

June 2, 2021

To whom it may concern,

As the first neighborhood to participate in the Enlivening Neighborhoods program, the Sunset Hills Environmental Affairs Committee can enthusiastically recommend working with Emerging Ecology to any neighborhood looking to build a committed, engaged, and action-focused group of neighbors with shared goals for neighborhood-specific environmental improvement. Over a series of five 2-hour sessions on Zoom and in person, as well as additional Steering Committee calls, Emerging Ecology guided us and helped us form a cohesive neighborhood group with subcommittees focused on three distinct but overlapping areas of interest, each with concrete goals and timelines for accomplishing them.

The Sunset Hills Environmental Affairs Committee began as a group of three individuals with a lot of energy and ideas for a neighborhood-scale project to address climate change, but no real sense of how to start. While we had a lot of motivation, we did not have any real community organizing experience, which is where our partnership with Emerging Ecology was crucial. They helped us to identify a target number of participants (8-12) and an initial “kick-off” event to attract interest - an hour-long walk to observe our neighborhood with “fresh eyes.” We were surprised by how easily we exceeded the target number of participants, and by how willing everyone was to join the post-walk Zoom meeting where we described our neighborhood as we saw it that day.

Over the next three months, in Steering Committee calls and in four additional 2-hour large group sessions, we engaged in Visioning exercises, then gradually and methodically moved from big-picture ideas into smaller goals and individual steps to accomplish them. Rather than letting us get lost wading through a sea of disconnected ideas, Emerging Ecology helped us create a scaffolding upon which we could organize and build on our goals and find the connections between them. Beyond that, Emerging Ecology helped us to engage many members of our community, weaving our neighborhood closer and building a sense of shared responsibility and commitment.

Emerging Ecology facilitated each large group meeting, and between meetings fielded emails and held check-in calls with the three original members to make sure we were happy with the way things were going. They stayed actively involved in all aspects of the process—from initial contact, to developing and laying the groundwork for the program, to preparing us for meetings, leadership and facilitation during meetings, and follow-up. They struck the right balance between prodding us to make decisions while still letting us make those decisions for ourselves, and steering us towards our goals while not interfering with our ownership of those

goals. They created a structure that required us to think carefully and completely about our goals and helped us find ways to organize them effectively.

Emerging Ecology was flexible with meeting times and formats, and used effective online platforms during the Zoom meetings to emulate the environment of an in-person meeting. Even though our project began during a pandemic, we don't feel we missed out by having the first three meetings on Zoom.

We spent just over three months working with Emerging Ecology, but we are much further along both with our goals and our cohesion as a group than we would have been otherwise. Emerging Ecology helped us work through many issues quickly and effectively, and we are now poised to accomplish our goals! We recommend working with Emerging Ecology to any neighborhood interested in the Enlivening Neighborhoods project - its team of professional facilitators make neighborhood organizing thought-provoking, inspiring, and fun!

Sincerely,

The Sunset Hills Environmental Affairs Steering Committee



Robin Davis



Adam Graham-Squire



Erin D. Reis