



SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION

City Hall—Shared Vision Room, 3989 Central Ave NE

Wednesday, August 12, 2026

6:00 PM

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Jensen Christen at 6:01 p.m.

Members present: Commissioners Carlson, Coveyou, Jensen Christen, LaPlante, Leoni-Helbacka, Nelson, Woods

Staff present: Ursula Brandt, City Planner
Liam Genter, City Forester/Natural Resources Specialist
Zekima Rashid, GreenCorps Member
Will Rottler, Communications and Engagement Coordinator (virtual)
Jesse Davies, Refuse and Recycling Coordinator

Members absent: Commissioners Matson-Brady, Small

Council Liaison: Council Member Connie Buesgens

COMMUNITY FORUM

Orson Leoni-Helbacka was present but did not have any comments to make.

CONSENT AGENDA

BUSINESS ITEMS

1. Costume Swap

Presenting Item: Will Rottler, Communications and Engagement Coordinator

Coordinator Rottler introduced himself to the commission and described the City's annual Truck or Treat event and the desire to add a costume swap event. Truck or Treat takes place in October each year and is a popular community event that would provide a great forum for raising awareness around sustainability. Rottler stated that the fire department was willing to host the event in conjunction with their annual open house. The event is scheduled for October 10, from 11am-2pm. Commissioner LaPlante said that the Events Subcommittee would be willing to help and asked what Rottler saw the role of commissioners being. Rottler stated that help would be needed sorting costumes by sizes and types and organizing events at the event itself. Rottler said it would also be a good opportunity for commissioners to engage with the community more broadly about sustainability topics including Partners in Energy. Commissioners Woods and LaPlante said that they would be interested and available to attend the event and help. LaPlante also stated that this could be a potential opportunity to promote events like the Fix-it Clinic as well. Chairperson Jensen Christen asked if the commission wanted

to use this opportunity to promote other Sustainability Commission activities. GreenCorps Member Rashid said that she had plenty of flyers related to Partners in Energy and a tabling kit that would be available for use.

2. Waste Reduction Challenge

Presenting Item: Jesse Davies, Refuse and Recycling Coordinator

Coordinator Davies showed the Anoka County Fix-it Clinic website to the commission and described the process of selecting sites and hosting events. Davies provided an update on the Waste Reduction Challenge starting with a brief background about the challenge. The challenge is designed to educate residents, increase household organics collection participation, and reduce waste from the community at large. Participants in the challenge complete online education about proper composting and recycling and become eligible for a smaller waste cart if they sign up for household organics collection. Coordinator Davies stated that the county recycling ambassador course has been canceled and that city staff are exploring creating a replacement course in-house. The course would consist of a series of video lessons about proper recycling, organics recycling, and other important waste reduction topics. Davies stated that the cost of organics collection would be included in recycling fees starting January 2027, and the city would be looking to roll out the challenge in coordination with that change. Davies anticipates that staff will have the website, lessons, and challenge ready for launch in January 2027. Davies further stated that the Solid Waste Policy was in the process of a full update, and that it would be presented to the commission for collaboration and review during the process. Davies showed a map of properties participating in organics and yard waste collection and said that the goal for 2027 was to increase participation to 20% of households city-wide. Commissioner LaPlante asked if it was possible for renters to participate in the program. Davies stated that all properties were eligible and that several rental properties in the city already participated. Councilmember Buesgens asked if the city could present information about participating in organics collection to the landlord meetings. Davies replied that it would be possible and that interest might increase once the fees are automatically included in the recycling cost.

3. We Are Water

Presenting Item: Rachel, We Are Water

Discussion of organization and how the Commission can participate.

<https://www.mnhum.org/program/we-are-water-mn/>

Rachel Busihauser from the MN Humanities Center introduced herself and provided the commission with background information about her organization and the We are Water program which they facilitate. We Are Water is a traveling exhibition that visits 5 communities in MN each year. The exhibition provides opportunities for community events centered around water, education, and community engagement. The goal of the program is to facilitate conversations about water and build relationships between communities and their water resources. Rachel described the process by which communities can become hosts for the exhibition in the future. Libraries, community centers, and other public places are the types of venues that make good hosting locations. Rachel stated that the exhibition would be hosted later this year in the library in Blaine, MN, if commissioners wanted an opportunity to see the

exhibition in person. Rachel also described a smaller program called the Water Bar, which is able to be deployed at various events. The Water Bar can be set up at community events and provides 3 different types of water to be tasted like beer flights, usually tap, filtered bottled, and filtered spring. The purpose of the Water Bar is to start a conversation about the differences between tap and bottled water, preferences, and sustainability issues around water choices. Commissioner Small asked if the Water Bar was at the State Fair. Rachel replied that the MPCA had a similar display at the State Fair, but it was not from the We Are Water organization. Chairperson Jensen Christen asked about the application process to be a host community. Rachel replied that successful applicants usually had well planned out partnerships and resources in place because of the extended timeline of the exhibitions. Rachel also described the required spaces needed and the timeline of a typical application and hosting cycle.

4. Green Steps Recognition at Council Meeting

Presenting Item: Zekima Rashid, Green Corps Member

Scheduling date for Council Meeting for Green Steps to present Step 3

GreenCorps Member Rashid said that she would like to schedule with the commission a date to come to a City Council meeting to be recognized for reaching Step 3 in the Green Step Cities program. The commissioners discussed availability and said that Monday, September 14 would be the best date for the recognition. Commissioner Coveyou asked if all commissioners were expected to attend. Councilmember Buesgens said that as many commissioners as could attend would be welcome to attend and that they had played a critical role in achieving Step 3.

5. Community Energy Ambassador Program Certifications

Commissioners provide updates on progress and discussion of topics covered.

The commissioners discussed their progress in completing the Community Energy Ambassador Certification program. Commissioners discussed potential ideas for their final project and Commissioner Nelson suggested tying the project into existing commission events like the costume swap or an invasive species pulling event. Commissioners generally decided to target late October for the project and to tie it in with Truck or Treat or the Costume Swap event. Chairperson Jensen Christen summarized the discussion saying that the project would have a Halloween theme and would discuss energy efficiency as a sustainability topic. Jensen Christen asked if any specific energy efficiency topic made sense for the events. Commissioner Carlson suggested phantom power as a topic for the events to stay on the Halloween theme to general acclaim. Commissioner Nelson asked how the group wanted to approach the project proposal creation and submission to the extension program. Commissioner Coveyou suggested a shared document for the proposal and Commissioner Nelson volunteered to take lead on the proposal. Commissioner LaPlante asked if the proposal had to be completed before the event. GreenCorps Member Rashid said that the idea had to be submitted first but that it could change if needed before the event.

6. Climate Resiliency Planning

Discussion of what the City is working on and what the Sustainability Commission would like to see.

Planner Brandt stated that this agenda item had been brought to her by a commissioner and described the work being done on the Comprehensive Plan update, which will include a chapter on climate for the first time. Commissioner LaPlante described her interest in Climate Resiliency Hubs and their role in comprehensive Climate Resiliency Planning. LaPlante described what Climate Resiliency Hubs are and the various forms which they can take. LaPlante showed the commission resources that she had included on the commission Teams page and encouraged the group to start thinking about the topic. The commission agreed to review the information and table further discussions until a later meeting.

7. Zekima's Last Meeting

The commission thanked Zekima for all her great work over the last year at the City. Rashid thanked all the commissioners for the experience and shared her plans to continue as a GreenCorps Member for another year. Commissioner LaPlante thanked Zekima especially for her important work on achieving GreenStep Cities Step 3 and encouraged her to attend the City Council meeting on September 14 to be recognized.

BUSINESS UPDATES

Staff Updates

Subcommittee Updates

Commissioner LaPlante said that the Events Subcommittee had attended the Monarch Festival, which was very well attended and successful.

Commissioner Coveyou provided a brief update about the meeting of the Monarch Pledge subcommittee. The subcommittee discussed potential forum topics including gardening for butterflies; the topic would be a natural fit for late winter or early spring when people are starting to think about gardening.

Commissioner Leoni-Helbacka provided an update about a subcommittee meeting where discussions included potential singles buckthorn pulling and cosmic buckthorn pulling. Leoni-Helbacka also stated that the subcommittee would be hosting a buckthorn pulling event at LaBelle Park on Sunday, August 23, from 10am-12pm.

Commissioner Updates

Planning and Coordination

ADJOURNMENT

Chairperson Jensen Christen made a motion to adjourn, and Commissioner Carlson seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Liam Genter
City Forester/Natural Resources Specialist