

Comments of Allentown Environmental Advisory Council on Sustainability Coordinator Position in proposed 2024 Budget

The Allentown Environmental Advisory Council respectfully submits these comments to City Council in advance of the November 4th public meeting at which the new positions proposed in the Mayor's 2024 budget proposal are to be discussed with the goal of making a 10% reduction in the proposed budget. We thank City Council for this opportunity to comment.

We agree that the City should take a careful and thoughtful approach to the budget in order to ensure that costs are minimized. For this reason, one position that should definitely stay in the budget is that of Sustainability Coordinator. Based on our own member experiences, and the experience of other cities that have such a position in place, we are confident that the Sustainability Coordinator will help the City to lower its costs through implementing more sustainable practices and through bringing more money to the City in federal, state and county grants as well as philanthropic sources.

For example, in May 2020, the Western Pennsylvania Energy Consortium, led by the City of Pittsburgh, signed a new contract with Direct Energy to provide 100% renewable energy through 2021, saving the City and WPEC members \$700,000. The fleet vehicle savings added up to \$70,000 per year. These savings are in addition to all the money that sustainability coordinators are able to bring into their municipalities because they have the knowledge and the contacts to do so.

There are literally **millions of dollars** currently available that the City does not currently have the capacity to search out and apply for. Over the past few years, The Allentown EAC has made several recommendations to the City on cost-reduction measures on which little progress has been made due to lack of resources. These recommendations are all available on the Allentown EAC webpage on the City's website.

In addition to reducing costs for the City, the Sustainability Coordinator would help to drive progress on multiple environmental justice fronts, including tree equity, energy equity, water equity, food justice, air quality, etc. Through this

position the City could more effectively leverage the many community-based organizations and non-profit institutions in Allentown and throughout the Lehigh Valley to engage Allentown communities and address these issues cost-effectively. Examples would be Community Bike Works, Promise Neighborhoods, Community Action LV, Monocacy Farm and many others.

We note that the position is proposed to be housed in the Parks and Recreation Department. This is reasonable as the City recently received a grant of over \$900,000 from the U.S. Forest Service to address tree equity, so we see this as the first environmental justice issue the Sustainability Coordinator could address. However, over time, it will be important for the Sustainability Coordinator to work across departments, to help address energy efficiency, renewable energy, energy equity, water equity, and other important environmental sustainability initiatives that could bring even more significant cost reductions and grants for the City.

Support for a Sustainability Coordinator is widespread in the City. Petitions for such a position have been circulating and already have garnered over 100 names.

In conclusion, we implore City Council not to cut the Sustainability Coordinator position from the budget.

Submitted by
Allentown EAC
November 1, 2023