

Environmental Concerns Committee Meeting Minutes

February 18, 2026, 4:30 p.m. | City Hall, 241 W South Street

MEMBERS PRESENT: David Benac, Chair, Rachel Jondle, Vice-Chair, Stephen Romanelli, John Eric Kreuzer, Thomas Dewhirst, David DeBack

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

CITY STAFF PRESENT: Justin Gish, Kiana Jones (Recording Secretary)

OTHERS PRESENT: Mike Stout, Luke Zimmer

A. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL:

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 p.m.

ASSURANCE OF LIVE STREAMING (Facebook/YouTube)

The recording/Streaming of the meeting was confirmed, and community members joined via a link posted on the City's Facebook page.

B. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

RACHEL JONDLE, SECONDED BY THOMAS DEWHIRST, MOVED TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS PRESENTED. WITH A VOICE VOTE THE MOTION PASSED.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RACHEL JONDLE, SECONDED BY JOHN KREUZER, MOVED TO APPROVE THE NOVEMBER 2, 2026 ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS COMMITTEE MINUTES AS PRESENTED. WITH A VOICE VOTE THE MOTION PASSED.

D. COMMUNICATIONS

E. ANNOUNCEMENTS/PUBLIC COMMENTS

- a. No comments were received from the audience or the live stream call-in line.

F. REPORTS

1. Natural Features Protection Review Board
 - a. John Kreuzer reported that, at their January meeting, the NFP Board denied a variance request for slopes related to a proposed multi-family duplex development regarding four parcels on W Cork Street.
2. Air and Water Quality Report
 - a. No report
3. Wildlife and Natural Resource Protection
 - a. No report

4. Planning Commission
 - a. Rachel Jondle noted a streamlining of ordinance language was shifting from Appendix A to Chapter 50.
5. Tree Committee
 - a. Thomas Dewhirst reported that Consumers Energy is conducting canopy trimming to prevent storm damage. The committee approved tree removals for sidewalk construction on Kilgore Road and Portage Street
6. Parks and Recreation Advisory Board
 - a. No report
7. Kalamazoo River Watershed Council
 - a. Bella Baez has taken over the role from Doug McLaughlin.
8. Odor Task Force
 - a. No report
9. Waste Working Group
 - a. No report
10. Native Species & Urban Landscape
 - a. No report

G. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. Bylaw Updates
 - a. Proposed changes are currently being reviewed by the city's legal department
2. Single-Use Plastics
 - a. Discussion remains paused to allow for further research

H. NEW BUSINESS:

1. Election of officers by ballot
 - a. David Benac was re-elected as Chair
 - b. John Kreuzer was elected as Vice Chair, replacing Rachel Jondle.
2. 2026 Meeting Dates –
 - a. Proposed dates for the third Wednesday of each month were distributed. The committee discussed moving future meeting times 30 to 60 minutes later to increase inclusiveness for working members, however, this will require a bylaw update.
3. Introduction to Mike Stout of Michigan Waterways Stewards
 - a. Mike Stout of Michigan Waterways Stewards announced a community cleanup event on March 26th focused on litter removal and invasive species eradication along the Kalamazoo River.
4. Meet Luke Zimmer, applicant to the committee
 - a. The committee interviewed Luke Zimmer, including a discussion of his interest in noise pollution and his background with National Geographic. The committee unanimously recommended his appointment to the City Commission.

5. Evaluation of subcommittees
 - a. The Chair proposed streamlining subcommittees into broader topical categories to ensure more consistent updates. Members will review the proposal for a vote next month.
6. The potential transfer of Asylum Lake Preserve from WMU to Kalamazoo County
 - a. Extensive discussion occurred regarding the potential transfer of management and ownership of the Asylum Lake Preserve from Western Michigan University to Kalamazoo County. Members expressed concern over maintaining the property's status as a preserve rather than a park.
 - B. A MOTION WAS MADE BY THOMAS DEWHIRST AND SECONDED BY DAVID DEBACK TO REQUEST THAT THE KALAMAZOO CITY COMMISSION CONTACT WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY AND KALAMAZOO COUNTY AND REQUEST AN ECC PRESENCE ON ANY COUNCIL OR MANAGEMENT BOARD THAT IS DIRECTLY SUPERVISING THE ASYLUM LAKE PROPERTIES THAT LIE WITHIN THE CITY OF KALAMAZOO. WITH A VOICE VOTE, THE MOTION PASSED, WITH RACHEL JONDLE ABSTAINING.
7. The Amateur Sports Complex being proposed, the NFP Board approval of cutting more woodland and the zoning board of appeals denying a variance.
 - a. A brief mention of a proposed development in Oshtemo Township that may impact city property was moved to next month's agenda.
8. How does the City of Kalamazoo factor our remaining green spaces into decisions? Particularly as it relates to the statements of Climate Emergency and Sustainability?
 - a. This item was moved to next month's agenda.
9. City of Kalamazoo Sustainability Report
 - a. This item was moved to next month's agenda.

I. PUBLIC COMMENTS

- a. No comments were received from the audience or the live stream call-in line.

J. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

- a. Chair Benac reminded everyone of Kalamazoo Earth Day events.

K. ADJOURNMENT

- a. The meeting adjourned at 6:00 p.m.