



SHAKER HEIGHTS

Sustainability Committee Minutes

Thursday, December 11, 2025

8:00 A.M.

VIA ZOOM PURSUANT TO CHAPTERS 113 AND 115
OF THE CODIFIED ORDINANCES (AS AMENDED IN ORDINANCE 22-28),
AND RESOLUTION 22-29, ENACTED ON MARCH 22, 2022

Members Present: Kim Bixenstine, Council Member, Committee Chair
Tenille Kaus, Council Member
Nancy Moore, Council Member
Shanna Keown, Citizen Member
Heather Weingart, Shaker Heights City Schools Board Member, Ex Officio

Others Present: David Weiss, Mayor
Matt Carroll, Chief Administrative Officer
Ramona Ferrell, Director of Public Works
Brian Talarczyk, Public Works Grounds Superintendent
Jeff Grosse, Shaker Heights City Schools
Joshua Romig, Shaker Heights Public Library Community Engagement Librarian
Michael Peters, Sustainability Coordinator

The meeting was called to order by Committee Chair Kim Bixenstine at 8:02 A.M.

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Chair’s Opening Remarks

Kim Bixenstine noted this was the last Sustainability Committee meeting of 2025 and her last meeting as chair. She expressed that it has been a privilege and joy to chair the committee over the last two years. Beginning in January 2026, Council Member Tenille Kaus will chair the committee. Council Members Bixenstine and Kaus will meet the following week to ensure a smooth transition.

Chair Bixenstine thanked all committee members for their active participation, thoughtful ideas and discussion, diligent preparation, and attendance. She especially thanked Michael Peters for his expertise, support, knowledge, and everything he does for the city and sustainability.

Recap of Committee Highlights

Kim Bixenstine provided a recap of major accomplishments, building on the great work done in the past by the city and the sustainability committee:

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1. **Citywide Composting Program** - The committee recommended the program, which was implemented and has been very successful in terms of both the number of participating households and the amount of food waste diverted from landfills. Josh Romig recently shared an email complimenting the city on composting at the library.
2. **Service Center Solar Project** - The committee unanimously recommended proceeding with the solar project, which represents an exciting sustainability initiative for the city.
3. **Grow Not Mow Planting Days** - Nancy Moore confirmed there were two formal planting days plus ongoing maintenance work. These efforts are transforming public lands in the city by removing invasive plants and advancing native plantings.
4. **Landscape Ordinance Amendments** - The committee advocated for amendments that achieved a good balance between preserving property values and protecting safety while promoting more natural landscapes. This involved considerable work, particularly by the Law Department with input from many departments, especially Public Works.
5. **New Schools Forum** - The committee launched a forum that includes both private and public schools meeting a couple of times per year to share sustainability best practices.
6. **Enhanced Collaboration** - The committee achieved enhanced collaboration with the Shaker School District and the Library. This is the first time a school board member and a library staff member have participated as panelists on the committee, furthering the Forward Together initiative.

Chair Bixenstine thanked everyone for their hard work and expressed that all should be proud of these accomplishments.

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Approval of the November 13, 2025 Meeting Minutes

The draft meeting minutes were presented for approval. The motion was moved by Council Member Moore and seconded by Council Member Kaus. The acceptance of the minutes was unanimously passed.

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Update on the Service Center Solar Project

Kim Bixenstine provided an update on the project. The roof is substantially complete, but work remains on Building B, which has been delayed by cold and snowy weather since Thanksgiving. The roof manufacturer needs to inspect the roof before solar panels can be installed on it.

Solar panels have been installed on most of Building A and part of Building B and still needs to be inspected. The project team is concerned that shoveling the roof could damage the roof membrane, and snowblowers are insufficient given the amount of snow and ice.

The project is also waiting on First Energy (CEI) to install the new upgraded transformer needed for the solar installation. The city approached First Energy approximately two months ago and the delay has been frustrating. The city will need to go on generator power for approximately three days during the transformer transition.

Michael Peters noted the city has received permits and is working on the transformer upgrade. He added that because the city has paid more than 5% of the contract price and has physically started construction, the project has met the qualifications for the federal tax credits. The delay is not expected to impact receipt of the credits.

Kim Bixenstine clarified the city expects to receive 30% back for the solar portion of the project (not the new roof) in 2027, as the city would file for the credits with its tax forms in 2026. Despite weather delays, the project remains in good shape.

Nancy Moore congratulated everyone involved, noting this has required moving multiple mountains. She emphasized this is the city's first building solar project and it was accomplished quickly from inception to culmination. She noted that trying to do anything quickly in Northeast Ohio is daunting. Moore stated the end result will be the final testimony to whether this will be a long-term asset to the city with significant ROI, and whether this is a promising model for going forward, especially with city-generated electricity.

Kim Bixenstine noted that everyone has learned a great deal through this process, which should make future projects easier. She mentioned that Michael Peters is working on a form for computing savings once the system is operational.

Michael Peters confirmed the city should have good data, having spoken with Compass (the developer) about the different data to be received. He expects to have all the data needed for a robust analysis of returns.

Tenille Kaus echoed the congratulations and noted that as she transitions to leadership, building off the momentum of the solar project, one interesting area to explore will be how to further encourage solar with residents and how that interacts with current building and approval processes, including where solar can be placed on residential homes. She suggested the City's strong commitment to solar demonstrated through this project might help advance residential solar, potentially through legislation and other changes.

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Subcommittee Updates

Stormwater & Greenspace

Kim Bixenstine reported on the Stormwater and Green Space subcommittee meeting held on November 18th. Julia LaRouche could not attend the Sustainability Committee meeting. A new member was introduced to the subcommittee, along with Lana Radl, who is co-chairing the subcommittee and chairing the Energy Subcommittee and has extensive expertise in sustainability.

Grow Not Mow

The next planting day is scheduled for April 11th from 10am to 1pm at Site 3, which is on Shaker Boulevard westbound near the RTA station at Warrensville. The group will plant 18 trees, additional native plants, and remove more invasive species.

Heritage Tree Awards and a Tree Board Symposium were discussed.

Reid Coffman, a professor at Kent State University in Landscape Architecture and member of the Tree Advisory Board (chaired by Council Member Moore), invited people to an event on Tuesday, December 9th at Bertram Woods Library where undergraduate students presented ideas for pollinator gardens and native gardens. Council Member Moore attended that event.

Kim Bixenstine attended another event Professor Coffman organized on December 3rd with four of his graduate students pursuing master's degrees in landscape architecture at Kent State. Their projects involved developing ideas for the space at the Middle School (in anticipation of the Middle School ultimately being demolished) and for the median strip with mixed-use developments. The presentations were very creative and inspirational.

Other Topics Discussed

The meeting included discussion of plastics in the environment and synthetic turf. Bixenstine noted the landscape ordinance was passed on October 27th and urged people to read it. She gave a report on the solar project.

Composting is anticipated to be included in the 2026 budget to continue the citywide project. Michael Peters is analyzing usage data and may move one or two bins around.

Lana Radl asked about the possibility of providing individual compost bins to residents, as done in some other jurisdictions. This would involve additional expense, so for now the city will continue the current program.

The committee also discussed low-waste local events, including at block parties.

Nancy Moore provided additional highlights on planning initiatives. She noted that as the region turns colder, attention turns to spring planning, with significant planning occurring in winter.

Kent State Collaboration on Grow Not Mow Site 3

Moore reported on a collaborative exposition on December 11th put on by Kent State University School of Landscape Architecture and Design. Dr. Reid Coffman, a Tree Advisory Board member and professor, had approximately six students produce design plans for Grow Not Mow Site 3 - something the committee has never had before.

The site has been planting in circular areas containing three trees each, based on planting theory (supported by research) that trees planted more closely together enhance each other's

growth. The committee wanted to add native gardens and began planting swamp milkweed in the center of each circle this year, but never had a design plan.

The students, who are in a Plant 101 course (beginning students), produced approximately six different design plans. Each focused on two areas: the area opposite the RTA parking lot on Shaker Boulevard westbound (formerly full of invasives) and individual circular plantings of three trees. The plans looked at sequential blooming patterns of native plants and plant height profiles to create comprehensive design plans.

The students' research and talent were impressive despite being beginning students. The committee now has six design plans that could be implemented piecemeal in individual circles or across the totality of the planting plan.

For the remainder of winter, the committee must determine how plants can be sourced and address maintenance requirements. Native gardens in this prominent location must be carefully maintained.

The committee will conduct planning in concert with Public Works before beginning the effort. Moore gave a shout-out to Reid Coffman and his students for their talent.

Moore highlighted that this project was initiated by Director Ramona Lowry-Farrell and Assistant Public Works Director Chuck Orłowski, who believe student mentorship programs are the future. Through collaboration with the city, they build capacity and compound return on investment.

The Grow Not Mow sites receive \$4,000 annually from the sustainability budget, which is compounded by plant donations from home growers, volunteer planting, volunteer watering, and volunteer maintenance. Moore expressed excitement about this collaboration with significant inspiration from Public Works.

Kim Bixenstine noted the city is fortunate to have Professor Coffman in the community and as a Tree Advisory Board member. The collaboration with him, his students, and the Kent State department is exciting.

Composting Program Update

Josh Romig shared an email he received from a nonprofit partnering with Shaker Heights Library about the composting program. Chair Bixenstine recognized Council Member Kaus, the chair-elect, who recommended placing composting bins at the library in addition to public elementary schools.

Joshua Romig read from the email from Access to Equity, a local nonprofit run by Shaker residents and headed by Louis Harris. The relevant portion stated:

"We deeply appreciate the library's commitment to sustainability through the provision of a composting station. While the vast majority of our donated produce is high quality, handling

fresh food inevitably results in some spoilage that must be responsibly managed. The library's station allows us to divert waste effectively, aligning with our operations and environmental best practices. This resource allows us to encourage composting among the families we serve, teaching valuable sustainable skills. For reference, a residential composting membership in the Cleveland area typically costs \$25 to \$35 a month. Having this service available at the library offers immense financial and educational value to our organization and the families we serve."

Romig thanked the Sustainability Committee for their advocacy, noting that without it the Library would not have the bins and would not have received this praise. The bins have meant so much to patrons who use library services and specifically to Access to Equity, which has a produce giveaway every Wednesday at the library building, helping them manage waste.

Kim Bixenstine thanked Romig and the Library for collaboration on not only composting but all sustainability initiatives, noting it has been wonderful to have him as an active committee participant.

Michael Peters provided a program update: As of Monday, December 8th, 1,144 households are participating and 121,477 pounds of food waste have been collected. He noted the committee was happy early on about collecting 17,000 or 35,000 pounds, so 121,000 pounds is significant progress.

Kim Bixenstine confirmed 1,144 households and expressed amazement, noting the program only started in late April. She thanked everyone involved.

Energy Subcommittee

Kim Bixenstine reported the Energy Subcommittee had not been very active due to former chair's health issue. The committee was excited to have Lana Radl as the new chair.

Most of the November 18th subcommittee meeting was devoted to discussing roofs, particularly standing metal seam roofs, which have sustainability benefits. The discussion covered pros and cons and issues with aesthetics and design criteria of the Architectural Board of Review (ABR) in Shaker Heights.

The committee invited Dan Feinstein, the Planning Department representative on the ABR, and Hans Walter, the ABR chair. They attended along with several residents particularly interested in this issue. Bixenstine noted she learned a great deal from the discussion.

The committee did not discuss any particular pending case before the ABR, but rather the issue in general. Dan Feinstein made the case that the ABR has been very progressive in its thinking and has permitted many new sustainable materials for years. The board has permitted solar panels even on the front of homes, which many municipalities do not allow.

Feinstein explained the ABR's role is to ensure any additions or exterior changes to homes in Shaker are appropriate to the house style. The board has design standards that can differ for different home styles.

The day after the subcommittee meeting, Council Members Moore and Bixenstine met with Hans Walter. They indicated they will take the discussion back to the full ABR to develop clear guidelines on conditions and circumstances under which metal seam roofs would be permitted, so there are clear guidelines when requests are made to replace roofs with standing metal seam roofs. The discussion appeared productive.

Nancy Moore provided additional context on the conflict, which can be stated in simple terms but involves complex substance. When aesthetics (the housing style an applicant has) are inappropriate for a type of roof deemed sustainable and more practical for solar installation, there is a conflict between sustainability and aesthetics.

The ABR, by its standards and guidelines, weighs in on aesthetics. The question becomes: as the planet warms and climate changes, where does the City want to be in terms of flexing aesthetic standards and accommodating more sustainable roofing types? Similar conflicts will arise with other sustainability measures.

Moore recalled conflicts over 99% efficiency furnaces requiring white PVC piping vented on house exteriors, which people found aesthetically displeasing. As the community works through these conflicts, it's important that no one is autocratic. The community needs to think about where it wants to be not just today but 100 years from now.

Moore lauded Dan Feinstein, the ABR, and everyone in the city who works hard to hear each other, noting Shaker Heights is an exception in this regard. This was another example of working to hear each other and accommodate change, even if in baby steps.

Kim Bixenstine agreed completely that it was a thoughtful discussion.

Michael Peters expressed appreciation for both Planning and the ABR coming to the meeting, which was very helpful. It helped many people understand the ABR's role and how it has guidelines that differ from other committees or boards.

Kim Bixenstine added that it was explained and made clear that the ABR is independent, so City Council and the Mayor cannot control what the ABR does.

Shaker Heights Schools Sustainability Forum

The next Schools Forum is scheduled for January 26th at 3:30pm. Michael Peters invited anyone interested in attending to contact him. Kim Bixenstine noted that Tenille Kaus should be added to the invitation list.

Shaker Heights City Schools Updates

Kim Bixenstine noted the committee received an excellent update at the previous meeting from Michael Fodor, the school's sustainability consultant from Emerald Built Environments, with Jeff Grosse (Assistant Superintendent) also present.

Heather Weingart reported that Michael Fodor presented the full sustainability report to the school board on Tuesday evening. She will forward the approximately 35-page report to the committee and characterized it as outstanding. Jeff Grosse was currently driving and attending the meeting but unable to participate.

Weingart noted the school board will hold its annual retreat during the first two weeks of January, when committees will be reassigned. Her term ends December 31st, so there will be a new school board representative on the Sustainability Committee. Jeff Grosse will continue attending as needed.

Kim Bixenstine thanked Weingart for her participation and for being a fabulous partner, extending thanks for her service on the school board.

Report Highlights

When asked about highlights from the 35-page report, Weingart discussed a table showing each building (not just elementary schools) with the feasibility of installing solar panels and the ROI for each. She found it interesting that the table doesn't include potential grants and other funding sources that would reduce the ROI timeline. She raised this point at the board meeting, having learned through the Sustainability Committee what the city has been able to accomplish and that there are avenues besides simple payouts for solar panels.

Weingart noted several other items already in process, including how buildings will be heated and cooled, with recommendations from Emerald that the district is moving forward with. She characterized the study as excellent and noted that people in the community versed in sustainability will find it incredibly useful as a guide to the schools' intentions and demonstration of serious sustainability efforts.

Pollinator Garden Signage

Nancy Moore thanked Heather Weingart for her leadership on sustainability, noting that without it there would not be new signage for the Pollinator Garden created at Onaway School several years ago, which has drawn considerable attention. Weingart's leadership allowed a small committee to gain approval from Shaker Schools for the signage, which was then fabricated by Lupine Studios (the same studio that created Grow Not Mow signs).

Moore emphasized that sustainability work has two responsibilities: implementing projects and practices, and educating about them. The larger population moves toward sustainability measures at different speeds, and differences can be stark - some measures look, feel, and give the community a different appearance.

The signage will educate people about why natives are planted for biodiversity and why biodiversity is the planet's future. Continuing to plant the same five species means that if one pest, fungus, or infection wreaks havoc on any of them, diversity is lost, leading to a poorer planet with less wildlife. While a sign at a school garden may seem like a small project, it is immensely important.

Moore thanked Weingart again for her leadership, noting this would never have happened without it.

Heather Weingart thanked Moore and noted approximately seven to ten people worked together to accomplish this. She mentioned receiving an email yesterday confirming the sign would arrive in a couple of weeks and would be installed. She expressed appreciation for the collaboration.

School Composting Program

Kim Bixenstine thanked Jeff Grosse for his collaboration on the composting project and noted Michael Peters's statistics on the program's success. She noted the statistics don't include waste diverted from landfills by the schools.

Heather Weingart reported that according to the sustainability report, the schools have diverted 77,000 pounds of waste through composting.

Kim Bixenstine noted the combined total of approximately 200,000 pounds is amazing, especially since the program only started in late April.

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Chair's Remarks/Old Business/New Business

Swap Meet at Nature Center

Joshua Romig reminded the committee about the swap meet scheduled for March 21st (a Saturday) from 10am to 2pm at the Nature Center. Kim Bixenstine and Tenille Kaus will ensure there is representation at the event. Bixenstine suggested communications staff from the library and city coordinate to publicize the event.

Soil Composting Program Proposal

Nancy Moore asked permission from the committee to present on the need to develop a soil composting program in Public Works. She noted Brian Talarczyk has been involved with efforts to create organic soil composting and is the expert within Public Works.

The need has become apparent through the committee's close work with Rust Belt Riders. One Rust Belt Riders subsidiary produces Tilth, their soil compound resulting from composting.

Public Works is bound by municipal bidding law and ordinance and cannot simply contract with any soil composting company when organic soils are needed.

An efficient and cost-saving approach would be for the city to compost its own organic soil mix. Public Works has the knowledge to do this, but there are constraints based on the area where this activity might occur.

Moore requested to discuss this possibility with Public Works during January. Depending on their advice regarding process, she would like to bring the process back to the committee if there appears to be a viable approach to pursue this as a project, pending committee approval.

Kim Bixenstine supported this and noted Michael Peters would be happy to get involved and help.

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There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:49 A.M. Kim Bixenstine extended best wishes to all for joyful, healthy, relaxing holidays and a great new year, and thanked everyone again for their wonderful support and participation. The next meeting is scheduled for January 8, 2026 at 8:00am.



Michael Peters
Sustainability Coordinator