

**Minnetonka Sustainability Commission
Virtual Meeting
Minutes**

May 17, 2022

1. Call to Order

Chair Golob called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Sustainability Commissioners Justin Anderson, Edwin Avalos, Elizabeth Boor, Brian Golob, Matt Henry and David Ingraham were present. Greta Beck, Ashley Pattain and Harapanahalli Muralidhara were absent.

Staff present: Community Development Director Julie Wischnack, City Planner Loren Gordon, Drew Ingvalson, Associate Planner/Sustainability Coordinator and Minnesota Green Corps member Julia Wells.

3. Approval of the Agenda

Henry moved, second by Ingraham, to approve the agenda as submitted.

Anderson, Avalos, Boor, Henry, Ingraham and Golob voted yes. Beck, Pattain and Muralidhara were absent. Motion carried.

4. Approval of Sustainability Commission March 15, 2022 Meeting Minutes

Henry moved, second by Avalos, to approve the minutes as submitted with the removal of the words “on the” on Page 4, Item C, before the word “declaration.”

Anderson, Avalos, Boor, Henry, Ingraham and Golob voted yes. Beck, Pattain and Muralidhara were absent. Motion carried.

5. Report from Staff

Ingvalson gave the staff report. He stated that:

- The next Energy Action Plan meeting will take place on May 24, 2022.
- Commissioners are invited to sign up to represent the sustainability commission at the following:
 - Summer Farmer’s Market and Summer Fest events.
 - A Solar-Power-Hour event was presented by MREA and a solar power installer on Thursday, July 14, 2022.
 - Everything Electric Event to be held Sunday, July 24, 2022.

- The next sustainability commission meeting is scheduled to be held on July 19, 2022.

6. Report from Sustainability Commission Members

Anderson noted that there is a recycling company, Redwell, which provides prescription-based recycling services by collecting different items such as stuffed animals and straws at different times. It is a nationwide company that now has a location in St. Louis Park.

Chair Golob stated that he volunteered at an event organized by We Share Solar in April. Patty Acomb helped organize the event. There were nine teams of junior high students at West Junior High who assembled items in solar suitcases that included a controlling mechanism. The constructed items were connected to solar cells. The kits are now being sent to nine groups in Kenya to produce light for the schools and community centers at night. Channels 9 and 11 televised the event. He encouraged the participants to apply for a Minnetonka Sustainability Award.

Chair Golob attended an Environment Commissions Conference at the Ridgedale Service Center and listened to three speakers. There will be a Zoom meeting on May 25, 2022, from 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. that everyone is welcome to join; that will be a climate-action conversation focusing on the Twin Cities.

7. Agenda Items

A. Sustainable Minnetonka Awards Update

Ingvalson reported that the Sustainable Minnetonka Award was promoted in the April Minnetonka Memo, and the application has been posted to the city website. One application was received in May. The application deadline is June 20, 2022.

Boor asked if the application needed to be filled out by the nominee or if someone else could apply on another's behalf. Ingvalson answered that an application could be submitted on another's behalf, but the nominee would need to be willing to have the information on the project shared with the public in an effort to promote sustainable efforts.

Boor suggested that the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District be provided information on the award. Ingvalson agreed.

Avalos suggested that flyers be given out at the Farmer's Market. Ingvalson stated that the first Farmer's Market would be on June 28, 2022.

In response to Henry's question, Ingvalson explained that 80 percent of respondents to a survey reported learning of the survey from the Minnetonka Memo.

Gordon added that the Minnetonka Memo has the highest readership of any publication in the metro area. The strategy is to use as many avenues of communication as possible.

In response to Henry's questions, Ingvalson will look into the number of visits made to Minnetonka's sustainable website page and the number of sustainability subscribers. Henry suggested advertising on Nextdoor and posting flyers at Whole Foods and Trader Joe's.

Ingraham suggested that if more nominees are needed closer to June 20th, staff will contact a resident who utilizes solar power and encourage that person to apply for a sustainability award. Henry suggested utilizing the pool of people who completed a home energy audit. Ingraham suggested residents who made energy-efficient improvements to their residences.

The public hearing was opened. No one chose to speak.

The public hearing was closed.

B. Sustainable Commission Education Opportunities

Ingvalson reported.

Chair Golob suggested adding touring an e-waste and mercury recycling center to the list.

Anderson stated that he would be able to attend a tour on a weekday. He would be curious to see a mercury recycling center and how that process works. Chair Golob explained how mercury is recycled. Part of the process transforms the mercury from a bead to a vapor and then a liquid secured in a stainless steel trap.

Chair Golob, Ingraham, Avalos, and Henry indicated that they would be able to attend a tour during a weekday if given enough notice.

Henry was concerned with salt used to treat roads and soften water being carried into bodies of water.

Boor noted that there is no economical way for a city to remove chloride from water. Boor suggested that Brooke Asleson of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency chloride division provide a presentation on how technology has advanced.

Boor supports commissioners learning more about environmental justice. One way would be to invite Karen Gallus to give a presentation. Ms. Gallus has been the lead on the Hennepin County Climate Action Plan, which has an expansive climate justice report that covers areas of Minnetonka and identifies areas of communities most impacted by climate change and other hazardous materials, and provides information on what can be done.

Boor would be interested in learning more about invasive species management and visiting a wastewater treatment plant. She could accommodate a weekday-during-the-day tour with advance notice.

Ingvalson added touring an e-waste facility, a presentation on environmental justice, a presentation on invasive species, and touring a wastewater treatment plant to the list of education opportunities.

Henry suggested inviting a vehicle manufacturer to give a presentation on electric vehicles. He would like to tour the Cullen Nature Reserve and Prairie Island or Monticello nuclear power plants.

Ingvalson asked commissioners to pick their two top choices for the next educational opportunity.

Anderson chose to tour the Hennepin County Energy Recovery Center and nuclear power plant.

Avalos chose the nuclear power plant tour and environmental justice presentation.

Boor chose the environmental justice presentation and landfill-site tour.

Chair Golob chose a composting presentation and Hennepin County Energy Recovery Center tour.

Henry chose a presentation on renewable energy subscription options and a tour of an electronic-and-hazardous-materials-recycling facility.

Ingraham chose wetlands and environmental justice presentations.

The public hearing was opened. No one chose to speak. The public hearing was closed.

C. Community Solar Garden Discussion

Wells reported.

Anderson asked what it would cost a resident to join a community solar garden. Wells stated that it depends on the developer. Edina and Eden Prairie's developer charged a one-time fee of \$25 to join the cooperative that operates the solar garden.

Chair Golob explained that he joined a private solar garden at no cost to join, but there is a 25-year commitment to be a customer. After three years, his household avoided emitting 5.8 metric tons of greenhouse gases, and he saved a little money. It was a win-win situation for the private company and homeowner.

Chair Golob asked who takes advantage of the renewable energy credits (RECs). Wells explained that Xcel Energy owns the right to claim renewable energy credits.

In response to Avalos' question, Wells explained that solar developers are overseen by the public utilities commission, which regulates Xcel Energy. Developers see this as a great business opportunity since Xcel Energy is required to pay out bill credits, and the cost of solar panels is falling.

Avalos asked what would happen if the solar supply could not meet the demand for electricity. Wells explained that the city would remain connected to Xcel Energy's grid so it would continue to deliver electricity as it does now as a backup.

Boor thought a 25-year minimum could be a barrier for renters. Wells explained that one of Eden Prairie's developers, Cooperative Energy Futures, allows participants to be excused from the 25-year commitment if given a certain amount of notice.

Boor asked if Minnetonka is considering powering its own buildings with the solar array planned for the public works and police buildings or if it would be available for residents. Wells answered that it would be utilized by the city. Future discussions will focus on what would benefit the community the most.

Boor noted that the city is able to utilize solar power from elsewhere. Since there is an obstacle for a resident to obtain solar power from elsewhere, a city-owned-solar array in Minnetonka would provide the most effective community benefit by allowing residents to utilize its power and the city hosting an array.

In response to Anderson's question, Wells explained that Minnetonka would be the site owner of the solar array and subscriber if it would take on the backup subscriber role.

Ingraham asked if multiple buildings could subscribe to a solar garden and make it part of the rental terms. Wells has not heard of that occurring in Minnetonka. There is one multi-family building that has a solar array, but it is owned by the owner of the property. She saw no reason why a solar developer could not partner with multiple buildings and offer subscriptions.

Ingraham would like Minnetonka to promote understandable instructions on how to become a solar subscriber for those unable to accommodate solar panels on one's own property. He once attempted to sign up for a community solar garden but gave up after not being able to locate understandable information.

Avalos had the same experience as Ingraham. Avalos suggested notifying property owners whether their property would be a good candidate or not for solar panels and providing each with information on the steps to create one's own solar array or how to subscribe to a community solar garden.

Chair Golob suggested creating a list of reputable solar-power providers that have the capacity to add new customers.

In response to Henry's question, Wells found that most developers allow a subscriber to terminate the 25-year lease with proper notice and/or by paying a fee. Henry supports developers by providing different options for long-term contracts.

Henry would like Minnetonka to assume the responsibility of a long-term contract on behalf of a resident and pass the management costs onto the end user. Wells stated that she has heard of a city being used as a backup subscriber where the city agrees to take on the additional capacity if a subscriber leaves. She has not heard of a city being a backup subscriber for an individual customer and did not know if it would technically be possible to have more than one electrical account attached to the same contract.

Ingvalson noted that the city is close to utilizing its limit of available solar power.

Henry proposed a credit-union model be utilized.

Ingraham thought it might be a bigger benefit to the environment by the city not claiming RECs to meet a goal and residents using the capacity created by the solar arrays that will be located on the public works and public safety facilities.

Avalos likes the idea of Minnetonka offering a buffer to the long-term contracts. This is an area that Minnetonka could potentially lead. He likes the idea of a co-op.

Anderson likes the co-op idea.

Chair Golob suggested creating a working group with more expertise to address the issue in greater detail.

Ingvalson explained that the Energy Action Team will continue meeting on the issue and will update and receive comments from the sustainability commission.

Henry asked how a backup subscriber benefits. Wells explained that some backup subscribers have an ongoing commitment to regularly utilize 1 to 20 percent of the solar garden and up to 40 percent if needed. Eden Prairie's contract was not designed to benefit Eden Prairie in a financial way but to back up the primary subscriber.

Henry supports residents being told if their property could support a solar array. Ingvalson noted that the UMN website provides some preliminary information to determine if one's property could accommodate a solar array. The link is on the sustainability page of Minnetonka's website.

Boor likes Henry's idea. She asked if the city would get the RECs if the city or a resident utilized the solar power from a community solar garden. Wells answered that either way, Xcel Energy would get the RECs. The only way a city could get the RECs would be for the city to own and operate its own solar array.

8. Other Business

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned unanimously at 7:30 p.m.

By:

Lois T. Mason
Planning Secretary