

CITY OF UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS, OHIO
COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
May 17, 2022
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Vice Mayor Michele Weiss called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Also present were: Councilmen Christopher Cooney; Justin Gould; Brian King, and John Rach; Councilwomen Barbara Blankfeld and Sheri Sax; Mayor Michael Brennan; Housing and Community Development Director Geoff Englebrecht. Also present were Elena Stachew and Kwame Botchway, representing PCFO (Power a Clean Future Ohio). Executive Director, Joe Flarida, joined the meeting via Zoom.

Agenda Item

1. Discussion regarding Potentially Joining PCFO (Power a Clean Future Ohio)

Vice Mayor Weiss stated the first item on the agenda would consist of a presentation from PCFO. She turned the meeting over to Councilman King who introduced the guests, Mr. Kwame Batchway and Ms. Elena Stachew. Councilman King recalled that Mr. Kwame Batchway spoke at the last Council meeting. Mr. King noted that he is looking forward to hearing what the organization can help the City with in terms of efficiencies, particularly in view of the facilities-finding process and the process of building clean and more efficient buildings. It would be helpful to get a handle on where the City fits in with those standards.

Mr. Batchway stated that he deals with computer testing technology and introduced Ms. Elena Stachew. Ms. Elena Stachew explained that she works with Mr. Batchway on recent development consulting in Northeast Ohio. She noted that she is an engineer and focusing on ecological restoration. She has experience with clean energy, sustainability, climate action and environmental justice. Ms. Stachew stated that she is very familiar with the Northeast Ohio region.

Mr. Flarida was recognized and apologized that he could not attend the meeting on site. He stated that PCFO was started February 2020 and saw interests of governments investing in clean energy, and explained that there are many communities interested in clean energy and sustainability including transportation solutions focusing on public health of their communities. He noted that the interest to accomplish these goals does not necessarily equate with actually being able to complete those goals; this is where this organization can bridge the gap between being interested and actually taking the step forward. He explained that the organization has incredible support ranging across a broad range of disciplines including economic issues of public health, racial equity, environmental concerns and efforts to maintain quality green space for residents. There are currently 30 communities working together toward these efforts. The organization provides tools and resources including technical experts. Mr. Flarida stated that Northeast Ohio has many local governments that are interested in collaborating with each other to build an ecosystem and

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find ways to do this regionally. Mr. Flarida emphasized that PCFO is interested in being a resource for the City.

Following are some of the topics addressed by PCFO.

Communities involved with PCPO are Cuyahoga County, Moreland Hills and Oakwood Village. It was pointed out that each community initiates its own resolution to tackle various missions; i.e., Oakwood Village is planning to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030. Since the PCFO last visited Council, more communities are interested in working together. Cincinnati, Columbus, Garfield Heights, and Cleveland Heights were mentioned. As there are large DOD grants available, it would be beneficial to have all communities work together to help secure funds. It was noted that Cuyahoga County reaffirmed the commitment to 100% gas reductions by 2050 and that there is a positive working relationship with Cuyahoga County leveraging existing relationships and introducing additional communities to the program.

Councilwoman Blankfeld mentioned the matter of traffic and greenhouse emissions and wondered how that can be defined in our small city to reach a certain goal. Ms. Stachew mentioned that Oakwood Village has the traffic concern and infrastructure will be addressed. She pointed out that more and more vehicles are being transitioned to electric, and because of that, charging stations need to be in place. She stated that as more communities are a part of PCPO, strategic planning for placement of stations collaboratively will be well organized since the needs of various communities will be known; hence chargers would be efficiently placed. In addition, PCPO can help secure grants for the purchase of charging stations.

The benefits of communities working together toward common goals as part of PCPO were reiterated. PCPO can provide resources so that no community stands alone; the strategy encourages regionalization support.

Regarding emissions, Councilman King reported that it is commonly thought to originate from vehicles and while that is true, the predominant source in the City of University Heights comes from our homes in the form of electricity and natural gas. The benefit of solar panel installations was mentioned as something PCPO could help the city explore.

Vice Mayor Weiss asked about the relationship between Cuyahoga County and the City of Cleveland regarding this issue. Ms. Stachew stated that Cuyahoga County has passed an ordinance and that Cleveland is on board. She summarized that in Northeast Ohio, the following are on board with PCFO: Cleveland, Lakewood, Solon, Cleveland Heights, Shaker Heights, and Moreland Hills. It was pointed out that that the goal is for the County to pass down to the suburbs initiatives taken. Mrs. Weiss also asked about what residents could do to reduce emissions originating from their homes.

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Ms. Stachew mentioned that retrofits to homes and commercial establishments can be reviewed, new policies can be created, etc. Many ideas were brought up and the fact that PCFO can assist in many areas working on the methods to reach the goals. Aggregation was stressed.

Mr. Flarida stated that these are complex issues. He discussed Carmel, Indiana, a city that has transformed their streets reducing the number of emissions coming from vehicles on the road. He noted that while these are complex issues, PCFO does comprehensive planning considering a variety of topics. He stated that purchasing renewable energy is important and the process impacts the community because that's where residents are receiving power from. He also noted that not every state as the right to select their provided. Discussion ensued regarding sustainability planning, a climate action plan, and the fact that residents need the right tools and education to understand how to increase the efficiency of their homes.

Councilwoman Sax noted that the city is reviewing zoning, building and housing codes, and embarking upon a facilities assessment of all municipal buildings. She asked if the group has experience working with cities building from scratch and how the city would be guided. Mrs. Sax also questioned whether there would be grant writing assistance and how many hours would be committed.

Mr. Flarida explained how their technical experts would be connected to city representatives from the very beginning to discuss RFPs, contracts, etc. Building codes are something that PCFO can help review; there are consultants focusing on solar developments, etc. Regarding grant assistance/writing, while PCFO can assist, it was stressed that a city representative should be involved to ensure all requests are explicitly specified

Mrs. Sax discussed the City's revenue and mentioned that funds were not unlimited with the City and the services of PCFO suggested must be costly; she asked that we work with a reasonable budget. It was noted that working with PCFO has the advantage of having many experts, so money that would have to be spent on an external consultant, for example, would not be necessary and that expense would not occur.

Discussion continued regarding logistics of how the services would be implemented and the fact that comprehensive, collaboratively planning would be beneficial. The Foundation Center Library was mentioned as a resource.

Mr. Korea reiterated comments made at the Council meeting that it is important to have a "go-to" designee on this ordinance. It was agreed that Mr. Englebrecht will be the designee.

Mayor Brennan confirmed Mrs. Weiss' question that Housing and Community Development Director Englebrecht would be the point person for this ordinance. Mayor Brennan commented that Mr. Englebrecht would be the day-to-day point person contact and that they would be working together as he (Mayor) has a lot of interest in this.

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Mr. Englebrecht was present and stated that he supports this organization, that this is a chance to also lead the city in requiring that new buildings be environmentally friendly.

Councilman Gould referred to language in the original ordinance regarding commitments to certain items and asked if this is contingent upon the City signing up for services.

Vice Mayor Weiss clarified Mr. Gould’s comments and referred to Sections 2 and 7 of the ordinance; she asked if “**work towards**” would be agreeable. Mr. Gould concurred. Ms. Stachew stated that is not uncommon to have changes made. It was requested of Law Director McConville to make the discussed changes **in Sections 2 and 7 to change the word “commit” to “work toward” and delete reference to Earth Day in Section 8 as the deadline has passed.**

Mr. Gould discussed the importance of committee inclusion of matters relating to zoning work as the process continues. Mr. Gould stated that the Council is committed to this work and there are multiple areas that are being developed now that could be influenced by PCFO. It was reiterated that this community has limited resources. Mr. Gould stated that he hopes there will be innovation and resources that PCFO exposes the City to find grant dollars.

Councilman King thanked the representatives noting that he appreciated that PCFO continues to work with us until we get to the point where we enact the resolution to formalize the relationship.

Mrs. Weiss thanked everyone for coming tonight, and stated that the city is excited about the project and looking forward to working together.

2. Charter Review Ordinance 2022-25, Establishing a Charter Review Commission

Vice Mayor Weiss summarized the ordinance, stating that the way the ordinance is written now specifies that every Council member chooses one representative for the committee and then the committee chooses three members as a whole. There is an extremely tight timeline of two meetings a month until the committee is comfortable with their outcome.

Mrs. Weiss stated that Mayor Brennan has suggested changing some of the committee members by either the number of appointments or the method of selection/appointment. She stated that an election would be cumbersome, not cost effective and would delay the process for at least seven months

Vice Mayor Weiss stated that she believed that some are agreeable to updating this ordinance. She suggested that the Mayor could be given another pick. Vice Mayor Weiss noted that this group could come up with some ideas and opened the floor for discussion.

Councilman Gould referred to a spreadsheet obtained from the Mayor and Managers' Association which polled some communities regarding how other cities handled this. Mr. Gould summarized responses received, and reported that Woodmere has an election; there are five counties where the Mayor makes the appointments and the appointments are then confirmed by the Council. Of the feedback received, there were a variety of methods employed, including where the Council makes all the appointments.

Mr. Gould believed that the residents should be able to participate. He stated that perhaps some sort of hybrid could be formulated where at least a portion of the community could have a direct vote.

Mrs. Sax discussed responses from the poll Mr. Gould obtained and thanked him for getting it.

Councilman Gould asked for clarification on whether the Charter Review Commission is a creation of the Council; Law Director McConville answered yes. Mr. Gould continued to clarify that what Council is doing by that is seeking advice from citizens about what amendments to our charter should be placed on the ballot. Mr. Gould referred to Article 8, Section 5, where it talks about amendments to the Charter; it says that a vote of any five of the council members can place on the ballot an amendment to the charter. At the end of the charter review process, the recommendations of that body have to return here and that five of the seven of us have to agree with them. Mr. Gould asked about this. Mr. McConville stated that yes, unless there is something in this ordinance that contradicts that. A question was asked of Mr. Gould if he contemplated that the Commission might put amendments on the ballot directly rather than bringing back to Council.

Councilman Gould stated that he didn't mind expanding the number of people the Mayor appoints and the City does better when there is consensus.

Law Director McConville referred to Section 6 of the ordinance and addressed Mr. Gould's query.

Vice Mayor Weiss affirmed that this to be a collaborative effort. She pointed out that she believes no one is opposed to increasing the amount of the Mayor's choices here. She stated that there should be an odd number of people on the commission.

It was agreed that Council would have one each and the Mayor would have four; making a total of eleven, an odd number.

Mrs. Sax referred to the wording in Section 6, suggesting that the word "shall" be changed to "may".

Mr. McConville stated that it has been too long since the last Charter Review and amendments need to be made. He stated that it should be specifically stated that Council can consider recommendations one by one and that it is critical there is a process that all are confident with.

A process which would include the Administration's position on proposed amendments was discussed; Councilman Gould expressed concern that the Mayor should also be aware of proposals in efforts to have full disclosure.

Council Committee of the Whole

Reference to Section 8 of the ordinance was made and it was suggested that information about a public hearing regarding amendments be inserted there.

Vice Mayor Weiss referred to the June 8 deadline proposed and asked if the group thought there was enough time. It was agreed that the appointments to the committee would be announced at the last Council meeting of the year, June 21, 2022.

Motion by Mr. Gould, second by Mrs. Blankfeld, to refer Ordinance 2022-25 with amendments made by the Law Director, to Council.

All voted "aye" and the motion passed.

The meeting was then adjourned.

Submitted by,

Jeune Drayton
Assistant Clerk of Council

Michele Weis, Vice Mayor/Chair
Council Committee of the Whole