

**Unapproved  
Minnetonka Sustainability Commission  
Minutes**

**Jan. 16, 2024**

**1. Call to Order**

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

**2. Roll Call**

Sustainability commissioners Justin Anderson, Molly Birr, Diane Meier, Amanda Norman, Ashley Pattain and Brian Golob were present. Edwin Avalos and Matt Henry were absent.

Staff present: Community Development Director Julie Wischnack, City Planner Loren Gordon, GreenCorp Member Kessa Andrews, GreenCorp Member Clare Grilley and Natural Resources Engagement Coordinator Christine Peterson.

**3. Approval of the Agenda**

The agenda was approved as submitted.

**4. Approval of Sustainability Commission Nov. 21, 2023 Meeting Minutes**

Norman moved, second by Meier, to approve the Nov. 21, 2023 minutes as submitted with changes on page 2 adding the word “to” to create the sentence “A hyperlink may be used to track . . .” and adding the word “or” to create the sentence “Reducing garbage or refuse . . .”

Anderson, Avalos, Birr, Golob, Henry, Meier, Norman and Pattain voted yes. Motion carried.

**5. Agenda Items**

**A. Sustainability Minnetonka Awards**

Gordon reported. Staff recommend commissioners vote for a winner in each category with more than one entry. The energy category received three submissions including one from St. David’s Center for Child and Family Development.

Jayson Palm, director of risk management and facilities for St. David’s Center for Child and Family Development, stated that:

- St. David’s did a major renovation that included replacing every bulb with LED bulbs; improving the waterflow by adding new aerators; increasing their recycling effort; improving the landscaping; and adding a solar array on the new roof.

- The solar array produced 50,000 kilowatts and performed really well.
- He is excited to be part of a community that cares about sustainability.

Gordon described the other nominees in the energy category:

- Joerg Reifart, resident at 15612 Wing Lake Drive, installed a 29-panel-solar array that produces 11.6 kilowatts and supplies energy to his home and hybrid vehicle. His house has an energy-fit-home certification. The household also recycles, composts, food cycles, uses cloth diapers, has a pollinator-friendly-residential yard and utilizes unpackaged produce.
- The Heartland Realty Investors are the property owners of the Minnetonka Heights Apartments at 5809 County Road 101 who installed a solar array on the roof. They express a passion for the environment and for bringing clean, renewable energy to the properties they own. They look for opportunities to implement environmentally conscious practices.

Meier suggested having separate energy categories for business and residential uses. Chair Golob concurred.

Gordon described a nominee in the landscape category:

- Nominee Kimberly Oleson, of 5432 Maple Ridge Court, was nominated by Elizabeth Boor, a Nine Mile Creek Watershed District employee, for installing a shoreline buffer made up of 1,320 square feet of turf grass conversion and removing an invasive species to create a more resilient stream bank.

Charlie Swanson described his project at 2840 Mayflower Ave. nominated in the landscape category:

- The residential property he purchased had been neglected for many years. He utilized goats to remove a third of an acre of buckthorn. No chemicals were used. He used a "polar bear" buckthorn puller to remove missed plants and burned the remaining roots.
- He partnered with the UMN's Cover it Up program to learn how to best select plants that would out-compete buckthorn. He learned that blocking light is the best way to prevent buckthorn growth. He has been planting broadleaf, quick-growing plants and native-plant seeds.
- He purchased all of the patio furniture, wood and plants from private parties to avoid creating waste.
- His property is on a corner lot and he has been able to educate neighbors on what he has been doing. Some of his neighbors have also hired the goats. He hopes to continue inspiring others to remove buckthorn.

Gordon described the nominee for the water category:

- Nominees Michelle Traeger and Kevin Gordon were nominated by Elizabeth Boor, an employee of the Nine Mile Creek Watershed District, for creating a raingarden along the street at 5560 Bristol Lane. The raingarden prevents pollutants from entering the wetland downstream.

Gordon described the nominee for the waste category:

- Mary Jo Bailey, of Bailey Properties, was nominated for reducing the amount of waste created by the buildings at 5800-5870 Baker Road by 80 percent and converting the waste into recycling. The buildings also received the U.S. Green Building Code Energy and Leadership in Environmental Design (LEED) Platinum award in 2011.

Peterson explained how she paired student Sarah Johnson with experienced volunteers to install bluebird monitors and remove buckthorn last summer. The students started a club, the Minnetonka High School's Natural Resources Club, to connect Minnetonka High School students to the environmental volunteer opportunities that the city offers; expand the city's available natural resources youth programming; provide a space for students to learn more about sustainability and the environment; and offer members an opportunity to volunteer.

Peterson stated that the Minnetonka High School's Natural Resources Club was nominated by Minnetonka Public Schools Community Service Specialist Sarah Johnson in the young adult category for volunteering their time for numerous projects that included:

- Planting over 24-large trees in Spring Hill Park.
- Selling and donating more than 300 native tree saplings to residents.
- Clearing buckthorn along the trail south of Minnetonka High School and helping forestry staff replant in that area
- Adopting and cleaning storm drains.
- Making educational materials to promote a reduction in salt use on roads.
- Speaking to visitors at the farmers markets to promote sustainable activities.
- Educating fifth graders at Groveland Elementary on stormwater pollution.
- Creating a video to explain the importance of picking up pet waste to protect water quality.
- Helping kids create public-service posters that will be used at pet waste stations to promote pet owners cleaning up after their pets.

Grilley announced that the winner of the energy category is the St. David's Center for Child and Family Development. The winner of the landscape category is Charlie Swanson. The winners will be recognized at a city council meeting.

Chair Golob was delighted and grateful for all of the nominees making the effort to improve the environment.

Meier and Chair Golob suggested advertising all of the great projects.

Pattain appreciated the nominees attending the meeting and explaining how financial obstacles had been overcome. She loved seeing the photos and hearing the story of how the goats assisted with transforming the property.

## **B. Earth Day Programming**

Andrews reported. Staff recommend commissioners discuss changes and ideas, spread the word about the display and recommend that the city council approve the Earth Day program.

Meier appreciates the thoroughness of the project and the inclusion of many residents. She sees it as an opportunity to add resources. The visuals may peak some people's interest and the resources would be readily available.

Norman suggested that a QR code be provided to link someone to additional information. Andrews stated that flyers would be provided.

Chair Golob felt that the Earth Day program would be fantastic. The visuals would be great. The tree idea is novel.

The public hearing was opened. No testimony was submitted and the public hearing was closed.

Norman moved, second by Meier, to recommend that the city council approve the Earth Day program as presented. Birr, Golob, Meier, Norman and Pattain voted yes. Anderson, Avalos and Henry were absent. Motion carried.

## **C. 2024 Public Outreach and Volunteer Campaigns**

Gordon reported. Staff recommend commissioners provide staff with direction on the types of outreach campaigns to promote in 2024. A few examples to consider include energy conservation, paved-surface salting and waste.

Meier favors hosting a one-stop efficiency shop and making it more of an expectation for business owners to attend every five years. She supports recognizing residents as a climate champion and providing an incentive. She supports ongoing education. The Earth Day program is a wonderful example of that.

Chair Golob concurred with Meier. He found the one-day blitz useful.

Norman suggested advertising the inflation reduction act (IRA) rebates on residential and electric vehicles (EV) incentives. They are new and a lot to navigate. Commissioners could be brought up to date on the tax rebates and assist with explaining the information to the public.

Pattain agreed. She found the one-stop-efficiency shop to be a good use of everyone's time and very useful. She would like information on salting, organics and home-energy-squad visits available for commissioners to give to the public at the farmer's market table.

Norman suggested that the city host a workshop to educate non-profit organizations about a new incentive called direct pay.

Meier noted that Andrews has been contacting non-profit organizations to encourage them to utilize IRA funds to pay for community solar. Andrews confirmed that she has been reaching out to non-profit organizations to educate them on available IRA funds and will be sending out information on the direct-pay incentive that just opened. There is a workshop being held tomorrow on the direct-pay incentive hosted by clean energy resource teams (CERTS).

Chair Golob suggested asking haulers for the number of residences that utilize curb-side recycling and organics recycling. He felt it would be beneficial to find out how many people bring organics recycling to the public works drop-off site and the weight of the organics recycling being dropped off.

The public input portion was opened and closed.

#### **D. Everything Electric Review**

Gordon reported. Staff recommend commissioners provide feedback on a date and the vendors to invite for the 2024 everything-electric event.

Pattain was disappointed that the 2023 everything-electric event was held on the first day of school. She prefers it to be held in July or August on a date not already scheduled for an event.

Meier enjoyed the previous everything-electric events. She suggested that heat pumps be included in the next event; members of the center for energy and environment be invited to participate; and iPads be available for residents to learn more information about IRA rebates. Rewiring America is a good site to share with residents. She recommends advertising the locations of electric-vehicle (EV) charging stations in Minnetonka at the event and supports adding an EV charger at Ridgedale Commons park.

Anderson favors having the everything-electric event in July or August and pairing it with the farmer's market.

Chair Golob thought that July would be the best month for the event. He supports inviting rooftop and community-solar vendors and having the everything-electric event at the same time and location as the farmer's market. The staff report is excellent at providing useful information to help plan the best possible everything-electric event.

Meier suggested collaborating with surrounding cities on a shared everything-electric event and advertising the event to a wider area.

The public input portion was opened and closed.

## **6. Report from Staff**

### **A. CAAP Update**

Gordon just received the draft climate action and adaptation plan (CAAP). It will be reviewed by staff and posted on **minnetonkamatters** next week. Feedback will be requested from residents. The city council will review it at its study session scheduled for Feb. 5, 2024. Staff will submit feedback to the consultant. The consultant team will present the document to the sustainability commission on March 19, 2024 and commissioners will make a recommendation to the city council. The city council is scheduled to review the CAAP at its meeting on April 22, 2024 which is Earth Day.

### **B. Organics Charging Requirements**

Gordon reported that haulers have been notified of the state law requiring them to provide an equal rate across its customer base for organics recycling.

### **C. Community Solar Workshop on March 12, 2024**

Gordon announced that a community solar workshop is scheduled to be held March 12, 2024.

### **D. EV Workshop on Feb. 29, 2024**

Gordon reported that the EV workshop is scheduled to be held Feb. 29, 2024.

### **E. Public Works Tour Scheduled for 4:30 p.m. on March 19, 2024**

Gordon reported that a tour of public works is scheduled to take place March 19, 2024 at 4:30 p.m.

Gordon will email a link to commissioners for them to sign up to attend a smart-salting-for-elected-officials webinar that will be held Feb. 22 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Gordon reported that a tour of the public-services-compost facility in Minneapolis is scheduled for Feb. 23, 2024 at 11 a.m.

Gordon stated that City Manager Mike Funk sent a letter to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission to address some of the problems that will be created by Xcel transitioning out of using the "retail rate" for solar and into the "value of solar rate" and the impact that will have on the early adopters of the program.

In response to Pattain's request, Gordon will email commissioners a link providing more information on the new state law regarding refuse haulers charging its customers an equal rate across its customer base for organics recycling.

**7. Report from Sustainability Commission Members**

Meier feels personal experience is one of the best teachers. She has an all-electric-heat pump. She supports educating homeowners on the benefits of a heat pump before they need to replace their furnace.

Chair Golob noted that 2023 was the hottest year on record. He knows of an area in Arizona that will not be developed due to having no ground water. The CAAP is very relevant.

Birr supports inviting teenagers to be involved with the city's efforts to promote sustainability and assist with educating residents on how to implement sustainable practices. The volunteer opportunities could be added to a list made available to students at the Minnetonka High School. Minnetonka High School has a natural resources club, Earth club and vantage global sustainability program made up of students eager to work with adults to help promote and implement sustainable efforts.

Chair Golob agreed that it is very important to engage the next generation.

Norman suggested inviting teenagers to a future meeting that would have an item on the agenda to discuss ways for teens to learn more about the city's sustainable efforts and offer them the opportunity to volunteer to promote and assist others with implementing those efforts.

Meier would like to learn from students who could be invited to give a presentation to the commission. Norman agreed.

In response to Wischnack's question, Birr thought students would be willing to comment on the CAAP. She will check with the club presidents. She was sure club members would appreciate the opportunity to speak to commissioners on certain issues if invited.

Pattain also supports commissioners traveling to a school to meet with students.

**8. Other Business:** None

**9. Adjournment**

Anderson moved, second by Norman, to adjourn the meeting at 8:20 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

By: \_\_\_\_\_

Lois T. Mason  
Planning Secretary