



SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION
City Hall—Council Chambers, 3989 Central Ave NE
Tuesday, August 08, 2023
6:00 PM

DRAFT/UNAPPROVED MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

Members present: Commissioners Ahmadvand, Evenson, Finkelson, Groseth, Jensen Christen, Johnson, LaPlante, Leoni-Helbacka

Members absent: Commissioner Kurek

Staff present: Sulmaan Khan, Interim City Engineer
Sara Ion, City Clerk
Andrew Boucher, City Planner
Liam Genter, Urban Forestry Specialist
Sue Chapman, Administrative Assistant

Council Liaison: Connie Buesgens

OLD BUSINESS

NONE

NEW BUSINESS

1. INTRODUCTIONS

The meeting was led by Sulmaan Khan, Interim City Engineer. Staff and commissioners introduced themselves and gave a short background.

2. OATH OF OFFICE

Sara Ion, City Clerk, explained the Oath of Office and passed out the forms for signature.

3. SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION ORIENTATION

The City Clerk and Interim City Engineer provided an orientation for commissioners.

4. VOTE ON CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR FOR THE GROUP

Motion by Ahmadvand to nominate himself as Chairperson for the Sustainability Commission. Seconded by Finkelson. Motion passed unanimously.

Motion by Madeline Jensen Christen to nominate herself as Vice-Chair for the Sustainability Commission. Seconded by Ahmadvand. Motion passed unanimously.

5. INTRO TO COLUMBIA HEIGHTS GREENSTEP CITIES PROFILE

The City of Columbia Heights has been part of the GreenStep Cities since 2013. We haven't done much in recent years, not since 2017. The intent of the intro is to give an idea of some of the things the city has done that relate to sustainability, and what needs to take place to move forward and/or bring new ideas to the table. Andrew Boucher, City Planner, advised his background is more sustainability focused. This has been his passion. He was introduced to the GreenStep Cities program while he was in the Minnesota Green Corps. This is a very good comprehensive program and framework for cities that are just beginning sustainability principles. The City of Columbia Heights is currently on Step 2 of the program and creating this committee satisfies one of the requirements for Step 3, which is the next step we would like to get to. He suggested the commission familiarize themselves with the 2040 Comprehensive Plan and the Minnesota GreenStep Cities program.

6. QUESTIONS

Evenson asked if there are ordinances that are lacking right now that don't meet the sustainability standards. Boucher stated this is a hard question to answer. However, just to give an idea of what some of the more immediate priorities are, the council would like to adopt a chicken ordinance. Also, he and the City Forester worked preliminarily on a tree preservation ordinance. Evenson advised she is the city landscape architect for Lake Elmo, and she does all their development plan reviews for their tree ordinance. Boucher stated he would love to have her feedback.

She then asked if the city is doing much in terms of climate adaptation. She knows we're sustaining Emerald ash borer extensively right now, but in terms of true replacement and other policies, is there anything that falls under something broader? This question was directed to Liam Genter, the Urban City Forester.

Genter explained he's engaged in all forestry and a variety of other activities for the city. He advised we plant lots of trees, definitely more than we remove. We're trying to encourage tree planting on private property through an Arbor Day tree sale that we hold every year. Residents receive an amazing discount on a variety of good climate adapted trees. We're planting for diversity.

Climate adaptation is definitely a big part of the picture. Emerald ash borer in the public forest is very well managed at this point. The city only has 275 remaining ash trees, all of which are being treated on a three-year cycle. The private ash trees remain a large challenge and the city is moving forward with this. Over the winter he surveyed the entire city and located every ash tree on all private property. All property owners recently received mailings informing them of the ash trees on their property, so we're seeing a lot of trees getting removed.

Evenson asked if there are any incentives available, such as discounts. Genter advised there is currently no funding available. The only real comparable event in urban forestry is Dutch Elm disease and at that time the state did provide funding which allowed local governments to assist residents. Unfortunately, the city budget just doesn't have room to compensate for Emerald ash borer as it is a large cost. For homeowners who are unable to afford removals, the city does have a plan in place. If a homeowner is unable to remove a tree that's ordered to be removed by the city, the city would then assign a contractor to remove the tree. Any abatement that's over \$800 automatically gets

assessed to the property taxes, which is really good. Minneapolis has a similar program in place. Certainly, we're keeping our eyes open for additional funding. The state just released two new grants, which for the first time will allow for tree work on private property. Genter will be applying for those grants but the money doesn't exist yet.

Johnson asked if the Sustainability Commission as a group needs to be doing a charter. Khan advised he doesn't know if it's required but a charter or work plan is certainly something that can be done as a group.

Ahmadvand asked what is the goal that the Council would like the commission to focus on for the next few meetings. Boucher recommended that the commission read the comprehensive plan. This will help identify where we might be lacking in some areas or just sort of establish the City's priorities along with the city green steps. This will give the commission "a lot to chew on" over the next month. The little leaf icons with an arrow on the sidebars show the green step items in the comp plan. Boucher has talked with program staff at the GreenStep Cities program and they're also willing to meet whenever we can get the City Council and Sustainability Commission together. He feels they would be a very valuable resource. We certainly could invite them to come to one of our meetings to help us out with some brainstorming and putting together a work plan for action.

Evenson asked about the commission's role in development, such as the Alatus development that's going in at the old Rainbow site. Is there a role for the commission to examine what they're proposing? Khan stated that based on what's he's seen so far, they are still working through the process of pulling together the plan. He feels there will be opportunities coming up for the commission to bring forward any thoughts or ideas.

Finkelson would like to put the comp plan on the agenda for the next meeting. Evenson would like to devote a sizable chunk of the next meeting to getting to know everyone and their passions and backgrounds, more than just the short intro.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Ahmadvand, seconded by Jensen Christen, to adjourn the meeting at 7:26 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Sue Chapman
Administrative Assistant