



SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION

City Hall—Shared Vision Room, 3989 Central Ave NE

Thursday February 15, 2024

6:00 PM

APPROVED MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

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

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

Members absent: Commissioners Kurek, Evenson

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

Staff absent: Liam Genter, Urban Forestry Specialist
Andrew Boucher, City Planner

Council Liaison: Connie Buesgens (present)

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by Ahmadvand, seconded by LaPlante to approve the minutes of October 10, 2023, as presented. Motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Sustainable Purchasing Policy Update

Khan stated that a draft copy of a sustainable purchasing policy was distributed at the December meeting and opened the floor for comments or questions from commissioners. LaPlante stated that she would like more time to consider the policy, and Ahmadvand agreed. There were some issues getting access to the policy, and Khan stated he would reach out to IT to get that resolved. Commissioners agreed to revisit the sustainable purchasing policy at the next meeting.

2. Complete Streets Policy Update

Khan stated that he reviewed the information in the complete streets policy and wanted to ask commissioners for their thoughts about the language requiring reporting the race and ethnicity of car accident victims – the State of Minnesota does not provide that information, and it is only reported at a Federal level. LePlante said that she wanted to keep the language the same but remove the specifics about race. After some discussion about editing parts of the language, Khan stated that he would make the adjustments discussed and then send back out to the group for approval and comments via Teams.

LePlante suggested that a report about the condition of the infrastructure be provided to ensure it is maintained. Khan explained that this may be something we could achieve through a GIS map. Khan further explained that Columbia Heights breaks the city into zones every year to assess and repair

infrastructure as needed, and this would also include any pedestrian and bike areas. Khan said that he can check through the street rehab policy and make sure the language includes the complete streets items. LePlante requested a copy of the street rehab policy Khan discussed, and Khan agreed to provide it for the next meeting.

3. Partners in Energy Update

Khan stated that Boucher has submitted the application for this and will need to follow up with him about the results.

4. GreenCorps Host Site Update

Khan went over the need to choose a focus area to submit an application for GreenCorps, and commissioners discussed what that might look like at the city, and who this person might work with for their 11-month assignment.

Khan suggested a sub-committee to provide a little more research and information about what this focus area should be, and what project makes the most sense to have this person work on. Commissioners expressed an interest in speaking with Jesse Davies to discuss a little further what might be needed in the Refuse and Recycling department, and if this GreenCorps position would be a good fit.

Ahmadvand made a motion to start a subcommittee to do more research and evaluation around opportunities for these and other internships. Motion was seconded by Finkelson. Motion Passed.

NEW BUSINESS

5. Sustainability Commission Submission for City Newsletter (e.g. zero waste tips, sustainability facts, etc.)

Buesgens and Groseth explained that it may be a good idea to include a sustainability section to the city's newsletter and gave examples of possible topics.

LePlante stated she works in marketing and would love to work on some communications on behalf of the Sustainability Commission to include in the newsletter.

Commissioners discussed possible ideas to highlight in the newsletter including organizing some clean-up days.

6. Changes to Municipal Organics Program going into effect in Spring

LePlante brought up the communication that had been sent out about the new organics recycling program. She asked if the group might be able to speak with Jesse, the Refuse and Recycling Coordinator, to talk about messaging, communication, and education about new organics recycling program. Khan stated that he would see if he would be available for the March meeting.

7. Implementing Ban on Black Plastic To-Go Containers from Restaurants

LePlante explained the problems with recycling black plastic and brought an example to share with the group about the Minneapolis ban on black plastics for to-go containers. LePlante shared that she believes it may be a good first step for Columbia Heights.

Finkelson suggested getting feedback from the community about the possibility of banning black plastic.

Khan stated that in order to enforce any policy banning the use black plastic, there would need to be an ordinance passed for that.

The commissioners decided to bring some action steps forward for the March meeting.

8. People Over Parking Act

Finkelson brought forward the idea to stop requiring a parking minimum in the City of Columbia Heights for new spaces in the city.

Beusgens said that it would be a good idea to bring a list of pros and cons for getting rid of parking minimums to the council for consideration.

9. Round Robin

Leoni-Helbacka made a motion to create a subcommittee for invasive species removal. Motion was seconded by Johnson. Motion passed unanimously.

LePlante mentioned that she had attended a field trip to a recycling plant with Jesse Davies that was valuable and educational and encouraged the other commissioners to attend these adult education events in the future.

Khan stated that the draft agenda can be sent to the group for additional items or edits.

Groseth asked if anyone from the group would want to table at an upcoming event for the city, and that this could also be added to next month's agenda.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Ahmadvand, seconded by Jensen-Christen to adjourn the meeting at 7:45 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Bushaw
Administrative Assistant