

Cathy Becker

January Conservation Committee Kickoff

Sierra Club Central Ohio Group

Thursday, January 12, 2017

5:30 to 7 p.m.

Nationwide & Ohio Farm Bureau 4-H Center

2201 Fred Taylor Dr., Columbus, Ohio 43210

This was the first meeting of the year for the Sierra Club Central Ohio Group Conservation Committee, which I just became the chair of in January. Conservation Committee is where all the real work of the Sierra Club is done. Any substantive issue about the local environment comes through this committee. For example, in Central Ohio, this was the committee that handled the [Ikea variance request](#) to cut down hundreds of trees. We negotiated with them to cut down many fewer trees and to turn the land around their store into a semi nature reserve.

Last year's Conservation Committee chair was fantastic, but he abruptly left the group in August when he moved to California to help a friend launch a nonprofit. That left us without a chair for several months. I had said I would help, but was unable to do much with it during the election. Only now in January was I in a position to take on this committee.

Typically ConsCom meetings are three to five people, usually from people already on the Central Ohio Group Executive Committee. It functioned as a second meeting for us to discuss environmental issues in more detail. However, this year, after the election of Trump, Sierra Club has been adding a lot of new members, and 20 people turned out for this meeting!

I scheduled the meeting to go for one hour starting at 5:30 p.m. so that people could join a special event for Columbus Green Drinks at 6:30 p.m. That event was at the 4-H Center on campus, so I held ConsCom there too. It was hard to come up with an agenda since the committee had not met for so long, so I started by explaining a few issues we had worked on the previous year, then some idea for things we could work on in the future. The main point was to hear from people at the meeting to see what they were interested in.

It was a very productive meeting. We ended up splitting everyone into two subgroups, one to concentrate on air and energy, and one on water and development. The air and energy group's first project may be a campaign to urge Columbus city government to pledge to go 100% renewable by 2050, as 1000 other cities did during the Paris Climate Conference. The water and development group will be looking at ways to reduce use of plastic bags. We also need a couple of people interested in responding to 401 and 404 requests as well as city variance requests.

The agenda and minutes for the January meeting are attached. The next meeting will be on Thursday, February 9, at 6 p.m. I will have to find somewhere that can hold 20 people!

Sierra Club Central Ohio Group
Conservation Committee Meeting Minutes
Thursday, January 12, 2017
5:30 – 6:30 p.m.
Nationwide & Ohio Farm Bureau 4-H Center
2201 Fred Taylor Dr., Columbus, Ohio 43210

In attendance

Old members: Emma Beasley, Michael Daly, David Roseman, Elissa Yoder (staff), Nicole Tabit (Clean Water Fellow), Elizabeth Scott (Clean Water Fellow), Miles Van Blarcum (COG Fellow), Cathy Cowan Becker (chair)

New members: Ann Marie Condo, Brittany Converse, Robin Craft, Michael Holm, Jessica Klammer, Rosalind Parkinson, Gerard J Tankovich, Karen Tankovich, Katie Todd, Alex Turo

Call to order by Cathy Cowan Becker at 5:33 p.m.

1. Cathy welcomed new people to the meeting and started by going through past issues listed in the agenda. She explained that Conservation Committee has a lot of projects that are at a stopping point right now, and that we are interested in hearing what people at the meeting want to work on. Past issues, their background and status listed on the agenda include:

- Ikea
- Plastic bags
- Columbus Stormwater Drainage Manual revisions
- Sawmill Wetlands

2. We discussed ideas for upcoming issues we could start work on:

- Meetings with Columbus city council members
 - Jaiza Page – want to arrange an event with youth and metroparks
 - Shannon Hardin – previous discussion about sidewalks, streets
 - Elizabeth Brown – Clean Water Fellows to present postcards on plastic bags
- 401 and 404 permit requests
 - These come through constantly. Most are routine but some require comment from Sierra Club, sometimes with a quick turnaround. We need a team of people able to respond to this. Estimated frequency: Once or twice a month
- Stormwater Manual variance requests
 - These come through often. Most are routine but some require comment from Sierra Club, sometimes with a quick turnaround. We need a team of people able to respond to this. Estimated frequency: A few times a year
- Lobby Columbus city to pledge to go 100% renewable by 2050
 - 1000 cities at Paris Climate Conference made this pledge
 - Sierra Club's Ready for 100 campaign already working on Cleveland
 - Columbus already partway there with Smart Cities grant
- Issues will be brought to our attention from Columbus and surrounding counties

3. Introductions and issues of interest

- We went around the table so people could say which county and city they are from, tell a little bit about themselves and their issues of interest in conservation
- We will send out a google survey after the meeting to get this in writing

4. We then broke into a general discussion about conservation issues of interest in Central Ohio

- David discussed Columbus's commitment to planting trees and an urban tree canopy
- Elissa said the population of Columbus is projected to increase 22%, so there will be more development, and the Sierra Club has leverage. She said this is a good time to pressure the city to do smart development.
- David said we can have impact by getting them to incorporate Sierra Club policies. One example is how MORPC adopted complete streets. We meet with city council members, county officials, city department heads such as DPU and parks, metroparks, COTA, etc.
- Rosalind asked why Sierra Club chose Cleveland for the Ready for 100 campaign. Michael said Cleveland has a large wind project at Lake Erie and a publicly owned utility. David said only five cities were chosen, so when they expand, it probably won't be another city in Ohio. Elissa said Jocelyn Travis, the Ready for 100 staffer in Cleveland, can tell us how the program works so we can apply those ideas in Columbus
- Elissa talked about changes to environmental staff in Columbus city government. The previous Mayor Coleman had a Green Team of three staffers and several working groups that included community members and professionals. These task forces met regularly and developed programs to address environmental issues. However, under the new mayor Ginther, the city is down to two environmental staffers no longer in the mayor's office. One is with Parks and Rec and one is with Dept of Public Utilities. Ginther has made infant mortality a top priority – however, that is directly related to environmental issues such as air quality. Columbus Public Health has taken up air quality as a top priority.

5. We discussed possible structures for Conservation Committee, including breaking everyone up into subcommittees based on issues of interest. We decided to create two broad committees:

- Water and development – headed by Elissa
 - Water quality
 - 401 permits and city variance requests
 - Plastic bags
- Air and energy – headed by Michael
 - Air quality
 - Renewable energy
 - Ready for 100 campaign applied to Columbus

We also discussed essential elements of any program including:

- Allying and interfacing with other environmental organizations in Central Ohio
- Liaison work with city, county, and agency leaders in Central Ohio

6. Next steps

- See if Jocelyn Travis can make a presentation at our meeting about Ready for 100
- Work of other Sierra Club staffers also may overlap with ConsCom, including Neil Waggoner (Beyond Coal), Cheryl Johnstone (Methane), Kristen Kubitza (Clean Energy)

7. Adjourned 6:35 p.m. Notes by Cathy Cowan Becker, January 13, 2017

**Sierra Club Central Ohio Group
Conservation Committee Meeting Agenda
Thursday, January 12, 2017
5:30 – 6:30 p.m.
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PAST ISSUES

A. Ikea

Background

October 2015 – Ikea announces plan to build store on I-71 near Polaris. City of Columbus gives them a variance to the stormwater drainage requirements to cut down 600 trees.

- Sierra Club meets with the city to raise objections
- Public outcry and letters to the editor against cutting down the trees

January 2016 – Ikea brings new proposal to city and Sierra Club to cut down fewer trees and plant new trees.

- Sierra Club works with Ikea and city to modify the proposal event more.
- Ikea agrees to create a nature area with interpretive signage

Status

- Construction on the Ikea store has begun, with opening set for summer 2017
- Language for the interpretive sign for the nature area is being finalized and sign will be printed and in place in time for the store opening

B. SWACO plastic bags

Background

Columbus and some areas in Central Ohio have been discussing the possibility of banning or taxing plastic bags. SWACO (Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio) strongly supports this, and the previous mayor's Green Team also supported this idea. However, it created a lot of controversy in discussions in Clintonville City Council last year, so city officials decided we need a lot more education of the public before attempting to get something like this passed.

Status

Water fellows for Ohio Sierra Club have been collecting signatures on postcards, and now have a lot of postcards. They are ready to make an appointment to present the postcards to a Columbus city council member, probably Elizabeth Brown.

C. Columbus Stormwater Drainage Manual revisions

Background

Last year the Division of Public Utilities for the city of Columbus decided to revise the stormwater manual. This manual contains all the city codes for how properties and developments must manage stormwater runoff. Sometimes proposed developments as the city for a variance, or an exception to the rules. That is how the Ikea situation was brought to our attention.

Status

The city asked Sierra Club for input in revising the stormwater manual. We went through all 321 pages of the manual (not bedtime reading), and suggested revisions to the city last fall. A new draft has been created, and we are waiting to see that.

D. Sawmill Wetlands

Background

Sawmill Wetlands is the only wetlands inside 270 in Columbus that can support amphibian life. It is in the middle of a slew of development off Sawmill Road. Last year the Ohio DNR agreed to sell it to a developer in exchange for a parcel of land near Highbanks Metropark. However, the deed for Sawmill Wetlands specifically says the wetlands cannot be sold or developed. Sierra Club along with OEC and others raised objections to this sale, so ODNR pulled out of the deal. The developer took ODNR to court, where the judge ruled ODNR has to give Sawmill Wetlands to the developer for free. ODNR has appealed this ruling and will go back to court.

Status

A padlock has been put on the gate at Sawmill Wetlands, and no one can get in or use it. We are awaiting the trial on the appeal. This is a very sad situation for the land, and the people who use it. Sawmill Wetlands was the location for weekly high school classes.

UPCOMING ISSUES

A. Meetings with Columbus council members – Need liaisons

1. Jaiza Page

Howard Miller, the previous ConsCom chair and I met with Jaiza Page, chair of Recreation and Parks committee, on May 3, 2016. This was a general introductory meeting. We discussed doing a joint activity for youth at a metropark, but were not able to coordinate it in time for last summer. We would like to follow up on it this summer.

2. Shannon Hardin

Howard Miller, the previous ConsCom chair and I met with Shannon Hardin, chair of the Public Service and Transportation committee, on May 25, 2016. This was a general introductory meeting to discuss things like sidewalks, bike paths, complete streets, etc. We should schedule a followup meeting to discuss any projects we want to move forward on.

3. Elizabeth Brown

The Clean Water Fellows will schedule a meeting to present their plastic bag postcards and discuss the issue of plastic bags in Columbus.

B. 401 and 404 permit requests

Often new developments request a 401 or 404 permit under the Clean Water Act to do things like fill in a wetlands or discharge pollutants. Many of these requests are routine, but some of them Sierra Club wants to make comments on.

We need a team of people who are knowledgeable about water issues (or are willing to learn) and will be available – often on short notice – to file comments for these requests. It is not predictable when permit requests that we want to comment on will come in, but it seems to happen once or twice a month.

C. Columbus Stormwater Manual variance requests

Similarly when new builds or developments are approved in Columbus, sometimes they request an exception to the stormwater drainage rules. This is how the Ikea situation came to our attention for example.

We would like to have a team of people who are knowledgeable about development issues (or are willing to learn) and will be available – often on short notice – to file responses for these requests. It is not predictable when such requests will come in that we want to comment on, but it could happen a few times each year.

D. Ready for 100 – Urge city of Columbus to go 100% renewable by 2050

As part of the Paris Climate Agreement, 1000 cities around the world pledged to go 100% renewable by 2050. This was not just the city government facilities, but the entire city going carbon neutral. Leadership on this came from Michael Bloomberg, former mayor of New York City, and the Compact of Mayors.

The Sierra Club has a Ready for 100 campaign to urge cities in the United States to do the same thing. Right now they are working on Cleveland, but no one is working on Columbus. Columbus is on its way to going renewable – it just got a Smart Cities grant to put 1000 electric car chargers all over the city, among other things.

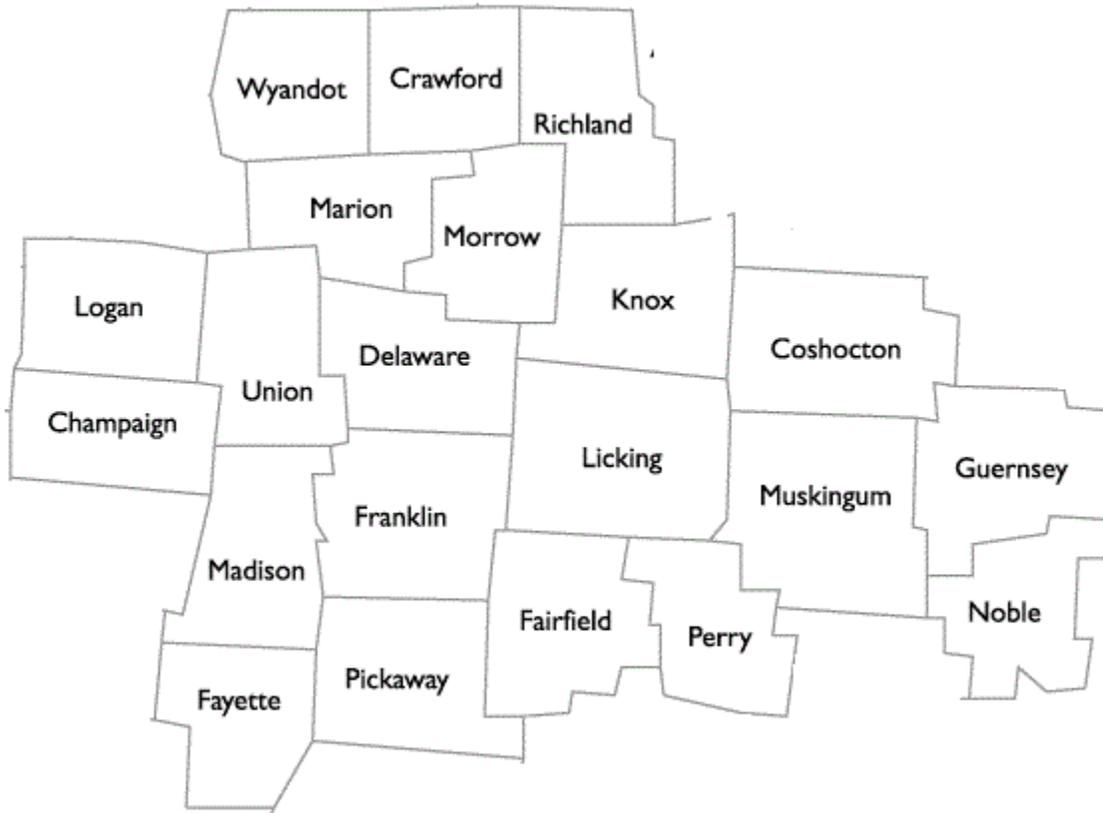
We would like to have a team of people to talk with the Sierra Club national about targeting Columbus for the Ready for 100 campaign, and to put together a campaign to target Columbus to make this pledge.

E. What issues are you most interested in?

What are your ideas for what Conservation Committee could be working on?

BACKGROUND

21 counties in the Central Ohio Group coverage area



STATE

Search for Ohio EPA Public Notices - https://ebiz.epa.ohio.gov/Notices/jsp/notice_search.jsp

Subscribe to OEPA notices - <https://ohioepa.custhelp.com/app/account/profile>

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CITY

Columbus Stormwater Drainage Manual Variance requests - <https://www.columbus.gov/Templates/Detail.aspx?id=2147487221>