

Environmental Concerns Committee Meeting Minutes

March 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, Reeta Chandler, Luke Zimmer

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

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

OTHERS PRESENT: None

A. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL:

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 p.m. by Chair David Benac

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

THE CHAIR REQUESTED AN AMENDEMENT TO THE AGENDA TO INCLUDE COMMITTEE STRUCTURES UNDER UNFINISHED BUSINESS. DIRECTOR JONDLE MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS AMENDED. MOTION WAS SECONDED BY DIRECTOR DEWHIRST.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

DIRECTOR BENAC MADE A MOTION TO POSTPONE THE APPROVAL OF THE FEBRUARY 26 MINUTES TO THE APRIL MEETING, AT WHICH THE COMMITTEE WILL REVIEW AND APPROVE BOTH FEBRUARY AND MARCH RECORDS. A MOTION WAS MADE BY DIRECTOR BENAC AND SECOND BY DIRECTOR JONDLE.

D. COMMUNICATIONS

THE FOLLOWING COMMUNITY MEMEBERS PROVIDED TESTIMONY REGARDING ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERS

- MOLLY MECKLENBURG (EAST SIDE) EXPRESSED GRAVE CONCERNS REGARDING THE MARCH 10TH FIRE AT KALAMAZOO METAL RECYCLERS. SHE REPORTED 10 HOURS OF BLACK SMOKE AND DANGEROUSLY HIGH AQI LEVELS ON PERSONAL MONITORS. SHE QUESTIONED THE LACK OF TRANSPARENCY REGARDING THE COMPOSTIOTN OF THE BURNING DEBRIS AND CALLED FOR MORE RIGOROUS INDUSTRY COMPLIACE MONITORING.
- JEN WHALE (PEACE House) QUESTIONED CITY ACCOUNTABILITY FOR INDUSTRIES SITUATED ALONG THE RIVER. SHE NOTED THAT 1.3 MILLION GALLONS OF WATER WERE USED FORO THE FIRE SUPPRESSION AND INQUIRED WHETHER THE FACILITY'S RETAINING PONDS WERE SUFFICIENT TO PREVENT CONTAMINATED OVERFLOW INTO THE RIVER. SHE REPORTED THAT RESIDENTS DOWNWIND ARE EXPERIENCING HEALTH ISSUES, SPECIFICALLY SORE THROATS.
- AMY Kuritzky (PHD STUDENT, AIR POLLUTION) CRITIQUED THE MUNICIPAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE,

CHARACTERIZING THE MONITORING OF PM 2.5 AND OIL SHEENS AS THE BARE MINIMUM. SHE EMPHASIZED THE NECESSITY OF SPECIATED ANALYSIS TO IDENTIFY HEAVY METALS AND VOLATILE ORGANIC COMPOUNDS. SHE SUGGESTED THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A RESIDENT NOTIFICATION APPLICATION FOR HEALTH-RELATED ALERTS.

- Katie Meyer Teper (Oshtemo Township) INTRODUCED HER PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND IN ENVIRONMENTAL BIOLOGY AND ZOOLOGY. SHE EXPRESSED AN INTEREST IN CONTRIBUTING HER EXPERTISE TO THE COMMITTEE'S INITIATIVE DESPITE HER NON-RESIDENT STATUS.

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. The subcommittee reported the election of Director Fredrickson (landscape architect) as Chair and Director Stemple as Vice Chair. The NFP annual report highlighted the preservation of wetlands, water resources, trees, floodplains, and habitat corridors. Discussion followed regarding the phrase "to the extent possible" on site designs, with members expressing concern that such language may prioritize economic development over natural resource conservation.
2. Air and Water Quality Report
 - a. Reeta Chandler summarized a GAP analysis conducted by DR. Benny Gerler of the institute for Public Scholarship. The analysis identified census tracts requiring priority monitor placement based on the following vulnerable populations.
 - Youth (Under 5 years of age)
 - Seniors (Over 65 years of age)
 - Race (Black Residents)
 - Socioeconomic Status (Medium household income below \$44,296)
3. Wildlife and Natural Resource Protection
 - a. The committee reviewed correspondence from Rick Zichterman regarding deer population management. Deliberation followed concerning the distinction between "culling" and "exclusion" strategies. It was noted that culling often results on a "spring back" effect where populations rapidly rebound, necessitating a consideration of exclusion for long-term management.
4. Planning Commission
No reports
5. Tree Committee
No reports
6. Parks and Recreation Advisory Board
 - a. Updated were provided on trout habitat restoration at Milham Park (Portage Creek dredging) and budget approvals for playground equipment at Verberg Park. The subcommittee continues to seek "park adoptees" for community-led stewardship.
7. Kalamazoo River Watershed Council
No reports

8. Odor Task Force
No report
9. Waste Working Group
 - a. No report
10. Native Species & Urban Landscape
 - a. Subcommittee will hold its inaugural meeting next month

G. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. Committee Restructuring

- a. At the request of the Chair, the proposal to reorganize subcommittees will be resent to all members. The objective is to create a smoother reporting structure with broader, more productive subcommittees. Discussion is scheduled for the April meeting.

2. City Sustainability Report

Justin presented the 2024 Greenhouse Gas (GHG) and Sustainability update

a. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

- The city has identified 65% of non-copper/lead supply lines towards its 2032 goal of 75%

b. Water Conservation

- Last year, 27 rain barrels were sold. The city is now partnering with the Kalamazoo River Watershed Council to expand the rain barrel program for 2026.

c. Emissions Date

- Municipal operations emissions are 82% electricity-related (Scope 2). Enrolling in the Renewable Energy Certificate program is projected to reduce the city's carbon footprint from 36,000 to 8,000 metric tons. Direct emissions from fuel and natural gas (Scope 1) are being addressed through fleet and building improvements.

d. Biodiesel Program

- Heavy machinery and snowplows utilized a B11 mix in 2024, are currently using B17, and have a target of B20 for the following year.

e. Waste Management

- An EPS (Styrofoam) recycling event is scheduled for April 25th. It was noted that coffee cups are now recyclable as they consist of virgin paper with long fibers, which are highly desirable for the recycling process.

3. Green Space Preservation

- Deliberation followed regarding the creation of a "Green Zoning" classification for public and private land. Luke Zimmer and John Kreuzer were assigned to research municipal examples and evaluate the benefits and procedural hurdles of such designations.

H. NEW BUSINESS:

1. Appointment of Associate Members

- The Committee recognized the value of external technical expertise in environmental biology.
Director Jondle made a Motion to appoint Katie Meyer Teper as a non-voting Associate Member of the ECC, seconded by Director Dewhirst

2. Action Items: Kalamazoo Metal Recyclers Fire Response

- The Committee discussed the inadequacy of current monitoring protocols. City Commissioner Jeanne Hess reported that while Egle found no issues with contaminated runoff as of the previous week, Committee members emphasized the need for more granular data. Associate Member Katie Meyer

Teper recommended “surface wipe sampling” and “soil testing” within a five-mile radius to detect lithium-ion contaminants or heavy metals that may have settled after becoming airborne.

Director Dewhirst made a Motion to draft and forward a communication to the City Commission recommending

- A public statement regarding the status and stage of the fire investigation
- A speciated analysis of air and water toxins beyond PM 2.5 and oil, specifically monitoring VOC’s, particulates, and heavy metals
- A formal plan for improved resident communication during emergencies and protocol for long-term environmental monitoring of affected areas

Motion seconded by Director Deback

I. PUBLIC COMMENTS

- a. Iris Potter (Kalamazoo River Protectors) cited the context of the 2010 Enbridge spill and expressed support for the city to institute fines against businesses that pollute the river.

J. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

- a. None

K. ADJOURNMENT

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