Environment and sustainability commission

Minutes
Oct. 2, 2019
Community Room, City Hall

Members present: Chair Claire Lukens, Thor Anderson, Abdi Ali, Shaina Ashare, Sue Bloyer, Nicole Ciulla, Stefan Collinet-Adler, Larry Kraft, Bridget Rathsack

Excused absence: Ryan Griffin, Zoe Frank, Jim Leuthner

Staff present: Brian Hoffman, director of building and energy; Deb Heiser, engineering director; Meg McMonigal, ESC coordinator; Lauren Michaels, intern

Guests: Bette Danielson, Nordic Ware

1. The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Bridget Rathsack (for Chair Lukens).

2. The minutes of the Sept. 4, 2019 meeting were approved with minor changes and one abstention (Bloyer).

3. Staff presentation – Deb Heiser, engineering director, presented information on sustainability within engineering work throughout the city. She explained the engineering department is in charge of every construction project within the city. She focused mainly on pavement management, Connect the Park, transportation projects and Living Streets. She also noted the engineering department works on surface water management plan, storm water pollution prevention plan supporting community development, along with ROW permitting, erosion control permitting and traffic.

Ms. Heiser noted engineering takes a proactive approach on managing streets within the city and usually repave or rebuild 5 miles of road per year, which equates to $5 million.

Ms. Heiser stated engineering has been working to improve city streets and roads at the direction of council. She pointed out various streets and roads where improvements are needed and being made.

Ms. Heiser explained Connect the Park and the goal of prioritizing walking first, bicycles second, followed by transit and vehicles, adding the initiative is halfway completed at this point. It is funded by city tax dollars, and came out of 2007 visioning, and the recommendations of a citizen-led group. She added that it grew out of the Active living sidewalks and trails plan which was approved into the 2008 comprehensive plan. Connect the Park has filled gaps where sidewalks are missing throughout the city and it has enhanced the transportation system within the city for walking and biking. Ms. Heiser stated that during the Vision 3.0 process, the community continues to ask for more sidewalks and for a more connected system for pedestrians and bikers.
Ms. Heiser explained the Living Streets policy as well. She noted Texas Avenue reconstruction in 2017 was the first application of the living streets principles, with trees and bump outs for pedestrian crossings. Raingardens for storm water management will be installed if residents request them. Ms. Heiser added engineering also works on narrowing streets to reduce runoff and manage traffic.

Ms. Heiser noted the bikeway in progress from Dakota Avenue up to Cedar Lake Road. She pointed out a bridge over railroad tracks and on-street bike lanes, the place where a pedestrian crossing will occur, and a bump outs with trees.

Mr. Collinet-Adler asked about tree replacement. Ms. Heiser stated that sometimes, it is not possible to save trees due to the nature of the transportation project. When that happens, the city replaces trees that are removed on an inch to inch basis not tree to tree. She noted that engineering has worked closely with the city forester to ensure that the tree replacements occur.

4. Efficient building program update – Brian Hoffman, director of building and energy, reported.

Mr. Hoffman stated two meetings have been held with businesses, with no major objections so far. He stated there will be a presentation at the Nov. 4 city council meeting for the first reading of the ordinance on the efficient building program. He noted, if approved, there will be a second reading and council will vote and finalize the ordinance.

Mr. Hoffman stated buildings over 25,000 square feet will be exempt from the ordinance. He added that condominiums will also be exempt from the ordinance since there are multiple owners, and condo associations. Mr. Hoffman invited ESC members to attend the Nov. 4 council meeting presentation.

Mr. Kraft asked about hiring. Mr. Hoffman stated Emily Ziring will be starting as the sustainability manager in three weeks. He added in January a sustainability specialist will be added, as well as a third sustainability staff person mid-2020, after council approves the 2020 budget.

5. City council report – the written memo was well received by council at the August meeting. Chair Lukens asked if the ESC would like to present anything to the council in the upcoming report. Ms. McMonigal stated it would be helpful to have ESC members attend the Monday, Nov. 4 council meeting in support of the building efficiency ordinance.

Commissioner Rathsack noted the public comment period is open currently with the Public Utilities Commission for Xcel Energy’s Integrated Resource plan for the next 15 years.

The ESC will revisit the city council report again next month.

Mr. Hoffman added there is a group of cities working with St. Louis Park on sustainability, green step cities and energy efficiency for commercial buildings. He stated the group is working on a message and will request legislative support.
Mr. Collinet-Adler added work is being done to connect with other city sustainability commissions as well.

Chair Lukens asked Mr. Hoffman to keep the commissioners informed about this initiative.

6. Event recap and work group updates - none

7. Upcoming events
   a. Annual retreat
   b. Twin Cities Film Fest – Oct. 16 - 26 – the commissioners were asked to volunteer at the event, and Mr. Hoffman noted on Oct. 23 there will be an opportunity for the commissioners to have tickets to the event, and be ambassadors for sustainability, as a group.
   c. Mr. Hoffman asked about other programs and incentives that can be developed related to usage.
   d. Sunday, Dec. 8 from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. will be the ESC retreat. The commissioners will discuss the focus of the retreat, including the 2020 work plan. Ideas can be emailed to Chair Lukens prior to the retreat, and more discussion will take place in November.
   e. Ms. McMonigal noted there is one opening for an ESC member that the council still needs to fill.

8. Topics for November meeting
   a. Introduction of sustainability manager

Adjournment.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.