



Approved 8/20/2025 CH

City of Scottsdale
Scottsdale Environmental Advisory Commission (SEAC)
Regular Meeting Minutes

5:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 21, 2025
One Civic Center Community Development
7447 E. Indian School Road, Scottsdale 85251

Call to Order 5:35 p.m.

PRESENT: Chair Andrew Scheck, Vice-Chair Alisa McMahon, Commissioners: Ute Brady, Alexandra Craig, Siobhan Ulreich-Power, and Judah Waxelbaum

ABSENT: Commissioner Tara Iyengar

STAFF PRESENT: Tim Conner, Environmental Policy Manager; Cindi Eberhardt, Planning & Development Area Director; Justin Suryanata, Environmental Projects Coordinator; Clayton Hults, Planning Technician

Public Comment: None

1) **City of Mesa's Food Waste to Renewable Energy Initiative**

Presentation and discussion on the City of Mesa's Food Waste to Renewable Energy Initiative, including the 2020 Feasibility Study; first phase of the Flare to Fuel project and anaerobic digestion at Mesa's Northwest Water Reclamation Plant.

Presentation by Lauren Whittaker, Sustainability Programs Supervisor, City of Mesa
Staff Contact: Tim Conner, Environmental Policy Manager, tconner@scottsdaleaz.gov

Ms. Whittaker provided an overview of the City of Mesa's Food Waste to Energy Initiative. Mesa's food-waste-to-energy cycle includes collecting and pre-processing commercial food waste; injecting the slurry into anaerobic digesters at the wastewater treatment plant; cleaning the resulting methane gas to pipeline standards; and injecting the renewable natural gas (RNG) into Mesa's gas utility for use by the city's CNG-fueled solid waste collection fleet.

Benefits include: avoiding greenhouse gas emissions from methane flare at the wastewater treatment plant; avoiding greenhouse gas emissions from and extending the

life of landfills; producing a local, resilient natural gas supply; displacing fossil fuel use in Mesa's solid waste collection fleet; supporting the Renewable Fuel Standard initiative to reduce reliance on imported oil; obtaining Renewable Fuel Standard incentives (RIN credits); and achieving Mesa's Climate Action Plan 2050 goals: carbon neutrality, 100% renewable energy and 90% waste diversion.

Per million metric tons of food waste, landfilling releases 26,000 metric tons of methane. Composting and anaerobic digestion release 2,800 and 1,600 metric tons, respectively. Preventing wasted food is the most beneficial strategy for reducing the environmental impacts of wasted food.

Mesa embarked on the Food Waste to Energy Initiative seven years ago. In 2020, the city completed a Feasibility Study covering technical, operational and financial aspects. Lessons learned included that Mesa's anaerobic digesters have more than enough excess capacity to handle all the commercial food waste that could be collected in the city. Mesa does not intend to utilize residential food waste for contamination reasons.

At the time of the Feasibility Study, the Renewable Fuel Standard disincentivized U.S. wastewater treatment plants from processing food waste. Even though adding food waste produced greater environmental benefits, plants that did so received lower-value R5 RIN credits while plants that did not add food waste received higher-value R3 RIN credits.

In 2023, EPA published a ruling that partially removed this financial disincentive. The change allows anaerobic digesters that add food waste to earn a split of R3 and R5 RIN credits. Ms. Whittaker indicated the EPA ruling significantly reduced Mesa's projected number of years-to-payback. Mesa and its partners have been working on a grant to develop a more comprehensive solution.

In the meantime, Mesa proceeded with Phase 1, Flare to Fuel. RNG will be produced only from the wastewater treatment plant gas that would otherwise have been flared. Food waste will not be added. However, the equipment has been sized to accommodate the addition of food waste in Phase 2. The facility is currently being commissioned and Phase 1 will be completed this summer. Mesa expects the RNG produced to supply 25-30% of the annual natural gas consumed by the city's solid waste fleet.

Mesa's second and final phase will add food waste, including designing and building the food waste pre-processing facility and injection system as well as developing partnerships and agreements for the food waste collection system. Mesa continues to evaluate funding for Phase 2.

Ms. Whittaker provided a brief description of Mesa's Northwest Water Reclamation Plant and the steps involved in processing the biogas post-anaerobic digestion.

Ms. Whittaker indicated that a city can do food-waste-to-energy without having its own gas utility. However, the Renewable Fuel Standard credits can provide lucrative revenue, and having a gas utility allows a city to retain more of that revenue for itself, rather than sharing it with third parties.

No Action

- 2) **Approve Meeting Minutes for:**
 - a) **February 19, 2025, Regular Meeting**
 - b) **April 16, 2025, Regular Meeting**

Staff Contact: Tim Conner, Environmental Policy Manager, tconner@scottsdaleaz.gov

ITEM 2 Motion and Vote

Tim Conner, Environmental Policy Manager, explained the multiple copies of both the February 19 and April 16 meeting minutes provided to the commission. Commissioner Ute Brady made a motion to approve the February 19, 2025, Meeting Minutes with the tracked changes incorporated and the April 16, 2025, Meeting Minutes with the tracked changes incorporated. The Motion was seconded by Commissioner Siobhan Ulreich-Power. The motion carried with a vote of 6-0. Commissioners Scheck, McMahon, Brady, Craig, Ulreich-Power and Waxelbaum voted for APPROVAL.

- 3) **Sustainable Scottsdale Awards**

Commissioner Craig will provide a post celebration overview of the presentation of the 2025 Sustainable Scottsdale Award which took place on April 28, 2025, at 9:30 a.m. at the Echo Canyon School.

Presenter: Commissioner Craig

Staff Contact: Tim Conner, Environmental Policy Manager, tconner@scottsdaleaz.gov

Commissioner Craig and the other commissioners who attended the Sustainable Scottsdale Award presentation at Echo Canyon School provided a recap of the experience. Following the award ceremony, student leaders known as Culinary Cultivators hosted a campus tour for Councilwoman Maryann McAllen, SEAC commissioners and city staff. Principal Kat Hughes described Echo Canyon as a "Garden with a School." The description is apt. Beginning with the desert tortoise habitat, attendees toured the many pesticide-free gardens where students plant, tend and harvest mostly edible plants. Attendees were also introduced to inhabitants of Scottsdale Unified School District's Critter Farm, which is housed at Echo Canyon. Through a fun format, students challenged attendees' knowledge of what is and is not compostable. Principal Hughes, teachers and students enthusiastically shared their sustainability efforts. Commissioners were impressed by the level of understanding preschool and pre-K students develop regarding the concept of "waste" and the many examples of how the

youngest students reduce, with actual data collection, the amount they send to the landfill. A recent parent survey showed that lessons learned spread beyond the school day; 75% of respondents indicated their children talk about food waste and the school's Mill Recyclers at home.

No Action

4) **Sustainability Award update at future City Council meeting public comment**

The Commission will discuss and potentially vote to appoint a commissioner to represent the commission, to provide an update during the public comment section at a future City Council meeting.

Presenter: Chair Scheck

Staff Contact: Tim Conner, Environmental Policy Manager, tconner@scottsdaleaz.gov

ITEM 4 Motion and Vote

Chair Scheck made a motion to appoint Commissioner Craig to represent the commission during Public Comment at the June 10, 2025 City Council meeting to update City Council on the Sustainable Scottsdale Award including background, process, winner, talking points from the award presentation, impacts, and the video summary of the award presentation at Echo Canyon School. Commissioner Brady provided a Second for the motion which carried with a vote of 6-0. Commissioners Scheck, McMahon, Brady, Craig, Ulreich-Power and Waxelbaum voted for APPROVAL.

5) **Staff Updates**

Staff will present updates pertaining to Scottsdale's environmental initiatives for Commission information only. Arizona State law prohibits the Scottsdale Environmental Advisory Commission from discussing or taking action on an item that is not properly noticed on the posted agenda.

Staff Contact: Tim Conner, Environmental Policy Manager, tconner@scottsdaleaz.gov

Regarding the City's application for the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) LEED for Cities certification, the Office of Environmental Initiatives' intern has resubmitted the City's application with the corrections requested by USGBC. USGBC's review should be completed in June or July. LEED stands for "Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design."

The Shade & Tree Plan is still not completed.

No Action

6) **Identification of Future Agenda Items**

The Scottsdale Environmental Advisory Commission may suggest items they wish to be placed on a future agenda. Per Arizona State law, the Commission shall not discuss, deliberate, or take action on any item suggested as a future agenda item, unless the specific item is properly noticed for Commission discussion.

Staff Contact: Tim Conner, Environmental Policy Manager, tconner@scottsdaleaz.gov

Chair Scheck proposed the commission take a summer break to follow City Council's summer break. Commissioner Brady suggested no more than one month. Cindi Eberhardt indicated that many boards and commissions do take a two-month summer break, so doing so would be typical and consistent with other boards and commissions.

The Commission identified the following future agenda items:

- Scottsdale's LEED for Cities application including qualifying criteria and certification level (when the process has been completed)
- Current status of municipal energy management within the City (Facilities Dept)
- Update on the Old Town Scottsdale Business Recycling Program (continuation of the 2023 Old Town Scottsdale Recycling and Alley Refresh Campaign)
- Scottsdale Water (topics deferred in February 2025)
- Shade & Tree Plan (when completed)
- City's fire risk mitigation practices (staff will provide a link to the recording of the Mayor's Town Hall at DC Ranch)
- Update on City solar projects (2019 Bond and other city projects)
- Presentation by Scottsdale non-profit Ghost Carbon (staff requested additional information)
- Parks & Recreation's use of gas and electric leaf blowers

No Action

Adjournment 6:48 p.m.



Persons with a disability may request reasonable accommodation by contacting the Office of Environmental Initiatives at 480-312-7833. Requests should be made 24 hours in advance, or as early as possible, to allow time to arrange the accommodation. For TTY users, the Arizona Relay Service (1-800-367-8939) others may contact the Office of Environmental Initiatives at 480-312-7833.