

Title

I'm Jim Wylie, a volunteer serving on several committees, including the West Chester Borough Sustainability Advisory Committee, the WC COG's Clean Energy Future project, the Chester County Energy & Env Advisory Board and the new Clean Energy Subcommittee, which I'll be chairing, and I'm a volunteer leader with the Sierra Club's regional and statewide organization.

WCB

Today I'll mostly be talking about sustainability initiatives that the Borough of WC have taken or are exploring. Including hiring a Sust Director, initiating a stormwater protection fee, reviewing new building proposals for sustainability attributes, benchmarking the energy use of our facilities and fleets, establishing a pedestrian-only section of downtown WC, our single-use plastics initiatives and a few things we have on the drawing board.

WC COG

At the WC Council of Governments level, there is one project that I'm involved with that I'd like to share with you, which is the collaboration of 6 of the COG townships to transition to 100% renewable energy community-wide.

Chesco CAP

And then I'm going to try to put some of this into the context of what Carol talked about – the Chester County Climate Action Plan.

The SAC & SD

OK, back to the sustainability initiatives of the WC Borough.

The most impactful thing the boro has done in recent memory is to hire staff to specifically focus on sustainability aspects of the boro's operations and support for the community as a whole. Will Williams is an experienced municipal sustainability manager with a good bit of energy-use knowledge.

Will reports directly to the Borough Manager. Our previous Sust Mgr reported to PW.

Will works closely with the SAC – facilitating meetings, advising us on best strategies to advance proposals and is our liaison to WC departments, council and the mayor – but we often speak on support of our initiatives as well.

The SAC is made up of 7 members which are boro residents or are employed in the boro. All are interviewed and approved by boro council for 2 year terms.

We also have a Friends Of committee, which is a loose pool of volunteers that have expressed interest in helping with clean ups, outreach, review of proposals, etc.

And the WC Green Team is an independent group that often attends SAC meetings and work on environmental and sustainability topics that are important to the community. Like mosquito spraying, light pollution, clean energy, Earth day activities, and more.

Stormwater

I won't spend too much time on stormwater management initiatives. I understand this group has already studied this topic.

You might think WC is on higher ground and would not suffer from much flooding, but there are certain areas that, due to development, have insufficient runoff handling. The boro has a fee based on impervious surface area on our property. And there are credits for things like rain barrels and semi-pervious surfaces, like this living driveway. Isn't this great? I wish I could say this was a pic of my driveway. There are some pervious driveways in WC, including mine. I'm still trying to get to this.

Checklist

We have a process for reviewing building permit applications. Will gives input, but the official memo with recommendations to the planning cmte comes from the SAC. We have a couple of professional architects on the SAC right now.

Here's a list of some of the things on our WC Sustainable! Checklist. This is a voluntary process, but it's not unusual for a permit to request some kind of variance, and this checklist is valuable input into the variance considerations by the planning cmte and council.

Benchmarking

One of the first things that Will did when coming onboard in 2019 was to start a spreadsheet to track all of the energy use and energy budget for the buildings, municipal fleet and police fleet. You can't improve what you don't measure.

Now we have the data to inform decisions on proposals for building improvements and fleet transition to plug-in hybrids and full EVs. I know we have several plug-in vehicles (Fords) now. Options are reviewed when leases are up for new vehicles.

And then of course there is the pedestrian-only Gay St. The SAC had pushed for seasonal or weekend closure of Gay St for many years to try to address the idling and endless looping of cars through downtown to try to find the perfect parking space. And eating on the sidewalk in the summer is wonderful, but not so great when there is a line of cars idling just a few feet away from my table waiting for the light to change.

It took the economic impact of COVID to inspire the council to close Gay St to give more outdoor seating space for our downtown restaurants. It was very popular last year. It's not a done deal yet this year, but hopefully our leaders can find a way to make all stakeholders happy – including the utilities doing street construction, first responders that need to be able to get emergency vehicles to where they need to be, and municipal staff that will be tasked with moving blockades at the end of blocks.

Storefronts

Sustainable Storefronts started as a voluntary merchant recognition program as part of the store and shopper education program for our Single-Use Plastics ordinance which bans plastic shopping bags and plastic straws and requires a 10 cent fee on compliant bags – in an effort to encourage shoppers to bring their own bags.

Will printed off a stack of cards that the SAC and other volunteers could leave at stores and restaurants where we shop and dine. Shops are recognized for not handing out single-use plastics, including bags, straws, Styrofoam. And encouraging BYO bags and containers.

We have started enforcing the ordinance in Jan. No major problems that I know of. Will is the ENFORCER – which so far means handing out warning letters and speaking with managers that claim they've never heard of this rule – even though we have met with them multiple times.

Exploring

Now just a mention of a few that are on our radar:

- Proposing and maybe facilitating more community gardens
- We did go so far as entering into a contract with a curbside compost pickup company, but the company pulled out at the last minute. We are still exploring other opportunities to partner with a professional composter, or maybe provide the service through the public works dept. We are watching Media boro and some other programs that are just starting.
- Light pollution reduction is being talked about
- Seems like we talk about road salt alternatives every winter, but when it gets to be time for the boro to make its annual (or bi-annual) purchase in the summer, we forget about it
- And we have EV-Ready and Solar-Ready ordinance proposals being developed

COG – CEF 1

In the fall of 2018 the WC COG agreed to hire a professional energy planner to study and make recommendations for how the greater WC area could transition to 100% renewable energy – Community-wide. That resulted in the Cadmus Study, a list of prioritized recommendations and the formation of a collaboration by the 6 participating EAC/SACs to do community engagement around the topic of energy choices we all face.

COG – CEF 2

The community engagement initiative has turned into the WC Area Clean Energy Future Campaign – with a website with resources organized into 4 sectors: Residential, Education, Small Business and Big Business (or Corp). We started with the Residential sector last year with some public meetings, tabling at community day events and social media outreach.

This past winter we hosted a survey about electric vehicles. We had about 350 responses and learned that: most people expect their next car will be powered by electricity or a plug-in hybrid. There is significant concern about availability of chargers, sticker prices and range anxiety. And there are plenty of folks that feel that limited access to off-street parking will be a barrier to being able to charge at home and thus delay their choice to go to an EV.

COG – Priorities

Back to the Cadmus report, I just wanted to itemize the opportunities and highlight the ones that we have at least started on. I can share a more detailed chart of which of the 6 municipalities have taken which steps if anyone is interested. But the message here is, we have plenty of work ahead of us.

I'm going to push on Solar and EV Ready ordinances – which means requiring or incentivizing new construction to at least plan for future installation of solar on rooftops and EV chargers in parking areas. Even access to 110 outlets for slow charging is a step in the right direction.

CC CAP – working on

I just wanted to close by naming some of the actions in the Chester County Climate Action Plan that Carol gave us the overview of are already being addressed, at least in part, by West Chester area municipalities.

Including: stakeholder engagement, C-PACE promotion (coming with our Big Business module in the next month or so), climate awareness outreach, attempting to reduce landfill waste – especially organics and single-use plastics, Net-Zero and EV-Ready new construction ordinances or resolutions.

CC CAP – county priorities

And this list of things that are in the CAP that are seen as county or DVRPC initiatives that would greatly support the priorities that the WC SAC feels are important for the county and the planet.

Including: educating on reducing food waste, regenerative ag, encouraging solar on farms that use significant electricity (like mushroom farms), reducing the number of single occupant vehicles by establishing a student parking fee, get ahead of the expected crunch of community solar sites in Chesco by doing education about siting guidelines, work to organize a solar Power Purchase Agreement for municipal operations including school districts, water treatment plants, libraries, police and fire; develop and promote model ordinances for EV-readiness and rooftop solar; promote solar canopy installations on parking areas; promote workforce development in RE and EE areas; and I have on here the creation of a Sustainability Office in the Planning Commission, and as Carol noted, that has already happened. We look forward to working with Rachael Griffith to expand the discussion about sustainability initiatives throughout Chester County.

Closing

And I'll leave you with these important websites to learn more about the things I've just talked about: The WCB SAC page, which has info about the Single-Use Plastics initiative, the new construction checklist, our EV and energy work and the Friends Of Sustainable West Chester program.

And the WC Area Clean Energy Future website.

And finally the West Chester Green Team – which is not a government committee, but deserves a mention here.

I'll be happy to answer any questions when we get there.