

**MINUTES
JOINT MEETING
CULTURAL AND SOCIAL AWARENESS COMMISSION
ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION**

December 10, 2015
City Council Chambers

The special joint meeting of the Cultural and Social Awareness Commission and the Environmental Commission of the City of Woodstock was called to by Chairpersons Laura Crain and Erica Poremba at 5:33PM on Thursday, December 10, 2015 in the Council Chambers at City Hall. Notice of this special meeting was posted at least 48 hours in advance as required, and the media and all Commission members were notified of this special meeting.

Roll calls were taken.

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL AWARENESS COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT: W. Donato, J. Hudson, J. Rivera, and L. Crain.

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL AWARENESS COMMISSION MEMBERS ABSENT: I. Sagrado.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT: L. Kacmar, S. Wenzel, and E. Poremba. J. Krandel arrived at 5:37PM.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION MEMBERS ABSENT: E. Ellinghausen.

STAFF PRESENT: Human Resources Director Deb Schober, Planning and Zoning Administrator Jim Kastner, Assistant Director of Public Works Tom Migatz, and Transportation Commission Chairman Andrew Celentano.

OTHERS PRESENT: City Clerk Cindy Smiley

DESIGNATION OF ACTING CHAIRMAN

It was the consensus of both Commissions that Cultural and Social Awareness Chairperson Laura Crain serve as Chairperson of the Joint Commission for this meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment forthcoming.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Presentation – Alternatives to Plastic Shopping Bags

Cynthia Kanner, Founder of the BYOBag Committee of the Environmental Defenders, made a presentation regarding the Defenders' efforts to limit the use of plastic shopping bags. She noted the group has been working on this project for two years and has received two grants with the goal of reducing the use of plastic bags in McHenry County.

Ms. Kanner noted that, to date, the group has worked with communities and business in an educational outreach program to encourage people to bring their own bags when shopping. She showed those present an example of window signs that have been provided to businesses indicating that those businesses encourage the use of reusable bags. She also stated the group has been working with municipalities to proclaim a BYOBag Month.

Ms. Kanner gave a brief history of the plastic bag, noting they are made from oil and gas which are non-renewable resources and cannot be replenished and that it is the goal to get people away from

using up non-renewable resources. In addition, plastic bags create a great deal of waste and litter which can be seen along roadways and in waterways. Ms. Kanner talked about the oceans of debris that have collected in the oceans, much of which is plastic bags. She also described how these bags affect the environment, including wildlife.

Ms. Kanner then described the various types of reusable bags that are available, noting it is not necessary to use plastic bags. She stated the plastic bags are not free, with their cost being passed on to the consumer and that most plastic bags are not recycled due to contamination and costs.

Ms. Kanner encouraged the team approach, with municipal and community leaders working along with the businesses to educate the public and minimize the use of unnecessary plastic bags. She stated her opinion that people are not unwilling to use reusable bags, but rather forget to take them when shopping.

Ms. Kanner noted that one billion plastic bags are thrown away in the United States each year. She talked about the various myths regarding reusable bags, including contamination.

Ms. Kanner stated the goal is to make McHenry County bag-free by Earth Day 2017 by working community by community and with MCOG.

Chairperson Crain opened the meeting to comments.

J. Hudson asked several questions concerning the spread of disease through the use of reusable bags as cited by a study done in California and Arizona. He stated that, according to the study, 12% of the reusable bags were contaminated with bacteria. Ms. Kanner noted the numbers are very small and questioned the study, noting it was funded by the American Chemical Society.

Mr. Hudson noted that the washing of the reusable bags also affects global warming and that gas is used in cars also. He further noted it might be more environmentally effective to limit the gasoline used in cars.

Ms. Kanner noted there is energy used in the manufacture of the plastic bags also and that the plastic bags also contribute to litter. Mr. Hudson responded that the plastic bags only contribute to about 1-2% of all litter.

W. Donato noted that the energy used to wash the bags is not even close to the energy used to make the plastic bags.

In response to a question from J. Hudson, Ms. Kanner noted the stores would provide plastic bags for bread and sleeves for meat. She also noted the stores would save money with the use of plastic bags.

Mr. Hudson expressed concern that many people who are just getting by could not afford to buy reusable bags. Ms. Kanner expressed her opinion that everyone will save with the use of reusable bags as the stores will no longer have to buy and provide plastic bags and would pass that savings on to the customers. W. Donato stated there is evidence that prices have come down in communities where reusable bags are required. He described the programs of some other communities, noting that each program is a bit different.

Mr. Hudson noted he supports this idea but would like more information. He asked about the argument that people will shop elsewhere. Ms. Kanner replied that this is an argument for implementing the

program county-wide, noting there is support for implementing a county-wide program. E. Poremba stated many retailers already offer the options and her opinion that most could probably be convinced if the City is behind the program. Ms. Kanner noted this is why the educational component is so important.

In response to a questions from S. Wenzel, T. Migatz stated there are instances where bags have made their way into the public infrastructure. J. Kastner noted that plastic bags have plugged the drains of detention basins.

In response to a question from J. Kastner as to why there are so few communities in Illinois which ban plastic bags, Ms. Kanner stated it is her wish that McHenry County be the first to do so. She also stated that she believes a County is unable to pass such an ordinance which is why it is being approached on the municipal level. Discussion ensued of the authority of Home Rule versus non-Home Rule communities concerning the passage of such an ordinance, with J. Kastner noting that a non-Home Rule community is unable to pass this type of tax. It was noted that the development of a program and ordinance and its subsequent consideration and possible passage by the City Council will take some time and that the City may have attained Home Rule status by that time.

Nancy Shitzel, President of the Environmental Defenders talked about why communities are choosing to implement such a program and the lobbying efforts of the plastic bag industry. She also stated that McHenry County is very progressive, with residents who are very concerned about the environment.

J. Kastner noted the City Council looks at a number of issues representing a wide variety of interests and opinions. He stated if the two Commissions decide to take on the development of a bagless program to present to the Council, they should explore the issue from all sides including those of the businesses/retailers, the environmentalists, and the residents. D. Schober noted that Council is tasked with taking into consideration all groups and should be presented with a program that is widely acceptable. J. Kastner also noted that certain businesses would probably be exempted such as dry cleaners.

Ms. Kanner stated many business in Algonquin have been interviewed with only one expressing opposition and all others being very supportive. She noted there will be a lot of support in the Woodstock business community because they will benefit from this program.

E. Poremba stated the question before the Commissions is whether the groups are willing to take on this project. Ms. Shitzel stated the Defenders would be very happy if Woodstock would proclaim a Bag Free month. W. Donato stated the first process would be education and the proclamation could be part of that.

Motion by W. Donato, second by J. Krandel, to recommend to the Woodstock City Council that they proclaim the month of April as BYOBag Month in the City of Woodstock.

A roll call vote was taken. Ayes: W. Donato, J. Hudson, J. Rivera, L. Kacmar, J. Krandel, S. Wenzel, E. Poremba, and Chairperson L. Crain. Nays: none. Absentees: I. Sagrado and E. Ellinghausen. Abstentions: none. Motion carried.

W. Donato volunteered to research and develop the proclamation.

L. Crain recommended discussion and consideration by the Commissions of whether they wished to take on development of this program and its recommendation to Council. E. Poremba reiterated the

previously discussed point that the proposal should take into account all factions and opinions. In response to a question from S. Wenzel, L. Crain stated it will probably take one year to research the issue, hold discussions with the various interest groups, and develop the program and ordinance to present to the Council. She expressed her opinion that the City is ready to tackle this issue and that it will take both Commissions working together to do so. J. Kastner noted it would be helpful to obtain existing wording of ordinances from other communities who have been successful in implementing such a program.

Discussion followed of what constitutes a reusable bag and the idea of making the distribution of reusable bags to the public part of BYOBag Month.

Motion by S. Wenzel, second by W. Donato to move forward jointly to investigate and develop a BYOBag Program for the City of Woodstock.

A roll call vote was taken. Ayes: W. Donato, J. Hudson, J. Rivera, L. Kacmar, J. Krandel, S. Wenzel, E. Poremba, and Chairperson L. Crain. Nays: none. Absentees: I Sagrado and E. Ellinghausen. Abstentions: none. Motion carried.

It was the consensus of the members of the Environmental Commission that it will meet on Thursday, January 7 at 5:30PM.

It was the consensus of the members of both Commissions that they will next meet jointly on Thursday, January 7 at 6:00PM.

C. Kanner stated she will provide examples of ordinances and proclamations to Chairperson Crain who will forward them to D.Schober for dissemination to the group.

ADJOURN

Motion by L. Crain, second by W. Donato, to adjourn this joint meeting of the Cultural and Social Awareness Commission and the Environmental Commission, with the Cultural and Social Awareness Commission next meeting at 4:30PM on Monday, January 4, 2016, and the Environmental Commission next meeting at 5:30PM on Thursday, January 7, 2016. Ayes: W. Donato, J. Hudson, J. Rivera, E. Ellinghausen, L. Kacmar, J. Krandel, S. Wenzel, E. Poremba, and Chairperson L. Crain. Nays: none. Absentees: I. Sagrado and E. Ellinghausen. Abstentions: none. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 7:00PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Cindy Smiley
City Clerk