

Sustainability and Economic Vitality (SEV)

Council Committee Meeting Minutes
Virtual and In-Person Meeting in City Council Chambers
31 East 5th Street
October 16, 2023
1:00 p.m.

1. CALL TO ORDER/ ROLL CALL

Meeting called to order by Councilmember Chin at 1:05 p.m. with Councilmember Chin attending in person and Vice Mayor Adams attending virtually.

2. REVIEW MEETING MINUTES

A. September 18, 2023 SEV Meeting Minutes

Approval of the September 18, 2023 SEV Meeting Minutes was moved by Vice Mayor Adams, seconded by Councilmember Chin, and approved unanimously.

3. PUBLIC COMMENTS - The committee welcomes public comment. According to the Arizona Open Meeting Law, the Committee may only discuss matters listed on the agenda. Matters brought up by the public under public appearances that are not listed on the agenda cannot be discussed by the Committee. A 3-minute limit per person will be in effect.

A. Comment Cards Submitted

No comment cards were submitted by the public.

4. COMMITTEE SESSION ITEMS

A. Current Items and Updates

1. Economic Development Update

Economic Development Specialist Meg Zemlicka, Economic Development Program Manager Josh Jefferson, and Economic Development Special Projects Administrator Josh Rutherford provided an implementation plan and departmental update.

Meg opened the presentation by stating that the role of Tempe's Economic Development Department directly impacts Strategic Priorities 5.02 and 5.03 – to increase the number of new jobs and capital investment, and in both cases, they are exceeding their goals. Their own internal priorities that help them exceed these goals include business attraction and real estate development, business retention and expansion, retail and hospitality, and our designated innovation hubs, growth zones, and areas of focus.

Tempe's EDD department attracts businesses with a local talent pipeline of an educated workforce, and varied housing and transit options. Their measures of success are the number of jobs created, capital investments made, and high average wages. Real Estate Development is focused on height and density, public benefit, and the creation of workforce housing near innovation hubs.

Economic development can take many forms. Tempe has economy-shaping assets – the moneymakers like ASU and our large tech businesses – but it also has place-making assets like Tempe Town Lake or the Farmer Arts District, as well as collaborative relationships with social assets like Downtown Tempe Authority or Tempe Tourism. All of these contribute largely to a thriving local economy.

Josh Rutherford went on to update the committee on plans for Mill Avenue. One of Tempe's innovation hubs – the downtown area – has two active programs in place to increase economic development: The Mill Avenue Refresh and the Mill Avenue Restaurant Accelerator, both of which will reduce retail and restaurant vacancies downtown.

Joshua Jefferson provided an update on the landscape of industrial businesses in Tempe and vacancy rates compared to the Phoenix Metro area. Tempe's ASU Research and Discovery Campus Innovation Hub is experiencing 85% occupancy rates and steady growth of new jobs. From an Industrial standpoint, the area has low vacancy and demands a 20% premium over the Phoenix Metro average. As new real estate inventory gets built, the trend is to see vacancy rates increase for a bit before they level out.

2. Office of Sustainability & Resilience Update

Sustainability and Resilience Program Coordinator Maddie Mercer and Tempe's Urban Forester Richard Adkins provided an update on the City's efforts to implement Green Stormwater Infrastructure and the Rain to Roots master plan.

Maddie Mercer started by outlining the Tempe Performance Measures that this work touches – City Infrastructure & Assets, Water Conservation & Efficiency, and Tree Coverage. It also aligns with the strategies outlined in the Tempe Climate Action Plan Update, approved by Council in March of 2022, including identifying strategies to address extreme heat, drought, water use, and the need for climate-ready vegetation.

The benefits of implementing green stormwater infrastructure include supporting the tree canopy, reducing temperatures, reducing potable water use, mitigating flooding, promoting cleaner waterways, and creating wildlife habitat.

The purpose of the Rain to Roots Master Plan is to expand green infrastructure and urban colling initiatives, promote cross-departmental coordination and planning, and identify areas of opportunity for long-term funding, including streetscapes, multi-use paths, parks, neighborhoods, and on privately developed land.

Accomplishing these goals will require the cooperation and coordination of several internal city partners, such as the Sustainability and Resilience Office, Municipal Utilities, Community Services, Engineering & Transportation, Community Development, and

Economic Development, as well as active partnerships with external entities like consultants, private businesses, and our own Tempe residents.

Phase 1 of this implementation is to assess the current state of our work – understand existing programs and initiatives, learn from previous Green Stormwater Infrastructure projects, and compile available data from urban forestry, heat index, equity, etc. in order to make informed decisions moving into the next phases.

Richard Adkins then updated the Council Committee on how the data and lessons from Phase 1 of this plan will be used to inform recommendations for new programs, policies, and city codes and standards as we look to update our tree canopy maps and goals. We are looking to augment our development codes and standards – to update our practices based on new data and new strategies.

Projects and next steps that will inform how the GSI program moves forward include designing materials that highlight GSI best practices, creating a new GIS map that combines heat, flooding, urban forestry, and equity data, and to develop a project prioritization tool to identify future opportunities for GSI projects. These pilot projects will demonstrate how GSI can be integrated in different types of building and landscape projects.

The Rain to Roots Ambassador program is designed to educate the public about stormwater and urban cooling initiatives, review project materials, conduct site visits on pilot projects, and advice on the direction of programs and policy recommendations to the City Council. It gives a voice to Tempe residents in the development of their own sustainable future.

B. New Items for Consideration

1. *No new items were presented for consideration.*

C. Announcements

1. *There were no announcements.*

5. **NEXT MEETING DATE: December 18, 2023**

6. **ADJOURN**

Meeting was adjourned at 1:57 p.m. by Councilmember Chin.