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## Environmental group reaffirms Athens' commitment to sustainability

By Heather Willard Messenger Staff Journalist Jul 31, 2018 Updated Jul 31, 2018



Mayor Steve Patterson speaks during a news conference on Monday, July 30 related to the city's priority on sustainability.

Messenger photo by Heather Willard

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Athens has long been known for its sustainability and willingness to experiment with environmentally-friendly programs. On Monday, the city was recognized by an environmental defense fund for local efforts on combatting climate change.

The Defend Our Future group hosted a news conference with Athens Mayor Steve Patterson, Athens City Planner Paul Logue and Dominic Detwiler, a local activist and Ohio University student. The event is the first in a series that the advocacy group is hosting, with the next one to be held in Dayton in early September.

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Logue highlighted Athens' sustainability plan as well as the Environment and Sustainability Commission. That commission has worked to lower the water consumption and the amount of trash coming from apartment complexes and off-campus housing.

"We recommended that (landlords) establish programs to retrofit homes and rental units for energy improvement and to encourage new construction to be more efficient within the city," he said. "There is also a requirement of new construction projects that we focus on diverting the construction materials and deconstruction materials to better recycle those materials."

Logue also said that sustainability is a "key aspect" of Athens' Comprehensive Plan, with sustainability a part of the city's vision statement as well. The planner also spoke about the initiatives the city has for lowering the need for fossil fuels in transportation.

"We're not just looking at environmental behaviors, but things like our transportation network," Logue said. "There (are) things we could do to better encourage people to ride bicycles, build a high-quality sidewalk infrastructure so that it's easier for people to get around without the use of a car."

Patterson also spoke during the news conference. He noted his involvement with a group called the Climate Mayors, featuring hundreds of mayors across the country who have committed to upholding the Paris Agreement goals.

"When the current federal administration decided that they were going to move away from the Paris Climate Accords, I think most of us that were mayors ... everyone was kind of in shock," he said. "I jumped in right away, and I believe Mayor Nan Whaley did as well, there were a number of us saying we're going to continue down the path that was the Paris Climate Accord because it is the most responsible thing to do within our municipalities."

Patterson also spoke about the opt-out carbon fee that was voted upon and passed in May. As The Messenger has reported, the fee will only charge members of the Southeast Ohio Public Energy Council (SOPEC) electric aggregation program in the city 0.2 cents per kilowatt hour of electricity used. The average household consumes between 800 and 900 kilowatt hours each month, according to SOPEC, which means members will pay a monthly fee between \$1.60 and \$1.80.

Patterson said that Athens is becoming increasingly fueled by solar. Logue also noted that a new 195 kilowatt solar array is going to be installed at the Athens Water Treatment Plant on West State Street. The plant uses close to 200 kilowatts each month, the second largest electric account in the city, and city workers are optimistic about how much the array will help. The Water Treatment Plant is also receiving other upgrades, which will increase the plant's efficiency.

"We are constantly exploring ways that we can increase solar," Patterson said. "This administration is all ears."

Patterson spoke about the new recycling and trash containers in uptown Athens, which have solar arrays on top and compact the trash. The mayor added that it is unusual to have recycling opportunities available on sidewalks, adding to how the city works to remain sustainable.

He also said that a new electric vehicle charger might be coming to East State Street, saying that plans to install a fast charger by Athens Community Center are in the works. The mayor also pointed to efforts in changing the lighting in city buildings to LEDs, which use less energy.

Detwiler, the student activist, spoke about the unique challenges of living in Appalachia. He argued that the area has been abused by extraction industries, such as coal, and that injection wells are also spreading toxins into Southeast Ohio.

Detwiler noted that Oxford Coal Co. has put on hold plans for a proposed mine in Trimble Twp. (The company recently dismissed its court challenge of being denied a variance for that proposed mine; see related story.) Detwiler attributes that decision to the activists who opposed the mine.

"It seems that there is a new scandal each day which could distract us from these goals that we have," he said. "Nevertheless, we persist, because the goal here is bigger than ourselves."

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hwillard@athensmessenger.com