



## Minutes

### City of Tempe Sustainability Commission October 16, 2023

Minutes of the Tempe Sustainability Commission meeting held on Monday, October 16, 2023, 4:30 p.m. at a virtual meeting on MS Teams, through City Hall, 31 E. 5<sup>th</sup> Street, Tempe, Arizona.

**(MEMBERS) Present:**

Barbie Burke (Vice Chair)  
Natalie Mendoza  
Katja Brundiers  
Ben Paulat  
Taylor Conley

Morgan Winburn  
Jake Swanson  
Shawn Swisher  
Erin Boyd  
Joshua Randall

**(MEMBERS) Absent:**

Kendon Jung (Chair)

**City Staff Present:**

Eric Iwersen  
Brienne Fisher  
Andy Escobar  
Maddie Mercer  
Evelyn Brumfield  
Carissa Fowler  
Tom Duensing  
Richard Adkins

**Guests Present:**

Quinton Olson

**Agenda Item 1 – Welcome New Members and SRC Mission**

Vice Chair Barbie Burke called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m.

## **Agenda Item 2 – Public Appearances**

No public comments were shared

## **Agenda Item 3 – Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Vice Chair Barbie Burke called for a motion to approve the meeting minutes from September 18, 2023.

**Motion:** Jake Swanson

**Second:** Katja Brundiers

**Decision:** Approved 10-0

## **Agenda Item 4 – Rain to Roots Master Plan**

Maddie Mercer, Neighborhood Resilience Coordinator, gave a presentation to update the Commission on the Rain to Roots Master Plan. She was joined for part of the presentation by Urban Forester Richard Adkins. This plan works to integrate stormwater, urban forestry, and urban cooling efforts in the city. This plan addressed three performance measures: 1.27 City Infrastructure & Assets, 4.03 Water Conservation and Efficiency, and 4.11 Tree Coverage. The plan also aligns with the Tempe's Climate Action Plan Update highlight actions around strategies for green codes and standards. Mercer went over a basic definition of Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) and listed its benefits. Overall, the Rain to Roots Master Plan is focused on expanding GSI, cross-departmental coordination, and identifying opportunities for long-term funding. Mercer also provided an overview of the partners involved in this project, both internal and external – with one major goal of better coordination.

The overall plan has several components: the first of which is an assessment of the current state of urban forestry, stormwater, and sustainability initiatives in Tempe. Other parts of the Master Plan include

- Developing new codes and standards for adoption, implementation, and maintenance of GSI work.
- Updating the Urban Forestry Master Plan
- Identifying a funding strategy for the long-term.

Throughout the plan there will be new pilot projects coupled with public outreach through an ambassador program. This current presentation to the Commission will focus on that first step of assessing the current state. Current research is being done as to existing programs and initiatives, previous GSI projects, as well as data around stormwater, urban forestry, heat, and equity.

Urban Forester Richard Adkins explained in more depth about the assessments happening regarding urban forestry. To update the Urban Forestry Master Plan, recommendations will be solicited from consultants and the public. New data sets will provide a more accurate picture of landscape and land use patterns (with an additional eye to expanding green space). Additionally, examples of other related national and regional codes and standards will be studied to promote sustainable green development and tree maintenance.

After Urban Forestry, the next assessments cover stormwater initiatives. Mercer explained that this includes interviews with staff, drainage studies, and reviewing capital improvement plan. Next steps for stormwater include promoting stormwater quality, managing quantity, supporting MS4 Permit compliance, and integrating GSI to proposed stormwater capital improvement projects.

Adkins also summarized the current state analysis of GSI policies for codes and standards. With all the project components being discussed – augmenting and updating development codes and standards will be an important part of this plan. Practices and design criteria must be amended and improved, and to illustrate this point, Adkins refers to Tempe Fire Station #7. The landscaping planning and vegetation is appropriate for GSI, but also features a drywell which would prohibit the rainwater infiltrating to the soil. Next steps for this part of the plan include developing standards of care, as well as a native vegetation and biodiversity toolkit. Additionally, integration of GSI standards into existing Tempe codes is an important next step.

Assessing existing and new GSI projects via site visits is a recently-completed stage in this assessment process. The WERK consultant team were able to see how GSI projects were effective in spaces around Tempe and gain some valuable insight to best practices. For next steps around pilot projects, the goals are to design materials that highlight projects with GSI best practices, create a new GSI map that includes important data, and develop a tool to prioritize future pilot projects. In developing pilot projects, the main goals will be to demonstrate how GSI can be integrated into different project types, test new codes and standards, and build inter-departmental connections within Tempe.

Future funding strategies are another part of the plan to be explored. The next steps include a utility feasibility study – reviewing other cities' strategies for funding, as well as identifying other funding solutions for future projects. One crucial next step will be to coordinate with the water rate study with Municipal Utilizes.

The final large component of this Master Plan is public outreach through community engagement. The main avenue for that work is the Rain to Roots Ambassador Program;

that program's goal is to make the Plan accessible and easy to receive feedback. Having this Ambassador program makes the work more transparent and builds in advocacy for this work with an eye to future adoption and funding strategies. Ambassadors have the opportunity to learn about stormwater and cooling initiatives, review and give feedback on project materials, participate in site visits, and advise on policy recommendations. There has been growing interest and positive feedback. Ambassadors come from a range of backgrounds and interests.

Project outcomes from this Plan, at a high level, include GSI pilot project designs, updated codes and standards, updated Urban Forestry Master Plan, and identifying a sustainability funding strategy. Mercer also shared the next three Ambassador meetings dates & topics with the Commission.

Questions: Vice Chair Burke relayed some questions from the chat:

- Commissioner Natalie Mendoza asked if Green Stormwater Infrastructure would also include collecting excess stormwater and storing it for future use. Mercer replies that at this stage, the focus is to use landscape (rather than infrastructure) to manage stormwater. But long-term strategies could include tanks like Commissioner Mendoza references.
- Commissioner Katja Brundiers asked what was the contribution to cooling identified on the 25 sites on the fieldtrip? Mercer explained that the cooling benefits provided were a mixed bag. Sites planned with trees had larger cooling benefits as opposed to just vegetation cooling. A finalized site assessment report will be forthcoming and will have more details and benefits outlines.
- Commissioner Brundiers followed up by asking about what challenges this work has faced. One major challenge has been a lack of and need for coordination between partners and departments. Better communication between folks, such as Environmental Services, Engineering, Multi-Use Path teams; those who work on landscapes could use an opportunity to integrate GSI elements into their work and partner with other departments. Another challenge has been maintenance of these projects – ie planning for long term vegetation health and unobstructed flow of water. The responsibility for some of this maintenance isn't always clear.
- Commissioners Jack Swanson had two questions to pose:
  - o Would there be a document to clearly explain trade-offs of choosing non-native trees vs native ones (Commissioner Swanson mentioned the related discussion that took place around Mill Avenue tree selection)? Would it be communicated that this Plan took into account the trade-offs and assessed what would be most effective? Mercer agreed that the idea of a trade-offs fact sheet would be a beneficial part of a proposed toolkit.

- Commissioner Swanson also asked if this Plan would address deforestation projects, like the one that occurred west of Tempe Town Lake? Tradeoffs were assessed and there was much community concern – does this plan clarify when tradeoffs occur so public is aware? Making sure that this is communicated is key to bolstering support for this Plan. Mercer replied that the Ambassador program is a good opportunity to talk about contentious choices, should they arise.
- Vice Chair Burke asks what the impacts of this exceptionally dry and hot summer monsoon season may be on this Plan. Mercer replied that it will be invaluable to communicate that valley rains can be disruptive and affect hardscapes, which is why GSI is so helpful, even when rain is infrequent.

### **Agenda Item 5- Sustainability and Resilience Annual Report Review**

Brianne Fisher, Climate Action Manager, explained that every Board and Commission is charged with producing an annual report. The format is consistent among all Boards and Commissions, and every report is compiled into one large document that is provided to Mayor and Council. The report is due at the end of the calendar year, and Fisher will draft language that the Commission will provide notes on what is to be added or emphasized. Feedback can be sent to Fisher directly in addition to conversations at upcoming Commission meetings. Fisher will be updating attendance tracking and has already gathered some noteworthy accomplishments to show the Commission. Highlights include Commissioner Swisher's design competition, the letter of support for from the Commission to Council for the International Green Construction Code, and the significant work the Commission undertook regarding the General Plan. Goals for the upcoming years are also included in this report, and include topics such as resilient energy hubs and resilience hubs, transportation demand management and mobility hubs, and green stormwater infrastructure.

### **Agenda Item 6- Sustainability & Resilience Office Updates & Housekeeping**

Eric Iwersen, Director, started the office updates by outlining the new staff that will be joining the Sustainability & Resilience office. A new Policy and Grants Coordinator has been hired and will start on Oct 30<sup>th</sup>. That position is shared with the Strategic Management and Innovation Office. SRO is also hiring a Management Assistant (starting in mid-November) who will be shared with the Economic Development Office. The entire team is currently housed in the Tempe Transportation Center and the space is shared with the Economic Development and Transportation departments. Later on, Iwersen also noted the Heat Mitigation and Resilience Specialist who was hired earlier in the fall.

Iwersen also provided an update on the timeline to change the code around the Commission composition. Changing the code requires two hearings in front of Council and

is slated for November 16<sup>th</sup> 2023 and November 30<sup>th</sup> 2023. Iwersen also noted that the Commission will elect new officers in January 2024.

Iwersen reported that he and Community Development Deputy Director Mike Baxley presented the first hearing of the International Green Construction Code to Council on October 12<sup>th</sup> 2023. (The second & final hearing will be November 30<sup>th</sup> 2023.) It was well received, and it's nearing adoption for Tempe. Commissioner Swisher spoke in support of the Code at that meeting; Public and Council dialogue at the meeting revolved around pushing this from being voluntary to mandatory. Conversations with developers will be ongoing as this Code gets adopted, and a green-plan specialist will be hired to serve as an ombudsman to encourage IGCC use. Iwersen also laid out the future timeline for early 2024, and the Commission should expect an update around how success would be measured and other goals of this Code as it's in use. At the final hearing, Iwersen will be asking the Council to support a resolution dictating that future City buildings will engage IGCC to lead by example.

The last housekeeping item is the city budget forecast. Iwersen explained how changes at the state legislature will affect Tempe's budget. The state has prohibited the collection of residential rental tax by cities, and this will result in a loss of revenue of about \$20 million from the city's general fund. In order to accommodate this change, there will be no supplemental budget items for the next fiscal year; new positions or large financial requests won't be fulfilled. SRO has already started to share positions and will continue to pursue federal dollars as well. Deputy City Manager Tom Duensing elaborated that his office will present the forecast to Council at the November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2023 meeting. The decision to prohibit rental tax collection will disproportionately impact Tempe, as there are many rental properties within the city. The budget may be lean for several years as the city accommodates the change. Commissioner Brundiers asked if there are options for fees that would benefit the Sustainability office and its goals? Could the Commission assist in exploring fees or funding that would benefit sustainability, resilience, and equity programming? Duensing answered that at this point, city departments would be seeking direction from Council on how this is addressed. Additionally, the issue needs to be properly set up and explained before strategies can be explored. Iwersen mentioned that similar funding strategy discussions are happening within Transportation and Water, and SRO would look to those conversations as well.

### **Agenda Item 7 – Future Agenda Items**

Monday November 20<sup>th</sup> is the date of the next Commission meeting, which is the week of Thanksgiving. Vice Chair Burke asked Commissioners for ideas for future meetings via email.

Commissioner Brundiers motions to adjourn the meeting at 5:32 p.m.

**Motion:** Katja Brundiers

**Second:** Taylor Conley

**Decision:** Approved 10-0

Prepared by: Evelyn Brumfield

Reviewed by: Brianne Fisher

Addendum – MS Teams Chat:

[10/16 4:40 PM] Natalie Mendoza (Guest)

Would GSI also include collecting and storing excess stormwater for later use? I ask because the plants may only need so much water at any given time and we could always use more water overall.

[10/16 4:57 PM] Katja Brundiers

Thank you for the presentation! What was the contribution to cooling identified on the 25 sites on the fieldtrip?

[10/16 4:58 PM] Katja Brundiers

You mentioned you've identified the challenges that have sometimes prevented the work from going forward. From your research, what strategies have you identified that may be able to help with addressing some of these challenges?

[10/16 4:59 PM] Natalie Mendoza (Guest)

Thank you. And wonderful presentation.

heart 1

[10/16 4:59 PM] Fisher, Brianne

Storage could be a good option to explore for private development (AKA IgCC)

heart 1

[10/16 5:03 PM] Katja Brundiers

Thank you so much Maddy and Richard for the presentation and the very thoughtful research and careful approach to coordination that you both apply. I also greatly appreciate how you center the heat equity data in the work and the prioritization tool. Thank you!

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[10/16 5:15 PM] Katja Brundiers

Congratulations to your excellent abilities to grow the team of the SRO and for creating these liaising positions to foster cross-departmental collaboration.

heart 3

[10/16 5:23 PM] Brumfield, Evelyn

resilient!

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[10/16 5:27 PM] Fisher, Brianne

The Rain to Roots feasibility study is looking at various projections

[10/16 5:27 PM] Fisher, Brianne

So the answer is specific to our Department. Looking for revenues NOT dependent on the General Fund

like 3

[10/16 5:28 PM] Katja Brundiers

As the SR commission we could look into sustainability-related measures that incentives sustainability.

[10/16 5:30 PM] Fowler, Carissa

Thanks Eric!

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[10/16 5:30 PM] Katja Brundiers

Thank you Eric and Tom for your insightful responses.

[10/16 5:32 PM] Fisher, Brianne

Meeting adjourned at 5:32

[10/16 5:32 PM] Natalie Mendoza (Guest)

Thank you.

[10/16 5:32 PM] Erin Boyd (Guest)

thank you all

[10/16 5:32 PM] Katja Brundiers

Thank you SRO staff and others presenting! We appreciate you!

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[10/16 5:32 PM] Mercer, Madeline

Have a good night, all!

[10/16 5:32 PM]

Erin Boyd (Guest) left the chat.

[10/16 5:32 PM]

Natalie Mendoza (Guest) left the chat.

[10/16 5:33 PM] Taylor Conley (Guest)

Thank you!