



# SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION

City Hall—Shared Vision Room, 3989 Central Ave NE

Tuesday, April 8, 2025

6:00 PM

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## MINUTES

### CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Jensen Christen at 6:02 p.m.

Members present: Commissioners Evenson, Groseth, Jensen Christen, Johnson, LaPlante, Kurek, Small

Staff present: Andrew Boucher, City Planner  
Liam Genter, City Forester/Natural Resources Specialist  
Sara Ion, City Clerk

Members absent: Commissioners Leoni-Helbacka, Carlson

Council Liaison: Rachel James

**Community Forum:** No community members present.

### 1. Oath of Office/Introductions (Two Commissioners; April 2025 - March 2028).

City Planner Boucher related that two new commissioners had been selected and taken the oath of office—Grant Carlson and Stephanie Small.

### 2. Overview of Boards and Commissions/Orientation

City Clerk Ion greeted the commission and introduced herself to the new commissioner Stephanie Small. Ion told the commission that she was available to advise and inform commissioners about boards and commissions in general and parliamentary procedure in specific. Ion further related that she had given an orientation and a general overview of boards and commissions to the new commissioners. Staff and commissioners then took turns introducing themselves to commissioner Small and providing a short synopsis of their background. Commissioner Small then introduced herself to the commission and provided some background information.

### 3. Vote for New Chair and Vice Chair (Terms from April 2025 - March 2026).

Planner Boucher stated that it was time for the commission to nominate and select a chair and vice chair for the next year, to end in May 2026. Commissioner Jensen Christen was nominated and selected by unanimous vote to be the chairperson of the commission. Commissioner Evenson was nominated and selected by unanimous vote to be the vice-chairperson of the commission. Commissioner Johnson asked if the new commissioners would be finishing the terms of the commissioners they replaced or serving full three-year terms. Clerk Ion explained that the new commissioners would be serving full three-year terms. The full terms will allow for membership in the commission to be staggered and not have the entire commission turnover at the same time.

Ion further related that new updates to the city code limited the service on city commissions to two consecutive terms on any one commission.

**4. Approve March 11, 2025, Sustainability Commission Meeting Minutes**

Planner Boucher provided commissioner Small with a synopsis of the March 11, 2025, meeting including the goal setting activity, Waste Reduction Challenge, and GreenStep Cities assessment. Commissioner Groseth made a motion to approve the minutes and commissioner LaPlante seconded; motion passed unanimously.

**OLD BUSINESS**

**NEW BUSINESS**

**5. 2025 Sustainability Commission Goal Setting: Part II**

Planner Boucher provided a recap of the goal-setting session from the previous meeting of the commission. Specific ideas were gathered into four categories of goals including GreenStep Cities Communications and GIS Storymapping, Parks and Public Spaces, Stewardship, and Plans and Policy. Boucher related that GreenStep Cities Communications and GIS Storymapping tied with Plans and Policy with the most votes, followed by Parks and Public Spaces and Stewardship in that order. Boucher shared that the city will know if our application to host a MN Green Corps was successful in the next several weeks. Boucher showed the vote tallies and how the ideas had been organized, and shared that he felt the Parks Master Plan process would be a valuable way to tie together many sustainability initiatives. Commissioner Evenson made several points about parks planning in general including evaluation of existing resources, identifying gaps, and thinking about the end of life and transition plans for existing play features. Evenson also brought up the need to have an investment and funding strategy for parks and recreation and the master plan and stated her interest in having a joint meeting with the Parks and Recreation Commission. Commissioner LaPlante also stated interest in having a joint meeting in May or June with the commission. Planner Boucher said that he would reach out to them and see if a joint meeting would be a possibility. Councilmember James stated that all Parks and Recreation meetings are open to the public and can be attended and participated in by residents. James further explained that if people are unable to attend the meetings in person, they can write letters or emails to the commission that will be read in the meetings and added to the public record. Commissioner Evenson stated that she had not seen any actual draft park plans and was interested in reviewing those before providing a response to the commission. Boucher continued with the recap of the goal setting session from the previous meeting and shared the organized list of focus areas for the Sustainability Commission in 2025-2026 that resulted from the session. Boucher touched on various specific items within the focus areas including Parks Master Plan updates, park walks, Complete Streets Policy implementation, and updated welcome packets for businesses and residents. Evenson stated that the welcome packet for new residents as an online resource would be more useful and sustainable than the large number of papers that she received when moving to Columbia Heights. Commissioner Kurek asked about the large number of GIS initiatives in the goals and focus areas and how that work would be completed. Boucher stated that GIS work had been built into the work plan for the GreenCorps intern and that additional support from our in-house GIS analyst as needed. Kurek asked if an additional staff would be needed to complete the Storymapping side of the project and

whether the Sustainability Commission needed to push for that. Evenson stated that communications is an integral component of the process for creating the GIS Storymaps, and that storytelling is critical to making a good product. Evenson further stated that the commission should have some review over the created product to ensure that the messaging is clear and on point. Boucher said that the initial goals would be to keep GreenStep Cities step four and five in mind because specific metrics needed to be tracked to achieve those steps. Boucher also discussed areas of overlap for the Sustainability Commission, Planning Commission, and the Economic Development Authority. Councilmember James provided updates from the City Council work session on the Central Avenue reconstruction project. Commissioner LaPlante asked if the reconstruction plans show mixed use trails, sidewalks, or bike path on the side of the road. James replied that the City of Columbia Heights would have the final say on that part of the project and that staff had recommended a mixed-use trail. James elaborated about the factors that influence that recommendation including emergency vehicle access, snow plowing and other maintenance needs, and accessibility considerations. The commission discussed different visions and ideas for framing and marketing the decisions being made during the Central Ave reconstruction project. Commissioner Evenson asked whether the city was inclined to include a trails and connectivity plan with the Parks Master Plan or have two separate plans. Planner Boucher stated that he was not certain about the intention, but that it made sense to include connectivity in the Parks Master Plan. Commissioner Evenson commented that the Parks System Plan currently included in the Comprehensive Plan was not an acceptable plan. Councilmember James commented that the planning is somewhat disjointed in Columbia Heights because part of the planning falls under the Recreation Department while trails and open space planning is under Public Works. Planner Boucher stated that the Recreation Department is mostly focused on programming and that the responsibility for parks development planning is mostly driven by the Engineering Department. Commissioner Evenson commented that developing a master plan for the parks system with major staff gaps would be nearly very difficult. Commissioner Evenson noted that the GreenStep Cities includes many parks and recreation related items and that currently Columbia Heights was not reporting completion on any of them. Evenson also noted that she appreciated Boucher involving many commissions in the goal setting activities and bringing the different concerned parties together. Councilmember James commented that there had been great applicants for the open commission positions and that great people had been chosen to fill them,

#### 6. **Round Robin**

Councilmember James related that at the next City Council meeting the mayor will be issuing Earth Day and Arbor Day proclamations, and that if any commission members wanted to come and speak it would be a great time to relate Sustainability Commission items and accomplishments to the public. James further stated that the new commissioners would be announced at the city cleanup day on April 26. Commissioner Groseth related that a zero-waste event was upcoming at Edison high school and that she had room if anyone wanted to carpool. Commissioner LaPlante stated that per the request of Councilmember Buesgens she would be writing an article about the Adopt a Drain program for the newsletter. LaPlante also said she would be writing an additional article about the Waste Reduction Challenge as her usual Sustainability Commission column. Commissioner Evenson commented that the compost available for pickup at the Recycling Center was not always available and that the bags for transport worked poorly. Planner Boucher asked Evenson to email him the details so he could follow up with Jesse Davies.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Commissioner Groseth made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Kurek. The motion was approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Liam Genter  
City Forester/Natural Resources Specialist