Citizens Advisory Meeting
Minutes - April 16, 2019


Location: Phillips Park Visitor Center

Led by: Karen Wan

Meeting Overview:

We met on Tuesday, April 16th at the Phillips Parks Visitor Center to discuss proposed City of Aurora plans for becoming more sustainable and moving to a 100% Renewable Energy City. We had a spirited and provocative discussion on what it takes to make big and bold changes happen rapidly enough to address climate change and other environmental concerns.

One of the questions that arose is the effectiveness of top down versus bottom-up or grassroots leadership. So, the citizen feedback is shared in the context of our discussions.

Ideas for Creating Bold Change:

Building Grassroots Support
• Use the Next-door App to get feedback from Citizens in our neighborhoods. An example shared was how to find the best solar installer.
• Tap into the power of young minds to help us develop renewable options such as IMSA or local high schools
• Community Solar
• Would citizens be ok with increased taxes spread out over 25 years to pay for renewable energy?

Top-Down Leadership
• Get the mayor to publicly support green initiatives
• Consider Municipal Solar - wealthier investors invest $700 to $800 per panel, and receive dividend
• Learn from the leadership example of the Mayor of Indianapolis
• Aurora sign-up for Ready for 100 from the Sierra Club

Research
• Learn from renewable energy projects in St. Charles and Naperville
• Consider other types of power, such as underwater rotors or around dams
• Transform the old Caterpillar plant into a solar plant

Regional Partnerships
• The Fox Valley Sustainability Network is a good educational network, but isn’t set up to create bold change quickly
• There are many municipalities in the Fox Valley that Aurora could partner with on grants and knowledge sharing
• The Institute for Sustainability and Energy at Northwestern might be interested in working with us on the right project.
• Not everyone thinks we need partnerships. It could also be good to have our own energy system for Aurora.

**Additional Thoughts**

At the meeting, Karen Wan mentioned that she had led a green business network for the City of Chicago many years ago called the Waste to Profit Network. The network had two components — an innovation network, with paid members (mostly Fortune 100 Companies), and a free community network for smaller companies and communities. This was the first time that this approach was attempted with a by-product synergy network, and it was very successful. That network development aligned with the core organizing principles we discussed on Tuesday night.

As Karen and the team for the Comprehensive Renewable Energy Plan for the City of Aurora moved forward, our strategy will include both top-down and grassroots components.

In Karen’s experience with sustainable development projects, the most important aspect for success has been taking the necessary time to develop funding to create a program. Public and private funding is most likely going to be needed to boldly implement renewable energy in Aurora.

A bold and effective program is likely to require city, state and federal grant money as well as investment from citizens and/or wealthy individuals or corporations.

Partnerships are an essential part of the funding process. It’s best to develop them before going after funding. We have some work to do in Aurora, because we don’t have the same type of top-down leadership that the Mayor of Indianapolis has shown.

Some of you talked about the challenge of funding infrastructure and other expensive projects, and felt that only the wealthy could move us forward quickly enough.

We may need to get some wealthy donors or businesses working with us before the City of Aurora will take sustainability seriously. The city reflects what it thinks the people of Aurora want the most, which is economic development. A grassroots strategy would be to show the city that many, many voters want renewable energy solutions implemented and would be willing to be some taxes for it.

One of the attendees mentioned that in the last twenty five years, a lot of plans have come and go in Aurora. Very few of them happened. This is not unusual. Sometimes, the timing has to be right for big change to happen. Hopefully, our timing is right.

**Next Steps:**

1. Karen will share the feedback from this meeting at the next Sustainable Aurora meeting on May 9th, and incorporate some of your ideas into the Comprehensive Renewable Energy Plan
2. It seems possible that the Sustainable Aurora Board could go after low-hanging fruit, such as using the Next Door App, and engaging young innovators at IMSA.
3. We may be able to begin a process for looking for funding and investment of a bold Aurora Renewable Energy plan, if the Sustainable Aurora Board approves.
4. Potentially, the City of Aurora may commit to the Sierra Club’s Ready for 100.
By the next Citizens Advisory meeting in July, Karen will report on any of your ideas that we have been able to implement. Most of the ideas we discussed will probably take time to develop.

Thank you again for your time and generously sharing your ideas with us!