



Sustainability Committee Minutes

Thursday, January 8, 2026

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: Tenille Kaus, Council Member, Committee Chair
Carmella Williams, Council Member
Shanna Keown, Citizen Member

Others Present: David Weiss, Mayor
Kim Bixenstine, Council Member
Peter Chengelis, Council Member
Matt Carroll, Chief Administrative Officer
Ramona Lowery-Ferrell, Director of Public Works
Brian Talarczyk, Public Works Grounds Superintendent
Joshua Romig, Shaker Heights Public Library Community Engagement Librarian
John Barber, Stormwater & Greenspace Subcommittee Member
Meg Hennessey, Resident
Michael Peters, Sustainability Coordinator

The meeting was called to order by Committee Chair Tenille Kaus at 8:03 A.M.

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Chair's Opening Remarks

Tenille Kaus introduced herself as the new chair of the Sustainability Committee for the next two years. She explained that every two years, City Council rotates committee assignments and chairs. She welcomed former committee chair Kim Bixenstine and thanked Michael Peters for his great support and wealth of knowledge to the committee.

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Approval of the December 11, 2025 Meeting Minutes

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

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CITY OF SHAKER HEIGHTS

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Introduction of New Committee Members

Mayor Weiss provided introductions of committee members, noting the committee reconstitutes every two years with respect to council members. Tenille Kaus will chair the committee for the next two years, with Nancy Moore and Carmela Williams serving as the other council members. Nancy Moore was unable to attend due to medical procedures. Peter Chengelis was also introduced as a new council member, formally sworn in earlier in the week.

The Mayor noted that any council member can attend and participate in any committee meeting whether or not they are formally assigned to that committee. Kim Bixenstine, the former chair, was present at the meeting.

Mayor Weiss noted the city is in the process of firming up community members. Meg Hennessey was introduced as a prospective citizen member who was attending to observe the meeting.

Other participants introduced included Joshua Romig from the Shaker Heights Public Library, Brian Talarczyk from Public Works, and John Barber. The Mayor noted that John Barber, although a Cleveland Heights resident, is a valued guest of the Shaker Sustainability Committee. He has many years of experience and knowledge about the history of both Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights, and does amazing work on sustainability and environmental issues for both communities.

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Update on The Service Center Solar Project

Kim Bixenstine reported there were delays due to early cold weather and snow in completing the roof, which held up solar installation. With the warming experienced over the past week, she expressed hope they are close to completing the roof. They were working on installation of solar panels on the completed portions of the building, which was almost all of Building A and a substantial part of Building B. The roof work was estimated to need approximately seven more days to complete.

Bixenstine noted that weather continues to be a factor—not so much the cold but the snow preventing roof access, and also high winds that impede the installation process. The city has also been waiting on CEI (Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company) for installation of a new, upgraded, more powerful transformer that will be needed to turn on the new system.

Despite the delays, the good news is that the city is in good shape to qualify for the investment tax credits by having expended over 5% of the purchase price and having started and made good progress on installation prior to the end of 2025.

Background and Project Details

Michael Peters provided background for new committee members. The project has been in planning stages for a long time and under construction for the past several months. The Service Center has a courtyard in the middle (where residents drop off recyclables on weekends). The large building to

the right is Building A; the building to the left (where residents drop off items like light bulbs or hazardous waste) is Building B. Both buildings needed new roofs.

There were complications with the old roof being quite old with multiple layers, taking longer than expected to remove. The new roof is nearly complete, with some minor expected repairs. To expedite the project, solar panel installation began before the entire roof was completed. At some point, the installers caught up with the completed roof sections. Between that and the holidays, installers were off the roof working on other projects.

As soon as both Building A and Building B roofs are complete, installers will return to complete the solar panel installation. The city expects completion in the first quarter with cooperation from the weather.

Federal Tax Credits

Peters explained one reason for wanting to complete as much as possible in 2025 was to qualify for a federal tax credit for 30% of the cost of the solar installation. The city wanted to ensure it met all necessary requirements to qualify, which it has, but the project must still be completed to apply for the credit.

One critical piece for final completion (enabling the system to be turned on and produce energy) is a new transformer. At certain times when not all electricity produced by the panels is being consumed by the building itself, it can be sent back into the grid, requiring a bigger transformer. An unintended benefit is that Public Works will have this bigger transformer for future needs, such as charging electric vehicles.

The city must work with First Energy and Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company for the transformer installation, as they are the utility provider. Public Works continues working with them. The electricity will need to be cut to the building for approximately three days during the transformer swap-out, with a generator on-site to power the building during that time.

Project Management

Peters noted the city has full project calls every two weeks with all involved parties: city staff, Compass (the developer hired to manage the project), YellowLite (the installer), and Giraffe (the consultant assisting with federal tax credit filing). These calls will continue until project completion and are scheduled through the first quarter.

Ramona Lowery-Farrell from Public Works added that the city is waiting on OUPS (Ohio Utilities Protection Service) to complete marking, which was delayed due to snow. This marking is needed for the transformer work before any cutting can be done. She will check again on the status.

Kim Bixenstine thanked the administration for the huge amount of time devoted to this project, particularly Public Works personnel, as well as the Legal Department, Finance Department, Mayor, CAO, and Michael Peters. She noted that one ongoing project after installation completion will be monitoring savings. The expectation is that green energy generated by solar panels will be significantly less expensive than from the utility.

Michael Peters is developing a formula and report format for tracking savings. This will be an ongoing responsibility of the committee to oversee.

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Subcommittee Updates

Michael Peters explained that unlike many other city committees, the Sustainability Committee has subcommittees as a way for residents and those interested in sustainability topics to interact with the city on different projects. There are currently three subcommittees: Stormwater and Greenspace, Energy, and the School Sustainability Forum. The committee is considering whether this is the best structure going forward.

Stormwater & Greenspace

Michael Peters reported this subcommittee was previously chaired by Julia LaRouche, a citizen member, who will hopefully continue attending subcommittee meetings.

The subcommittee discusses various initiatives around stormwater and green space. One major initiative is the Grow Not Mow program, where publicly or city-owned land can be nominated through a process that goes through administration, Public Works, Law, and other departments for validation as a potential site, then comes to this committee for approval.

Grow Not Mow Sites

There are currently three sites, all along the Doan Brook:

- Site 1: Corner of Courtland and South Park Boulevards, across from Hathaway Brown playing fields
- Site 2: South Park and Lee Roads, farther west down the Doan Brook
- Site 3: Shaker Boulevard just west of Warrensville Center Road, across from the RTA park and ride (nearly contiguous to Site 1)

These areas were mowed for many years but are in the Doan Brook floodplain and well-suited to restore natural habitat with meadow and native trees, along with removal of invasives.

The program holds spring and fall planting days where the entire community is invited. There is a great partnership with the Doan Brook Watershed Partnership and the Nature Center, with excellent community engagement.

Peters noted Grow Not Mow may stand on its own without monthly meetings, as planning occurs for spring events and then summer planning for fall events.

Spring Planting Day

John Barber provided an update: April 11th from 10am to 1pm will be the spring planting day at Site 3 (Shaker Boulevard and Warrensville, across from the RTA station). Hundreds of native trees,

shrubs, and flowering plants have been planted on planting days and between planting days. Shaker residents now grow plants that get installed at these sites.

The program works closely with Public Works and appreciates the repeated delivery of wood chips to kill old turf grass, making planting easier. Last fall, four council members planted trees at Site 2. The events are fun with families, school groups, and Kent State students who come annually with resident Reid Coffman. It is a highly participatory public project.

Michael Peters noted this is an all-ages event with the full gamut of age ranges participating.

Other Subcommittee Topics

The last Stormwater meeting was a couple of weeks ago. The subcommittee has discussed transitioning to more focused meetings on certain topics, with Grow Not Mow being one focus area.

Meetings often include updates on state-level legislation impacting areas of interest. Another ongoing topic is plastics, especially single-use plastics, and having no-waste and low-waste events. Good progress has been made but more work remains.

Another focus area is sustainability in multifamily properties. Shaker Heights has many multifamily properties responsible for their own recycling and composting. The subcommittee has been working with member Alan Gross, who lives in the Diplomat. The Diplomat has been piloting various initiatives to develop best practices that can be shared with other multifamily properties, with assistance for adoption.

Anyone is invited to these meetings by contacting Michael Peters. The committee is still determining what the subcommittee structure will look like in 2026.

Citywide Composting Program Update

Kim Bixenstine provided background on the citywide composting program for new members. The program built on a successful pilot commenced several years ago in collaboration with the Shaker public school district and after a successful pilot in the Lomond neighborhood, with composting bins for schools and for public household food waste disposal.

Given the pilot's success, the City and City Council approved expenditure for a citywide program with six locations: one at the library (with thanks to Josh Romig and Amy Switzer for their advocacy and support) and one at each of the five public elementary schools throughout the city.

The program has been phenomenally successful with approximately 1,200 households participating. The program started on Earth Day in late April 2025. In approximately eight months of operation, around 120,000 pounds of food waste were diverted. Adding the schools' diversion of over 70,000 pounds, the combined total approached 200,000 pounds—an incredible achievement.

The city partners with Rust Belt Riders, who have been a terrific partner. They take the food waste and turn it into nutrient-rich soil called Tilth, which they sell.

The committee will continue monitoring the program. There was discussion at year-end about potentially moving some bins to maximize their use and achieve the most efficient allocation. There was talk about perhaps trying a location in the Malvern area, possibly at Hanna Perkins School.

Anecdotally, the city has received many favorable reports from residents about how useful they find this service. Food waste is the largest generator of methane gas in landfills, so the program has a positive environmental effect. It also saves money on tipping fees the city pays to Waste Management for trash processing.

Holiday Season Impact

Chair Kaus asked about the holiday season (Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa) and whether data was available on increased usage and the need to empty bins more frequently.

Michael Peters reported the program ended approximately \$3,000 over the additional budget allocation, which was less than expected. Some invoices from the final week or two may still be pending. The sustainability budget had capacity for this overage.

An interesting development in the last couple weeks of December was increased use at the library requiring twice-weekly service for the final two weeks—a level of demand not previously seen at that site.

Contract Status

Peters noted the city is currently finalizing the 2026 contract with Rust Belt Riders, which should be completed soon.

Energy Subcommittee

Michael Peters reported that work with multifamily properties overlaps into the Energy Subcommittee, with many members participating in both subcommittees.

The Energy Subcommittee has been working on energy efficiency for both single-family residential homes and multifamily properties/renters. Energy efficiency tips are available on the city's website, and subcommittee members are currently updating that information.

Community Solar Legislation

The subcommittee has been tracking state-level community solar legislation for a long time. Community solar could be very beneficial to the community because not every house is appropriately situated for solar due to trees, roof angles, and similar factors.

Community solar would allow people to buy or lease solar panels in a project outside the city and offset their electricity bills with power generated from those panels. This may also provide an opportunity for the community choice aggregation program to purchase power more locally from

renewable sources, which is why the committee tracks this closely. The legislation is still in committee at the Statehouse.

School Sustainability Forum

Michael Peters explained this subcommittee has held approximately three quarterly meetings. It grew out of a student committee called Shaker Youth LEEDs that existed for many years, consisting of students from Shaker public schools, Hathaway Brown, Laurel School, and University School working on sustainability topics. These students created the Eco Challenge around Earth Day a couple of years ago.

Like many volunteer-led organizations, the program depends on the people involved each year and ensuring continuity. There was a drop-off as high school students became busy with various activities.

The program transitioned from being primarily student-led to including administrators, staff, faculty, and some students from each school interested in sustainability topics. The forum serves as a way to share best practices, determine resources together, and learn how different programs have worked in different schools.

The next meeting is January 26th at 3:30pm. Anyone is welcome to join. There is typically one focus topic, but everyone gives updates on their activities and discusses potential future collaborative activities.

Shanna Keown has been leading this effort, as she did with Shaker Youth LEEDs previously.

Chair Kaus asked if St. Dominic's could be invited to participate, noting they have gone solar (with signage indicating this) and have at least a K-8 school (possibly pre-K). She suggested they might bring valuable insight or learn from other schools and represent the main other K-8 structure in the area.

Michael Peters confirmed he would be happy to follow up on this invitation. He noted the forum meets at 3:30pm for anyone interested and not already on the distribution list.

LED Streetlight Standards Discussion

Michael Peters introduced the streetlight topic, noting a resident has reached out about LED streetlights. He provided background on streetlights in Shaker Heights:

- The city has approximately 4,000 streetlights
- First Energy owns and maintains them; the city does not own them
- The city pays First Energy a monthly fee per streetlight
- The city buys electricity separately through its city contract
- All streetlight electricity is offset by renewable energy credits

A couple of years ago, there was an option to convert all streetlights to LEDs if the city paid for it. The alternative was to wait and, as bulbs burned out, they would initially be replaced with the same

type of bulbs. As many bulbs come out of production, eventually they would be replaced with LED equivalents. This is now beginning to happen.

LED bulbs come in different "flavors." The most common are 4000K (brighter, bluer, whiter light) and softer/lower options (2700K to 3500K) that are more like incandescent lights with softer, more yellow hues instead of blue.

First Energy installs 4000K bulbs as old ones burn out, creating a patchwork effect, especially on residential streets.

John Barber provided details on the Cleveland Heights experience and regional approach:

Cleveland Heights Issues

First Energy is inconsistently replacing bulbs with either traditional incandescent lights or 4000K LED lights. Cleveland Heights has received numerous resident complaints about unshielded 4000K bulbs, which are very penetrating and bright at night.

Health studies have shown blue LED lights in the 4,000-5,000 Kelvin rating are bad for humans, wildlife, and insects. Cleveland Heights is looking to establish a standard that lights be no brighter/colder than 3000K, preferably 2700K (the warmer lights that are less penetrating).

Data on public safety is mixed. Emerging studies suggest even colder lights create deeper shadows and may be worse for public safety, but data is still emerging.

Regional Approach

Cleveland Heights is discussing a regional approach with several goals:

1. Make First Energy responsive (so far they have been unresponsive to Cleveland Heights and University Heights, not returning calls or discussing the issue)
2. Set legislative standards for 3000K or less for public lights
3. Pursue this on a regional basis to increase leverage with First Energy
4. Establish regional standards for light shielding so streetlights don't shine unshielded into people's houses—a consistent complaint in Cleveland Heights, particularly with 4000K bulbs

Both Cleveland Heights and University Heights have new administrations. The sustainability committees in both communities feel strongly this issue has the same supplier and a regional solution makes good sense. They would like to work with Shaker Heights. Michael Peters has been working on streetlight inventory and standards for several years.

Cleveland Heights has complicated the issue by suggesting legislation should also include standards for homeowners where light trespasses onto other properties—a more contentious and legally complicated issue.

Barber expressed hope that a regional approach can start with LED bulbs in streetlights and municipal buildings to set standards for warmer LED bulbs in public spaces.

Questions and Discussion

Michael Peters noted this is a very interesting topic. The city has looked at streetlights for a long time because the city pays substantial money to First Energy for them.

Kim Bixenstine asked if there is any cost difference between 4000K and 3000K or less LED lights. John Barber stated he doesn't have an answer, nor has Cleveland Heights been able to get an answer from First Energy due to their unresponsiveness.

Mayor Weiss asked for clarification on whether the 2700-3000K range would apply to residential areas while major streets and thoroughfares would have different standards, possibly over 4000K.

John Barber clarified this point has come up. The question is whether commercial districts should have 4000K bulbs. Part of Cleveland Heights' problem is that areas like Lee Road now have residential apartment buildings or houses interspersed with commercial districts, and almost every commercial district has residents on second floors of retail spaces. The current proposal is that the standard will be 3000K throughout, not going to the cold 4000K in commercial districts. This is somewhat contentious.

Mayor Weiss confirmed the standard would be the same throughout the community regardless of whether areas are commercial or residential. Barber confirmed this, noting Cleveland Heights doesn't have a bright line between residential and commercial areas.

Mayor Weiss asked if LED bulbs have longer life or if pricing is known. Barber responded that LED bulb life appears similar regardless of temperature. The 4000K, 3000K, and 2700K bulbs all have lifespans of 15-20 years (unlike old incandescent bulbs), so there are benefits of lower energy and longer lifespan regardless of temperature.

The Mayor noted this is important because Shaker Heights struggles with light bulbs burning out and not being replaced in a timely manner. He continues receiving comments and complaints about this issue. Regardless of cold versus warm light, longer bulb life would have huge impact.

Many community members have volunteered to survey the community to identify where lights are out. People who run, jog, or walk in the morning note them and try to report them to First Energy, but it's problematic. It takes a long time to get bulbs changed. Street lights used to have identification numbers, but most are now missing and won't be replaced, making it challenging to identify and get lights changed.

Matt Carroll asked John Barber if there has been any success having a sit-down conversation with a fairly high-level government relations person at First Energy, or if there has been zero response. Barber confirmed zero response. Carroll stated the city can at least get a conversation, which is very doable, and suggested discussing this further offline.

Barber noted Bay Village (on the west side) had council require the presence of the local government liaison from First Energy to appear before council to address questions. Their primary focus was on the Mayor's issue of non-response when streetlight bulbs burn out regardless of temperature or LED type. Barber didn't hear the outcome but believes requiring First Energy to

send a representative before council to answer questions would be excellent. He suggested working toward a regional approach with perhaps several councils together to emphasize to First Energy this is not just a Shaker, Cleveland Heights, or University Heights issue but is across the board.

Carroll noted there are consortiums and regional leadership entities like Mayors and Managers and others that can make a push for this.

Council Member Carmella Williams thanked John for the presentation and asked two questions:

1. Does use of shielding help soften brightness of bulbs?
2. Is he aware of any community in the area having better success connecting with or getting responses from First Energy?

Barber clarified that shielding does not affect bulb color. He illustrated using his own house, where the streetlight shines halfway up the roof of his two-story house, casting bright, cold, white glow directly into first and second floor windows. Shielding would direct light to streets and sidewalks rather than into houses—literally a cone around the bulb directing light appropriately rather than letting it spread into bedroom windows.

Regarding other communities, Pittsburgh is replacing 33,000 streetlights with LED bulbs and had a struggle with its utility to get started. Barber is not aware of any community having success with First Energy. Communities he has talked with share frustrations about unresponsiveness. He plans to talk to the Mayor of South Euclid early the following week to see if she's interested in joining the effort. He is not aware of any community having success and expressed frustration.

Ramona Lowery-Farrell stated Public Works has been working on improving communication with First Energy and obtained another contact they are trying.

Michael Peters stated the city will continue this conversation internally and report back to the committee on progress made.

LEED Recertification Project

Kim Bixenstine suggested Michael Peters mention the LEED recertification project as an important undertaking for the year that committee members should know about.

Michael Peters provided background: The city started the certification process in 2019 and finished in early 2021. The city was certified by the US Green Building Council under their LEED for Cities program. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design.

The US Green Building Council is a nonprofit headquartered in Washington, DC, that publishes sets of best practices for different categories of the built environment. They started with buildings (how to make them more energy efficient) but also have programs for design, construction, renovation, building interiors, homes, hospitals, and various other categories. A couple of years ago they published a certification program for cities and communities (some counties have also participated).

Shaker Heights was fairly early in this process. The city certified along with Cincinnati as Ohio's first two communities. Cleveland followed about a year later, and Dayton most recently. It's a fairly small subset of cities, with Shaker Heights by far the smallest to achieve certification.

One rationale for pursuing certification was that sustainability is such a broad topic with only so many resources. Taking this set of global best practices seemed like a good way to make progress as a city and community.

The city successfully went through the program and learned a lot. It helped identify key metrics to focus on and work toward improving. One direct result was the citywide composting program—everyone was surprised at how poorly the city performed in the waste category, something not really considered prior to the process.

The city sees real value in the certification. Anecdotally, both Peters and the Mayor have heard from residents who, when moving to Northeast Ohio, were looking for a community sharing their values. One easy way to identify this was seeing the city had gone through the LEED process, demonstrating high value placed on sustainability. It serves as an attraction and retention tool for residents, employees, and potentially businesses.

This is a five-year cycle, so the city is now approaching time for recertification. The committee decided to embark upon this in 2026. Peters will be project managing, and the process will mirror what was done previously: looking at different data sets for the city, working with various city departments for data, working with the county and others to produce maps and similar materials. The committee will receive updates on progress.

Kim Bixenstine noted the city is very lucky to have Michael Peters leading this effort.

Peters responded he is happy to have gone through the process before, so he knows what to expect.

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There being no further business, a motion to adjourn was made and accepted with no objections. The meeting was adjourned at 9:02 A.M. The next meeting is scheduled for February 12, 2026 at 8:00am.



Michael Peters
Sustainability Coordinator