

**Minnetonka Sustainability Commission  
Meeting Minutes**

**Sept. 20, 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 Ashley Pattain were present. David Ingraham and Harapanahalli Muralidhara were absent.

Staff present: Community Development Director Julie Wischnack, City Planner Loren Gordon and Staff Liaison Drew Ingvalson.

**3. Approval of the Agenda**

Henry moved, second by Pattain, to approve the agenda as submitted with a procedural correction provided in the change memo dated Sept. 20, 2022.

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

**4. Approval of Sustainability Commission May 17, 2021 Meeting Minutes**

Henry moved, second by Avalos, to approve the May 17, 2021 meeting minutes as submitted.

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

**5. Report from Staff**

Ingvalson gave the staff report:

- Two electric vehicle (EV) chargers have been installed in the community center parking lot and two are located in the city hall parking lot. The city's fleet of vehicles now includes two electric vehicles.
- Sustainability Commissioners attended the farmer's market once a month during the summer to connect with residents and hand out LED light bulbs.

- There was a solar event in July to educate residents on how to go about utilizing solar power. Ninety percent of visitors stated that they heard about the event from the Minnetonka Memo.
- The Everything Electric event was a success with 150 visitors being provided the opportunity to learn more about electric vehicles, lawnmowers, bikes and other electric equipment.
- Commissioners toured an organics recycling center in Shakopee in July. Compost has to be over 130 degrees for at least three consecutive days to kill pathogens.
- Signs were added at city hall to identify what items may be put into the organic recycling containers.
- Staff is working to obtain an interested candidate under the age of 25 to serve as a sustainability commissioner.
- Commissioners will be needed to attend Minnetonka's open house and winter farmer's markets.
- The commission will begin creating a work plan at a meeting in November. Please provide staff with ideas by the middle of October.

## **6. Report from Sustainability Commission Members**

Chair Golob attended the successful electric event. There was a lot of interest. The solar-power hour had 40 residents interested in solar power.

Chair Golob stated that the composting tour was very interesting. The equipment used to operate the compost site is very expensive. Oxygen is utilized to eliminate a bad smell. Hennepin County is considering creating a centralized anaerobic digester.

Henry explained his reasons for supporting the proposed bulk deicer ordinance.

Henry stated that information on solar power options is available on the city's website. Staff learned that the majority of companies that provide solar power do not have cancellation of service penalties but instead require a 60-day notice for closing an account.

Chair Golob's stated that he had a very positive experience utilizing solar power at his residence.

Henry would like information on heat pumps added to the city's website.

## **7. Agenda Items**

## **A. Energy Action Plan**

Ingvalson introduced Megan Weck and Marisa Bayer from the Center for Energy and the Environment and Tami Gunderzik from Xcel Energy.

Marisa Bayer and Megan Weck, facilitators with the Partners in Energy program, introduced themselves. Ms. Bayer provided a presentation on the update to Minnetonka's Energy Action Plan. Ms. Bayer stated that:

- The goal is for Minnetonka to reduce its energy-related greenhouse gas emissions by 160,000 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent (MTCO<sub>2</sub>e) before the end of 2030.
- Three focus areas that will be utilized to reach that goal are multi-family buildings, residential energy efficiency and renewable energy.
- Minnetonka reduced its greenhouse gas by 10,855 MTCO<sub>2</sub>e in 2021.

Ms. Weck stated:

- Minnetonka's vision is to be the community of choice for people who care about responsible energy stewardship. Minnetonka will lead the metro in efficient energy management.
- Strategies that will be utilized to assist in meeting the goal include:
  - Awarding sustainable Minnetonka awards.
  - Keeping the website up to date
  - Updating the development review and permitting process to share information about energy efficiency and electronic vehicles.
  - Creating opportunities to share energy efficiency and renewable energy resources with residents.
  - Promoting access to no-cost-energy audits for multi-family buildings.
  - Educating homeowners.
  - Promoting the adoption of energy-efficient behaviors.
  - Identifying the next steps to remove barriers for the adoption of community solar gardens.
  - Increasing participation in renewable energy programs.
  - Launching a broad outreach campaign to businesses.
  - Promoting access to no-cost energy audits for non-profit organizations.
  - Hosting electric vehicle ride and drive events.

Anderson asked if it would be possible to lease an electric vehicle. Ms. Bayer explained that there is a strategy to advocate auto dealerships to provide a leasing option for electronic vehicles.

In response to Avalos' question, Ms. Weck stated that small to medium-sized businesses would be the initial focus because they usually need more support. Ingvalson explained that the city is working on providing loans for businesses to fund sustainable, efficient equipment.

In response to Pattain's question, Ingvalson explained that loan programs are in the process of being created. There would be some type of incentive, such as a better interest rate than what is provided by a lender. Another benefit would be a reduction in utility costs.

Henry asked if a stamp of approval could be given to a business that meets certain standards. Ms. Bayer stated that some cities provide a window decal for businesses to display to show that the business meets the requirements for its recognition program.

In response to Boor's question, Ms. Bayer answered that strategies are identified in Minnetonka's plan to include groups who have been marginalized and attract a broader range of participants, such as those who may not have thought it possible for them to participate, such as renters residing in multi-family apartments.

Chair Golob thanked Ms. Bayer and Ms. Weck for the presentation and the continuation of the program.

Avalos asked if a study had been done to identify how a resident of Minnetonka without a vehicle would reach commercial areas and, if not, to look into doing one. Ingvalson explained that the city's website provides walkability scores for each neighborhood. The neighborhoods are reassessed each year and the results are submitted to Green-Step Cities. That is something the city is working on improving by adding more trails and connections.

In response to Avalos' question, Ingvalson explained that it could be difficult to reach landlords who rent space to business tenants since they may be located outside of the area. The staff has access to landlords' contact information and does reach out to them. Avalos acknowledged the difficulty of a landlord who may not want to pay the up-front cost to install an electric charger even though it may benefit the businesses in close proximity by encouraging an electric vehicle owner to spend more time in the area.

Anderson supports creating more walkability and doing the research to make that happen.

Pattain appreciates the focus on working with more businesses. She understands that there is a lot of opportunity for a big-box business to increase its energy efficiency. She likes that the focus would start with local businesses. She supports the city by providing resources to businesses to support them in increasing their energy efficiency. She

appreciates the Thrive newsletter being sent to every business to get the information to the businesses. Customers will see the improvements businesses are making and it could possibly prompt them to make similar improvements at home.

Henry moved, second by Avalos, to recommend that the city council approve the Energy Action Plan. Anderson, Avalos, Boor, Henry, Pattain and Golob voted yes. Ingraham and Muralidhara were absent. Motion carried.

## **B. Sustainable Minnetonka Awards**

Ingvalson reported. Staff recommends that commissioners review each application and vote on a winner for each category.

Energy Category:

- Ingvalson described the project submitted by Dominion.

Landscape Category:

- Ingvalson described Lisa Linde's project which eliminated erosion and standing water on her residential property.
- Ingvalson described the application submitted by the Nine Mile Creek Watershed District on behalf of the property owners at 5567 Bristol Lane who removed invasive species; planted native species; and educated their neighbors on how they can do the same thing.
- Dr. Dennis Yockers explained his project includes planting a 10-foot to 20-foot buffer strip around his residential property to prevent water runoff from leaving his property. He installed a rain garden after receiving a grant from the Riley-Purgatory-Bluff-Creek Watershed District and removed invasive species. There are now over 50 species of native plants on the property which have attracted over 40 species of birds at different times of the year. He is most proud of the city's response to his suggestions. The engineering department agreed to stop its practice of automatically placing sod along streets after a street improvement project is completed to give a landowner a choice to plant native plants and grasses instead. He also assisted with a church implementing a 20-foot strip of native plantings and tying its rain garden into a stormwater system. He is adding a water retention feature to his property next year. He thinks more residents will make improvements when they see examples. He appreciates the city's work on this.
- Leanne Jorgenson explained how she and her husband planted vegetation to support bees, birds and butterflies in addition to a food garden. They harvested seeds from the milkweed and asters and

designed, purchased and installed an automated irrigation system. The yard has been filled out and seeds will be collected and planted to fill in the empty spots. Buckthorn trees, creeping Charlie and garlic mustard have been eradicated. The property has 74 kinds of native flowers, seven native bushes, 15 types of fruit, 24 trees, five raised-vegetable beds and three rain gardens. She appreciates being considered for the award and invited commissioners to visit her yard.

Water Category:

- Ingvalson described the application submitted by Mike Voss for the Dominion project at 11001 Bren Road East. The project connected three stormwater catch-basin runoff pipes to three underground storage facilities. One of the facilities is a water reuse tank. The water from the tank is used for on-site irrigation of Bren Road Station and the Preserve at Shady Oak.
- Maria Kline presented a project submitted by the Nile Mile Creek Watershed District on behalf of a group of residents who cleaned out a plugged drain pipe and created a rain garden on the property at 5607-5627 Green Circle Drive. The rain garden had to be replanted three times due to storms, but it is growing well now. She hopes it serves as a good example to neighbors.

Young Adult Category:

- Lindsey Leseman, the Hopkins West Junior High Community School Coordinator, described the project that received funding from Share Solar to enable students to build nine solar suitcases that were shipped to Nairobi last spring to be used in areas where there is no energy. The students will see footage of the devices in action. We Share Solar has received another grant to allow six more solar cases to be completed by classrooms.

Ingvalson explained that Gordon will now collect commissioners' votes in a hat and the city council will present awards to the winners at a meeting later this fall or winter. All of the applicants and winners will be recognized in the Minnetonka Memo, on social media sites and on the city's website.

Chair Golob thanked those who submitted applications and applauded their efforts to support the environment. He would like commissioners to visit the sites. He felt that all of the applicants are winners.

Gordon tabulated the votes and announced the winners:

- Energy Category: Dominion

- Water Category: Maria Kline presented the application submitted by the Nile Mile Creek Watershed District for a group project on Opus 2 property at 5607-5627 Green Circle Drive.
- Young Adult Category: Hopkins West Junior High Community School student-solar-suitcases-for Nairobi project.
- Landscape Category: Dr. Dennis Yockers and Leanne Jorgenson

### **C. NexTrex Recycling Program**

Ingvalson reported.

Anderson noted that Target by Ridgedale already has a NexTrex drop-off container, but the more drop-off sites there are the better.

Henry confirmed with Ingvalson that the city would have two drop-off containers. Henry stated that his employer might be able to provide 500 lbs. of items to be recycled at once which may require a larger collection container.

Anderson confirmed with Ingvalson that information detailing what type of clean plastic may be recycled using the NexTrex containers will be posted on the collection containers.

Chair Golob suggested a container be located at the public works and city hall buildings for the public to utilize. He supports the proposal.

Henry supports the proposal. He agrees with locating a collection container at public works. He suggested the city do what it can to require businesses to utilize biodegradable bags.

Avalos thought this would provide a good opportunity to educate people on what plastics should not be placed with regular recycling.

Anderson moved, second by Pattain, to approve the NexTrex recycling program.

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

### **D. Climate Action and Adaptation Plan**

Ingvalson reported.

Anderson likes the focus on total emissions and supports attention being paid to climate changes occurring during the last year including droughts and an increase in the number of storms.

Boor supports emphasis being placed on creating a stormwater infrastructure for the city to handle large-storm events as climate change progresses.

Boor favors the city becoming more walkable and bikeable by utilizing mixed-use developments to allow a resident to walk across the street from one's home to get groceries. She lives near Ridgedale Center and rarely has to drive anywhere to meet her basic needs. She promotes that type of livability being expanded throughout Minnetonka.

Henry would like emphasis placed on planning for flood and drought events.

Henry supports the greenhouse gas inventory being completed. In response to Henry's question, Ingvalson explained that individual residences would not be included in the greenhouse gas inventory due to privacy rules, but a city-wide inventory of residences would be collected.

Henry would like the consultant to have a background in scope one, scope two and scope three accounting to be able to act meticulously.

Pattain would like to make sure renters in multi-family residences are given the opportunity to be represented by inviting renters and board members of condominiums to be part of the process.

Avalos suggested making a solar garden cooperative more accessible to renters by decreasing the required time-period commitment for participants to subscribe to a solar garden. Another beneficial climate change initiative would be to make the city more walkable.

Henry agrees with the importance of including renters in the initiatives. He would like language included in the climate action and adaptation plan to reduce the city's salt usage for the deicing of roads.

Boor agreed. She supports including an adaptation plan in the climate action and adaptation plan to combat environmental issues caused by road salt, chloride and higher water temperatures.

Chair Golob stated:

- He supports prioritizing environmental justice.
- He likes the inclusion of "adaptation" in the title climate action and adaptation plan.
- Completing a vulnerability assessment and addressing the identified vulnerabilities is important.



- He agrees with completing a greenhouse gas emissions inventory for city operations and community-wide activities.
- A consultant must be familiar with numbers and be analytical.
- He suggests having a section that provides examples of actions that individuals can take to prevent climate change.
- Community engagement is critical and necessary to be successful. It would be well worth it.

Chair Golob confirmed with Ingvalson that a request for qualifications would be completed before a request for a proposal.

Chair Golob stated that the consultant should have already written a climate action and adaptation plan and should be able to provide an example of one they have already written.

Chair Golob appreciated moving forward with Minnetonka creating and adopting a climate action and adaptation plan.

#### **E. Solar Energy System Ordinance Update**

Ingvalson reported.

Avalos asked if residences with existing solar energy systems would be grandfathered into the new ordinance requirements and how many would be impacted. Ingvalson answered that the city has already been permitting solar energy systems in a similar way, so existing solar energy systems should be compliant with the proposed ordinance update.

Avalos asked where the screening would be located to reduce glare. Ingvalson explained that a solar energy system user would be required to provide screening, preferably with vegetation, to block glare from the panels if the glare would enter a neighboring residence's window.

Henry asked if a solar system array could be located in the front yard of a residence. Ingvalson explained that a detached solar array would be treated the same as a detached accessory structure which would not be allowed in a residential front yard. A solar system taller than 12 feet in height would require approval of a conditional use permit.

In response to Henry's question, Gordon stated that wind turbines are allowed in Minnetonka with a conditional use permit. Each district's height regulations would apply.

Avalos supports the proposed solar-energy-system-ordinance update. Having definitive, written guidelines detailing where and how solar systems are allowed would be helpful.

Anderson agrees with Avalos and staff's recommendation.

Pattain agrees with Avalos. Sometimes a person assumes something cannot be done if regulations for it cannot be found. She supports staff's recommendation.

Henry would like to see the solar-energy-system regulations included on the city's website. He agreed that consistency is important. He supports staff's recommendation.

Boor agreed that it is helpful to lay out the regulations and options. She supports allowing a solar-energy system to be located in the front yard of a residence.


Chair Golob agreed that providing clear regulations for solar systems is important.

**8. Other Business**

Chair Golob noted that commissioners are invited to attend the Annual City County Climate Action Conference scheduled to be held on Oct. 6, 2022. There are afternoon and evening sessions that may be viewed by Zoom.

**9. Adjournment**

Boor moved, second by Henry, to adjourn the meeting at 9:08 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

By:   
Lois T. Mason  
Planning Secretary