



SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION
City Hall—Shared Vision Room, 3989 Central Ave NE
Tuesday, April 9, 2024
6:00 PM

DRAFT MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order by Co -Chairperson Ahmadvand at 6:00 p.m.

Members present: Commissioners Finkelson, Groseth, Jensen Christen, LaPlante, Kurek, Evenson

Members absent: Commissioners Ahmadvand, Leoni-Helbacka

Staff present: Sulmaan Khan, Interim City Engineer
Liz Bushaw, Administrative Assistant
Andrew Boucher, City Planner

Staff absent: Liam Genter, Urban Forestry Specialist

Council Liaison: Connie Buesgens (present)

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by Kurek, seconded by Jensen- Christen to approve the minutes of March 12th, 2024 as presented. Motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

3. Sustainable Purchasing Policy Update

Khan stated that he hasn't had a chance to go through all of the comments and edits, and opened the floor for anyone who wanted to speak on the comments that they made. Khan reviewed the comments with the commissioners. The group discussed changes to language and content they'd like to see changed or added. LaPlante suggested that this policy should be brought in front of the employees at the city that do purchasing so that the city can better choose products that are more sustainable. Boucher suggested that we take the next step and bring the policy out to the department heads for feedback and input.

4. Complete Streets Policy Update

Khan referred to the updated policy that had been completed by Commissioner Finkelson. Commissioner Finkelson stated that he wanted to take out irrelevant references that were in the policy, and create more Columbia Heights specific information. Khan explained a bit more about the City's street rehab program that currently exists. Boucher asked if we could use the same kind of language from our existing rehab program in our new Complete

Streets Policy – especially as it pertains to the city being broken up into quadrants and zones. There was some discussion within the group as a whole about equitability and how to prioritize projects and funding. Commissioners and staff discussed the ability to include way finding in the Complete Streets Policy, and the conceivability of including other commissions and boards in the complete streets planning and implementation process.

5. Partners in Energy Update

Boucher stated that we did complete a kick-off meeting for Partner in Energy – he then went over what the next steps in the process are. We will need to put together an “energy action team” of about 17-24 people. He identified some of the organizations that were brought up as being possible stakeholders and interested parties in this team, and then opened the floor to the commissioners for suggestions and thoughts. Some suggestions were brought forward to Boucher who agreed these would be great people and organizations to reach out to in addition to the ones that have already been identified. Previously identified groups: Sustainability Commission, HeightsNext, the school district, Kiwanis Club, Rotary Club, Lions Club, SACO food shelf, the Multicultural Advisory Committee, the Business Council, homeowners, renters, the Ecuadorian population, the Somali populations, potentially connecting with Native American folks in Columbia Heights, landlords & rental property managers, and realtors.

6. GreenCorps Host Site Update

LaPlante stated that the subcommittee has been meeting regularly.

7. Sustainability Commission Newsletter Submission

LaPlante stated that the commission had picked a topic in our last meeting and then wrote an article for the newsletter. Khan said that they will probably need to cut some of it down for the physical newsletter, but will publish the full article in the online version. Commissioners will pick the next topic in the May meeting.

8. Implementing Ban on Black Plastic To-Go Containers From Restaurants

LaPlante tabled this item.

9. Sustainability Commission Representation at City Events

With the Expo coming up, the Sustainability Commission will have a table. Commissioners will not be present due to prior engagements, but Boucher assured everyone that he would represent their interests at the event. Boucher also brought up an event that will be happening for Earth Day, and will follow up with the group about other upcoming events.

NEW BUSINESS

10. Round Robin

Buesgens stated that she got word about some corporate landlords that will be likely leaving the City due to licensing issues, which will be good news for the community as a whole as it will help to maintain our housing stock and create safe places for folks to live. Buesgens also stated that a couple of homes that will be demolished in the city will be able to have some of the materials be salvaged. She also said that MNDOT has dedicated \$25 million to the reconstruction of Central Avenue.

Johnson asked about “no mow May” vs. “less mow May” – Buesgens explained that the updated version is actually more sustainable.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Jensen-Christen, seconded by Evenson to adjourn the meeting at 7:46 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

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