



Summary Report

City Manager's Listening Session Topic: Environmental Sustainability Monday, October 29, 2018 | 6:00pm – 8:00pm First Church Fellowship Hall

On Monday, October 29, 2018, the City Manager held a community listening session to discuss *Environmental Sustainability* in the City of Oberlin. This was the second of several listening sessions to be held, covering various topics. Approximately 50 individuals attended the October 29th session, including residents, Oberlin College students, City Councilmembers, City staff, representatives from non-profit organizations, and City board/commission members. Participants were encouraged to network with each other, and with City staff and non-profit organizations from 6:00pm-6:20pm.

The City Manager once again explained that the purpose of the listening sessions are to better understand what is important to the community. To facilitate the discussion, three questions were posed to the group:

- How do you define environmental sustainability?
- How does the City meet your expectations in the area of environmental sustainability?
- How can the City improve in the area of environmental sustainability?

Participants were to respond to the questions individually from 6:20pm-6:40pm and then discuss the responses in small groups from 6:40pm-7:00pm. From 7:00pm-8:00pm, a large group discussion ensued, responding to the questions posed above. The following are key points gathered from responses to each question:

How do you define environmental sustainability?

Environmental sustainability entails maintaining human life and the physical environment without causing significant damage to either in an effort to sustain the same or better quality of life for future generations. This involves being mindful of the balance between available resources/energy and the demands of society in an effort to address climate change effectively and to preserve the natural environment. Environmental sustainability includes making continuous, substantial improvements to transportation, building practices, technology, lifestyle, etc. to reduce greenhouse gas levels in the atmosphere, conserve water, and protect natural resources. Emphasis within these efforts should be placed on broad educational programs to sustain environmental sustainability that is accessible and available to a community at large.

How does the City meet your expectations in the area of environmental sustainability?

The City provides quality sustainable services, including water, refuse/recycling collection, and electric which has an 85% renewable energy portfolio. The City has also put forth various policies and procedures to promote environmental sustainable efforts, including the meadow ordinance, the utilization of electric vehicles throughout City departments, the development of a Climate Action Plan and Zero Waste Plan, green building requirements and the use of the Sustainable Reserve Fund in supporting sustainability initiatives. Having a dedicated Sustainability Coordinator on staff, as well as boards and commissions like the Public Utilities Commission (PUC), Open Space & Visual Environment Commission and the Resource Conservation & Recovery Commission also speak to the City's commitment to environmental sustainability.

The City also promotes environmental sustainability through its support of various initiatives and non-profit organizations. This includes support of community gardening, the Environmental Dashboard, local food sourcing, solar initiatives, and the support of organizations like POWER and Zion CDC that encourage energy efficiency within the community. The City's status as a Tree City and Bicycle Friendly Community also demonstrate its dedication to sustainable practices, in addition to the City's infrastructure promoting walkability and the preservation of green space.

How can the City improve in the area of environmental sustainability?

The City can improve its methods of measuring greenhouse gas emissions to gather better data, as well as enhance its green building requirements and make energy efficiency improvements to City buildings. The City's communication and education efforts can also be improved upon, including communicating in more practical terms and in a more inclusive manner so that the information is disseminated to the community as a whole. These communication efforts should be both educational (including information on incentive programs, the new storm water utility, recycling programs, etc.) and promotional of the City's accomplishments so that Oberlin may serve as a model for other communities.

The City can also improve its environmental sustainability efforts by utilizing the Sustainable Reserve Fund, working to expand public transportation, improving its infrastructure, including the expansion of sidewalks/bike paths, by establishing more incentive programs for environmental sustainability efforts by residents, businesses and local agricultural entities, and through better implementation of the Climate Action Plan and Zero Waste Plan. It was also suggested to advance sustainability initiatives within the community by encouraging cooperation between the large entities within Oberlin, such as the City, Oberlin Schools, Oberlin College, and non-profit organizations.

Other specific suggestions include developing a green burial section in Westwood Cemetery, banning pesticides, straws, plastic utensils and plastic bags, developing a food scrap/organics collection program, expanding solar initiatives to all residents, reducing the mowing of pollinator habitats during the summer so that they can increase, and removing invasive species from green spaces. Additionally, it was suggested to consider the well-being of people and the environment in the City's economic development planning, specifically including the encouragement of alternative housing instead of individual homes.