

Middletown Resource Recycling Advisory Commission
Special Meeting—March 4, 2025
WebEx

Minutes

Members Present: Stephan Allison, Nicole Charles, Brian Gomez, Izzy Guy, Rebecca McLachlan, Dan Schott, Krishna Winston (Chair), John Yarmolovich, Tisha Zawisky

Members Absent: Eleanor Nettleton, Jeanette Smith

Staff: Howard Weissberg, Acting Director of Public Works

Also Present: Lisa Liesener, Waste Reduction and Litter Assistant

1. Call to Order

The Chair, K. Winston, called the meeting to order at 7:05pm. H. Weissberg apologized for missing the deadlines for posting the January and February meetings. He cited the persisting vacancies and absences in the Public Works Department, and expressed his appreciation to the RRAC members for their patience. He noted that he himself would be departing soon and had wanted to meet with the Commission before that happened.

2. Acceptance of Minutes

The Chair asked whether there were additions or corrections to the minutes of the November 2024 regular meeting and the Decemer 9 special meeting. She reminded the Commission that she had not been present at the latter; it had been devoted to the revisions to the recycling ordinance that would broaden the Commission’s mandate, adding a focus on sustainability and augmenting the membership with two Common Council members. H. Weissberg was not certain whether the ordinance had been placed on the agenda for the March meeting of the General Counsel Commission. K.Winston said she would check with the Deputy General Counsel Wisneski, who had been closely involved in drafting the revised version. Hearing no additions or corrections to the two sets of minutes, the Chair declared them accepted.

3. Public Comment

No members of the public were present.

4. Staff Report

The Chair called on Acting Director Weissberg for his report. He began by noting the reitirement of Kim O’Rourke, whom he described as the driving force behind recycling and sustainability in the City for many years and a role model in the State. She would continue to be involved in EPR in her new position with the gas-cylinder Producer-Responsibility program. Although her retirement constituted a major loss to Public Works, the posting of the position, now closed, had drawn a considerable number of applicants, and he was optimistic that a well-qualified applicant would be identified. He said that his goal for the position was to have 50% devoted to materials management and the rest to sustainable practices, education, and outreach. Another positive factor was the presence of Lisa Liesener in the Department; she was picking up Save as You Throw, staffing the Clean Energy Task Force, working on

the HeatSmart program, monitoring the status of all the streetlights, and addressing the litter problem. H. Weissberg noted that he would be returning to the DOT to head up the road-paving program. He explained that the search for a Director of Public Works would have to be reopened because the Council had made changes to the requirements. Some discussion addressed the residency requirement attached to the position as a possible obstacle to attracting the best candidates.

H. Weissberg cited problems with the Save as You Throw program that threatened its viability, including the failure of the AI cameras to detect violations accurately; mistakes in the addresses to which carts were attributed; overall compliance; and availability of the orange and green bags in appropriate sizes. Having bags sold out of the Public Works office was not acceptable in the long run. The amount of time, effort, and funding needed was incommensurate with the small number of households involved. The survival of the Sanitation District hinged on making the program fiscally viable. One improvement in compliance might be achieved thanks to the Sanitation District Commission's recent decision to make recycling pick-ups weekly instead of bi-weekly; increasing pick-up of recyclables would keep them out of the trash and reduce the number of orange bags being used, which in turn would save residents some expense.

The Chair asked H. Weissberg about the possibility of having a recent member of the RRAC participate in interviewing candidates. He responded that such participation was not customary, but it would be helpful for the Commissioners to share desired qualifications and characteristics with HR.

5. Chair's Report

K. Winston noted that she would try to get time with the Mayor to propose a role for the Commission in hiring the Recycling and Sustainability Coordinator. She said she intended to attend meetings of the Sanitation District Commission more often to coordinate efforts between the commissions. She confirmed that the Sustainability ordinance had passed Public Works and Facilities and would, if all went smoothly, go to the Common Council at its April meeting.

6. Swap Shack

The Chair referred the Commissioners to I. Guy's recent suggestions for improved lighting and for making more room for new inventory. She commented on the gratifying neatness that had been established in the Shack and the willingness of Commissioners and others to serve as monitors. Once the weather improved the Commission could move forward with the construction of a Free Library as proposed by Cherokee Robbins, to be installed just outside the Recycling Center.

7. Too Good to Go Application & Program

B. Gomez reported on the program and his discussion with Sweet Harmony Café on the experience of working with it. His contact at Sweet Harmony had described setting up the program as easy and gratifying, in that excess food was being consumed rather than thrown out or sent to be composted, and customers who came in for the goody bags often purchased additional items, thereby increasing business volume. He thought Perk on Main might also be participating in the program. The Chair commented that Too Good to Go was much simpler to implement than food rescue programs such as that of Haven's Harvest and deserved to be adopted more widely in Middletown.

8. New Business

The Chair mentioned that she had originally planned for the Commission to discuss the transition to sustainability, but she felt that discussion should be postponed until after the vote by the Common Council. She asked the Commissioners to consider new leadership as the Commission embarked on a new phase in its identity and mandate. H. Weissberg urged the members to consider how they might interact with other City entities—departments, task forces, commissions, and the like—to promote thinking in terms of sustainability throughout City government and the community. He mentioned bodies that were natural allies—Complete Streets and Clean Energy for example—and stressed the importance of creating widespread awareness that sustainability was economically beneficial. He gave examples of implementing sustainable practices in road-paving. He suggested having a statement about the significance of sustainability included on the agenda of every Commission meeting and providing the framework for the meeting. He added that L. Liesener was working on replacing the EV charging stations in Melilli Plaza and behind Kid City. The entire project was funded by grants and would thus not cost the City anything.

9. Adjournment

A brief discussion ensued as to the advisability of holding the regular meeting scheduled for the fourth Monday in March. H. Weissberg thought that by the April meeting a new Recycling and Sustainability Coordinator would be in place. The Chair said she could provide minutes and an agenda and work with Public Works to get the meeting scheduled.

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded. The motion passed and the meeting was adjourned at 7:55 PM..

Respectfully submitted,



Krishna Winston
Chair, RRAC