposed: None.

Abstain: Edwina Mik-Lumor

The motion passed.

B. Chudzik also requested that the Staff Liaison send out a list of action items after each meeting in order to hold those responsible for follow-up more accountable.

## ii. August Long-Term Planning Working Group Meeting

Motion to approve the August Long-Term Planning Working Group meeting minutes made by W. Chudzik.

Seconded by T. Robinson.

In Favor: Peg Hackett, William Chudzik, Rebecca Fowler, Shannon Baldassario, Geoff King, Terry Robinson, Victoria McBrien, Edwina Mik-Lumor

Opposed: None.

Abstain: None.

The motion passed unanimously.

## 2. Funding Requests

### a. Discussion on a Formal Funding Request Process

A. Murray presented options for formalizing the funding request process for requests that come from outside the Commission. He noted that historically there have not been many outside requests for funding, but due to the success of the ARPA sustainability grant program and the amount of funding currently available to the Commission, the group discussed last month that it may be a good idea to establish a pipeline for project ideas that may require Town funds.

Austin shared an updated funding request submission link/form via Google:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1ZeNPGLoyHNWMUa7FazDtM2Xp1dXXDu55w1zXnVxAqh/edit>

He also reminded the Commission that after accounting for the last payment to the grant manager for the ARPA grant program, there will be roughly \$80,000 available to the Commission as of 1/1/25, and that the Board of Directors historically has allocated \$30,000 towards “Sustainability and Green Energy Initiatives” via the Town’s CIP during the budget development process. Also, the Town has the ultimate authority approve or reject all funding award made by the Commission.

Last, A. Murray offered that the Commission can consider creating an annual process for putting out a formal request for projects that could be funded by the Commission’s budget. There could be an amount of funding made available, much like the ARPA grant program for sustainability-related “mini grants” Relatedly, the Commission can formally recommend to the Board of Directors that a competitive grant program for nonprofits be established via some other funding mechanism—currently the Town’s Human Services Department funds the same organizations each year, but that process used to be competitive. The Commission can recommend to the Board/Town Manager that funding be made available to other organizations that are not on that “core” list.

P. Hackett added that the Board of Directors supports a similar Downtown Mini Grant program to support the vibrancy and walkability of Downtown, that could be used as a model for something like this.

W. Chudzik recommended that whatever process is decided, there should be a requirement to report on progress and upon completion so that there is some form of accountability with grantees.

T. Robinson wanted to discuss the administrative burden of creating such a funding mechanism, and if doing something on a regular basis would at least allow Town staff to plan around certain times of the year. A. Murray responded that an annual process for relatively low dollar amounts would not be overly burdensome.

The group also discussed whether or not the finding should be limited to Manchester-based groups and projects, and it was decided that the model established by the ARPA grant program be followed, which required at least collaboration with a Manchester entity, but could result in projects that cross municipal boundaries, if approved.

V. McBrien asked about marketing the opportunity, and how the Town could publicize the program so that the group encourages submission from a diverse set of organizations. She suggested along with the opportunity and instructions, the Commission include examples of previously funded projects or other successful projects to inspire groups that may not know exactly what is possible through this funding.

The group decided to take a month to consider some of the implications of this idea, with an official motion planned for the October meeting.

#### **b. Hop River Trail Alliance – Tree Plantings**

A. Murray updated the Commission that the Water & Sewer Department ruled that the section of the Hop River Trail that was the target of the tree planting program was not feasible due to underground infrastructure.

The group decided to wait for a complete analysis of the trails space in Town to see which other areas are appropriate for tree plantings, or at least a list of priority areas. A. Murray will communicate and work with John Bolduc, who brought and presented the request last month, on presenting other options before the springtime, which is when the planting was propose for.

P. Hackett asked about the situation with Eversource and the cutting of trees and other plants around their lines, to which G. King responded that Eversource's recent actions were the result of their interpretation being they can go 50 feet beyond their existing clearing. He explained that due to the recent clear cutting there is legitimate concern over bank erosion near the river. The Town will be communicating with Eversource on future plans, and the Conservation Commission will be pursuing things from the angle that Eversource always said they were OK with lower shrubs and plants, but decided to clear cut anyway, which results in the proliferation of invasives.

#### **c. UCONN CIPWG Invasive Plant Symposium**

R. Fowler, who has been working with the Conservation Commission's Invasive Plant Working Group, requested \$75 to attend the CT Invasive Plant Working Group's annual symposium at UCONN on 10/29. Based on the agenda, the event will cover:

- Case Studies in Managing Tree of Heaven and Mugwort
- Leveraging Community Engagement
- Pollinator Meadows at Robbins Swamp Wildlife Management Area Help Support Native Wild Bees and Monarchs
- Aquatic Invasive Plant Management and Prevention
- Common Questions about Invasive Plant Management
- Native Plant Availability

Speakers for each session come from local and regional governments and water authorities, as well as UCONN faculty and other outside academics and subject matter experts.

Members of the Conservation Commission will also be attending but have access to funds from the Town Planning and Economic Development department's operating budget.

T. Robinson made a motion to approve the \$75 expenditure for R. Fowler's attendance at the CT Invasive Plant Working Group's annual symposium.

Seconded by W. Chudzik.

In Favor: Peg Hackett, William Chudzik, Shannon Baldassario, Geoff King, Terry Robinson, Victoria McBrien, Edwina Mik-Lumor

Opposed: None.

Abstain: Rebecca Fowler.

The motion passed unanimously.

W. Chudzik suggested that the Commission consider creating an annual budget for other regularly occurring expenditures, such as professional development opportunities that may arise in the future.

### **3. Unfinished Business & Project Updates**

#### **a. Long-Term Planning**

The LTP Working Group met on September 12<sup>th</sup> and discussed objectives and metrics that they would like to see in the Sustainability Plan currently being developed.

Austin is working on updating the draft plan and will circulate to all members when that work is complete. A formal update on the current draft of the Plan will be provided to the full Commission at the October meeting.

#### **i. Internal Staff Sustainability Committee**

A. Murray and R. Schnabel have discussed with DPW Director Tim Bockus the possibility of establishing a staff committee focused on sustainability. The idea would be to convene a group on a regular basis (likely quarterly) so that Town staff working on sustainability initiatives (such as SustainableCT) can share updates, progress, and ideas.

If the Commission is interested, a formal motion requesting the establishment of that internal committee would enable Austin and Rachel to begin developing a scope of work, which would likely need to be approved by the Town Manager or Board.

G. DeJoannis recommended that if formed, the group should plan to meet, at least initially, on a monthly basis.

B. Chudzik made a motion to formally recommend the creation of an internal Town Staff Committee on Sustainability, with an official letter drafted and sent by the Staff Liaison(s) to the Town Manager/Board of Directors outlining the need for regular meetings of that group.

Seconded by R. Fowler.

In Favor: Peg Hackett, Gene DeJoannis (Co-Chair), William Chudzik, Shannon Baldassario, Rebecca Fowler, Geoff King, Terry Robinson, Victoria McBrien, Edwina Mik-Lumor

Opposed: None.

Abstain: None.

The motion passed unanimously.

## **ii. Community Outreach/Engagement**

A. Murray shared preliminary plans for a resident event at Work\_Space or another location where input can be gathered on what the public's priorities are.

Any event would be similar to the workshop held during the planning process for Manchester NEXT, and would contribute to the long-term planning work currently being done.

### **b. SustainableCT**

No update.

### **c. Food Scrap Drop-Off Program**

R. Schnabel shared that registrations have plateaued, but that total sign ups have hit 200. That does not mean that all of those 200 residents are participating, and it includes people utilizing the transfer station exclusively. She shared that roughly one ton of waste is being collected per month on average.

September 29<sup>th</sup> is the International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste, which will be used to send out another round of social media and other outreach materials.

Rachel also shared that she is working on increasing engagement at the schools, and a plan is in place to conduct a waste audit in the cafeteria at Bowers, and there may be an additional opportunity to partner with Blue Earth on a yearlong initiative for education and collection for composting.

The group also discussed driving participation around times of the year with increased potential for food waste, such as Thanksgiving and the holidays.

### **d. Eversource Community Partnership Initiative**

The first mailers will be mailed this or next week, so Austin will monitor signups in response and report back to the group.

### **e. Conservation Commission (Including Invasive Plant Working Group)**

Geoff King provided the following updates:

- There was \$600,000 in ARPA funding for trails, and a temporary committee was formed that created plans for that funding. Those projects did not progress, so now the Conservation Commission is hoping to contribute to the planning process to avoid that funding being reclaimed or reallocated.
- A. Murray updated Geoff that attempts to create or open a dialogue with the Water & Sewer department are on hold until the new administration is in place.
- Parking Day will be held at Work\_Space on September 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>. There will be information about invasives and other Town initiatives.

## **4. Items for Future Agendas**

None.

## **5. Next Meeting – October 16, 2024 (Virtual)**

R. Schnabel added that October 5<sup>th</sup> is going to be Free Drop-Off Day at the transfer station, and she will be looking for volunteers to help with the Take-It or Leave-It section of the event. The hours will be 8am – 1pm.

## 6. Adjournment

R. Fowler made a motion to adjourn.

Seconded by G. DeJoannis.

In Favor: Peg Hackett, Gene DeJoannis (Co-Chair), William Chudzik, Shannon Baldassario, Rebecca Fowler, Geoff King, Terry Robinson, Victoria McBrien, Edwina Mik-Lumor

Opposed: None.

Abstain: None.

The motion passed unanimously.