



SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION

City Hall—Council Chambers, 3989 Central Ave NE

Tuesday, October 10, 2023

6:00 PM

DRAFT/UNAPPROVED MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

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

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

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

Council Liaison: Connie Buesgens

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by LaPlante, seconded by Johnson to approve the minutes of September 12, 2023 as presented. Motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

1. GreenStep Cities Profile Follow Up

Evenson went through the 2024 assessments and highlighted the action items she felt were the most relevant/easiest to accomplish, along with items that may have been already accomplished.

Boucher favors the Sustainable Purchasing Policy. Some of the items listed can be incorporated into this policy, such as WaterSense, outdoor lighting, LED lighting, etc. Some may have already been done or are currently in process so just need to be put in writing. Councilmember Buesgens advised the City will be replacing all residential water meters in 2024/2025. The monitor usage will be extremely accurate and residents will be able to keep track of their water use, so this might fit into action 2.5. LaPlante asked about action 2.1, could we provide educational/awareness information in regard to the water meter program. Boucher stated we can; he would like to put this information on the utility bill. Groseth suggested adding the information to the emailed receipts customers receive. She also suggested partnering with the MWMO regarding a rain barrel workshop.

Commissioners discussed involving local businesses per action 2.4. Boucher advised in his experience businesses don't like doing things that require them to invest more time and money. Energy Star Portfolio Manager or similar energy tracking software are free tools. It could be worthwhile to pursue a workshop or some engagement activities showing the business owners how to use tracking software to get their utility data uploaded. Then they basically just need to check it every six months to make sure their data is still reporting. Possibly reaching out to landlords was also discussed.

Ahmadvand brought up adopting standards in action 3.5. Boucher felt action 3.5 would be good as there are new developments coming up in the future and a lot of these buildings would have a common interest such as green space; rainwater harvesting could be built-in, landscaping preferences, etc. Councilmember Buesgens is definitely in favor of establishing some type of framework developers need to follow for building construction.

LaPlante wants a more sustainable community but without creating so many hurdles that it only benefits the large land developers. Kurek suggested looking at the Minneapolis 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

Best Practice 24: Benchmarks and Community Engagement was reviewed and discussed as well as tree data and a dashboard or GIS data for the public.

Commissioners decided to discuss Best Practice 11: Living & Complete Streets.

Motion by Evenson, seconded by LaPlante to table the GreenStep Cities Profile discussion.

2. Follow up On Shared Email for Commission

Khan checked with the IT Department and was told that to create a Columbia Heights email you must be a Columbia Heights staff person. Since the commission members are not staffed, we cannot create an email for the group to use, but there are some other options. Commissioners can create their own group email through Google, or they can have their email posted on the website if they want items to come directly to them. Otherwise, Khan can share emails he receives with the group. Commissioners can also email him. If there are items that the commission wants to share with the public they can send these to Khan and he will get it out on social media or in the newsletter.

3. Adopt a Tree Update

Genter stated they received a huge number of volunteers for the Adopt a Tree program and thanked commissioners for their part.

NEW BUSINESS

4. Review of Complete Streets Proposal

The Commission discussed the Complete Streets Proposal and ordinance and how it relates to Best Practice 11. Commissioners questioned if the projects on 37th Avenue and 53rd Avenue could/should be included in this best practice as they are both shared projects with another city. Another street project coming up is 40th Avenue which will fall under the Complete Streets policy. An open house is scheduled for November 2 at City Hall.

Boucher explained the metrics and what we need to track to get to Steps 4 and 5. Commissioners then reviewed the proposed ordinance. Boucher strongly encouraged the commission to ensure this ordinance is workable and does not just exist on paper. In regard to transportation and priority groups, he tried to tie as much as he could back to the Comp Plan. Finkelson feels there are two major points that are deficient. One being there is no mention of equity in the original draft. The other is securing streets during construction projects. As an example, when the Ratio building was being constructed the sidewalk was taken out. The sidewalk detour was to walk up to Reservoir Boulevard, which is basically the biggest hill in town, and then go across and come back down on Gould Avenue. So, there was approximately a year and a half of pedestrians walking in the street on Central Avenue. For the 37th

Avenue project he contacted Sulmaan and Minneapolis and they put up cones, barrels and ramps where there was nothing before. He would not go forward unless there are accommodations for pedestrians during construction. The score sheet also mentions stating who is responsible for approving exceptions, which he feels is important. When the City redid his street they did not do it in a safe streets fashion. Boucher advised that this ordinance would provide accountability. Under Best Practice 24 the equity side can be built in as commissioners develop the policy. Once commissioners are familiar with Best Practice 24, they can start to pull from Best Practice 11. Construction on the Rainbow site is supposed to start next year, so this policy might be a good priority. Boucher recommended commissioners become familiar with Best Practices 24 and 11 which should help with the community equity portion of the ordinance.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Evenson, seconded by Ahmadvand to adjourn the meeting at 7:36 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Sue Chapman
Administrative Assistant