



SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION
City Hall—Shared Vision Room, 3989 Central Ave NE
Tuesday, March 12, 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, LaPlante, Leoni-Helbacka, Kurek, Evenson

Members absent: Commissioner Johnson

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 Ahmadvand, seconded by LaPlante to approve the minutes of February 16, 2024, as presented. Motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Sustainable Purchasing Policy Update

Khan said that he did see some comments on the group's Teams page that had been created. Ahmadvand asked what the cutoff should be to get feedback to Sulmaan – Sulmaan said that whenever the group is comfortable, they can move on to next steps. Boucher said that if they have questions, he can run it past the MPCA resource he has. LaPlante suggested that we do that as our version of the policy is close to completed. Boucher said that most of the work has been done that would be needed for a City Council work session, and Khan stated that May is probably the soonest time that this could get on the agenda. Evenson suggested that the deadline for the commission to get in comments would be in two weeks so that we can have them in time for the May work session.

2. Complete Streets Policy Update

Khan had included a draft of the policy in the packet and went through the comments – many of them have to do with not having the information to report on certain things. Some

roadways were mentioned that are actually state roadways, so they become hard to prioritize. Finkelson brought up that we should include MNDOT and county roads as MNDOT had said they didn't consider sidewalks to be their business. The trigger for the complete streets program would just be when the street is up for reconstruction. Boucher asked if the county or MNDOT have complete street design standards – Khan said that for sure the state does. Boucher asked if we could incorporate their language into our policy, and Khan replied that it is somewhat in the policy already. Boucher said that there is a complete streets evaluation tool – we can upload our policy and judge our policy based on the feedback. Khan said that the entire policy is in the Teams group and to please go in and make comments. LaPlante asked if we can add language about coordinating with other entities about the connected streets that would include a community engagement piece. Finkelson stated that there should be some language outlining the expectations for the city are such that our streets are “complete” streets. Khan asked for clarification about what “downtown” means – Boucher explained that we do have a central business district that could be considered downtown. Boucher asked if everyone could put their final comments in by the next meeting, and possibly this will go on the May work session for City Council.

3. Partners in Energy Update

Khan stated that Columbia Heights has been approved for the Partners in Energy Program. Boucher explained a little more about the program and said that he has a couple of contacts there who can schedule a kickoff meeting for us to go over the process and plan what would be best for the community. We would put together an Energy Action Team that can include community members, city staff, businesses etc. Ahmadvand said that having this kickoff at the expo would be a good idea, and Boucher agreed. LePlante asked if a tabling event would get the message across, and Boucher said that he is open to ideas about that. Ahmadvand said it might be best to have a separate event if there is enough interest at the tabling event. Groseth suggested that we have the date and time of the stand-alone event available for folks who might be interested. Boucher said that he liked the engagement for the Medtronic project, and something similar might work well for this project. Having a landing page for the Sustainability Commission would be a good way to promote the commission in general. Khan introduced Grant who works for the CEE and would like to be involved in the PIE program. Grant gave a short explanation about what the CEE does. Ahmadvand asked what involvement would be needed from the schools, and Boucher said they could be a good resource for getting the word out and community engagement. Boucher also said that some feedback they got was to clarify goals: social equity, land use etc.

4. GreenCorps Host Site Update

Boucher said that there is a companion program called ImpactCorps – they accept proposals as they get them, so it is a rolling application. There is also the ability to suggest a particular person for the role. GreenCorps is not a quarterly application – it is yearly. Leoni-Helbacka said that the subcommittee formed at the previous meeting is called the Sustainable Collaboration Committee – they will research and bring up other opportunities

for grants or internships. They can investigate this ImpactCorps and find where we might have a need for it. Boucher said that he would encourage the subcommittee to put their suggestions into a workplan. Jenson-Christen said that talking to city staff to identify where there might be needs in the city for an internship would be helpful. Kurek suggested that GIS maps might be a great project to get one of these interns started on.

5. Sustainability Commission Newsletter Submission

LaPlante said that she came up with about 6 topic ideas for a submission. LaPlante went over what ideas that she came up with. They decided that xeriscaping would be the best topic to cover first for the newsletter, and compost and organics topics can be covered in the city Expo. Boucher brought up a new citywide Time of Sale policy that may include some energy audits.

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

Kurek asked if we could get in contact with the Business Council – this might be a great topic to chat with them about. Leoni-Helbacka said that there is program called minimize that does a reusable takeaway program that some of our businesses might be interested in knowing about.

7. People Over Parking Act

Finkelson mentioned withdrawing this until further notice.

8. City Representation

Groseth said that she would like to have more representation at city events. We could have a couple of people at many events in the city and tailor the message to the event.

NEW BUSINESS

9. Expo

Ahmadvand asked how many people would want to go to the Expo, several members of the commission will be at the event. LaPlante asked to send ideas for handouts and print outs to our communications team. Ahmadvand asked about approving the materials that we will have at the table – the group can send over ideas for comments. Kurek asked about the PIE being included in the tabling event and whether or not we should have a GreenSteps City blurb as well. Ahmadvand asked if it would be possible to get the SC webpage up by the time the expo happens.

10. Round Robin

Connie shared that Fridley submitted a grant application for a hydraulic separator that would reduce pollutants to Sullivan Lake.

Evenson brought up park system planning and wanting to be included in some of that planning.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Ahmadvand, seconded by LaPlante to adjourn the meeting at 7:26 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

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