Environment and sustainability commission
Minutes
August 5, 2020
Via Webex

Members present: Chair Claire Lukens, Stefan Collinet-Adler, Abdi Ali, Thor Anderson, Shaina Ashare, Marisa Bayer, Zoe Frank, Paige Kane, Bridget Rathsock, Spencer Schaber, McKenna Taylor, Eric Zweber.

Members absent: Ryan Griffin

Staff present: Emily Ziring, Sustainability Manager; Annie Pottorff, Sustainability Specialist

Guests: None

1. The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m. by Chair Lukens.

2. The current and new members introduced themselves to the commission and spoke about their passion areas around sustainability.

3. The minutes of the March 2020 meeting were approved unanimously.

4. New member introductions – the new members (Spencer Schaber, Paige Kane, McKenna Taylor, Marisa Bayer, and Eric Zweber) presented more in-depth biographical information on themselves to the commission.

5. Staff updates

   Adjusted Sustainability Division 2020-2021 work plan – Ms. Ziring updated the commission on changes with the work plan.

   o The Climate Champions program has been shifted to 2021 due to Covid-19. The energy assessments were not able to be conducted during this time, and business owners are facing the pandemic and likely not eager to have energy discussions. Instead “Conservation in the Park” has been launched for low and no-cost energy efficiency programs for residents of St. Louis Park.

   o Conservation in the Park includes ongoing Home Energy Squad visits, as well as bi-weekly emails with tips on energy and water savings, as well as family games around energy.

   o The city was awarded Step 4 for the Green Steps Cities program.

   o A City Council report was written related to costs and benefits while working to reach goals 1-5.
Cities Charging Ahead 2.0 program will launch soon with a cohort of other cities to further expand electric vehicle charging. Work is also being done to look at where to locate the next group of EV chargers in St. Louis Park.

Efficient Building Benchmark ordinance – yearly submissions of data under review. Work is being done to increase compliance.

City-wide greenhouse gas emissions are being looked at – data is being updated since 2016 and the cause of those changes is being analyzed.

New natural gas advisory board is looking at de-carbonization of end uses, and how to get people off of natural gas and on to electricity, especially as the grid gets greener.

Both Ms. Ziring and Ms. Pottorff attended the Reuse MN conference and looked at policy such as deconstruction and right to repair.

Events Updates – Earth Day and Ecotacular both had to be cancelled this year and will be looked at doing in 2021.

Chair Lukens encouraged the new members to contact Ms. Ziring for any clarification on any of the projects or acronyms noted.

Chair Lukens asked if there are any plans to hire a 3rd staff member for Sustainability. Ms. Ziring stated due to budget issues the offer had to be rescinded. She added in 2021 staff is hopeful this will change, and possibly an intern will be hired to assist.

6. Work group and/or project updates – Chair Lukens stated there are no current project updates at this time.

Commissioner Zweber asked what the work groups are and if a review can be done on the groups at a future meeting, so new members may join.

Chair Lukens stated there are no active groups right now, but usually center around events or interests the city council would like to see the commission work on. Chair Lukens added due to the pandemic there were no work groups constructed, but this can be discussed at the September or October meeting.

Commissioner Collinet-Adler stated in years past the work groups were typically ad hoc, such as the electric vehicle event, the kick-off of the Climate Action Plan, and the first round of Climate Champions reaching out to businesses. Commissioner Collinet-Adler stated the groups are flexible and have changed over the years. Commissioner Collinet-Adler added in the past community members were also involved in the work groups, along with commissioners. Commissioner Collinet-Adler noted the anti-idling group as an example of this.

7. City Council written report – Chair Lukens stated this report had just begun prior to the pandemic. It is not a formal report, but was built into the ESC 2020 goals. Chair Lukens noted it is a document sent to the council to make sure they heard from the commission on a regular basis on existing issues, or proposal of new action related to sustainability and ideas for...
discussion on topics or actions. Chair Lukens noted the report was planned to go to the council once every quarter, and a few were sent prior to the pandemic. The last one went to the council in August of 2019. Chair Lukens asked if there were any topics to add to the next report/memo.

There were none at this time.

Ms. Ziring added the ESC work plan will also be presented to the council this coming fall.

8. Racial justice and climate equity introduction and planning for future discussion

Chair Lukens stated this topic was brought forward as a discussion topic related to the George Floyd murder, and as it impacts sustainability and climate equity, along with environmental justice. Chair Lukens stated all are coming to this topic from a different point of view and this will be a future discussion point for the commission and the city’s sustainability work. This will be an ongoing and long conversation, with all coming to it from their own backgrounds, opinions and biases.

Chair Lukens shared a definition of environmental justice and put together a resources list for the commission as well. Chair Lukens encouraged the commissioners to review the list.

Chair Lukens shared the document outlining a definition of environmental justice with the group as well as the resource list, and encouraged the commissioners to share their ideas for the resource list as well.

Chair Lukens stated this is a good overview of what commissioners can be thinking about as they work on sustainability ideas and projects. Chair Lukens noted the information will be emailed to the commissioners for review, and noted for the September meeting would like the commissioners to review 2 or 3 items off the list.

Commissioner Ali asked if these items can be added to Google Docs. Ms. Ziring stated it would be helpful if the group emailed items to her or Chair Lukens to be compiled and then shared with the group.

Chair Lukens noted a presentation from Alicia Sojourner on race equity in March that was given to the commission. Chair Lukens stated a recap of this presentation will be given to the commissioners prior to the September meeting for their review.

9. Provide feedback on letters to Public Utilities Commission on Xcel Energy’s IRP and CenterPoint Energy’s rate increase and inclusive financing program –

Chair Lukens stated the commission typically reviews these letters as a group and they go to the council for distribution, signed by the Mayor.

Commissioner Zweber stated would like added to the IRP information about disappointment on the continued dependence on the nuclear plants and extending their license. Commissioner Zweber stated they are not sustainable.
Commissioner Collinet-Adler stated that the commission previously discussed the issue of nuclear energy. He stated it is unclear on how to move forward in the near and medium term with decarbonization without nuclear energy. He noted that the Climate Action Plan goals are unlikely to be met without nuclear energy given the current technology and costs. Countries like Germany that have weaned themselves off nuclear energy have reverted to dirty coal to replace the energy formerly provided by nuclear energy. It may be a worthy long-term goal to wean the grid from nuclear energy, however, in the near and medium term, it is likely to be counter-productive.

Commissioner Bayer added agreement with emphasizing carbon-free, but the technology does not exist yet to transition away from nuclear and it could force Xcel to increase the use of natural gas for demand response.

Chair Lukens agreed it must be kept high-level and we would encourage Xcel to go faster.

Commissioner Zweber stated the IRP is the time to discuss this and even in the letter we are looking to 2034. Commissioner Zweber thinks this is the right opportunity, and if it was a different planning window, Commissioner Zweber would agree with the comments noted.

Commissioner Collinet-Adler asked if compromise language could be crafted to include decreased use of nuclear energy as a long-term goal with the understanding that one should accept nuclear energy in the near-term as superior to the alternative of increased reliance on fossil fuels when other renewable clean energies cannot be used.

Commissioner Zweber stated yes, and with advances in technology, phasing out nuclear that does not add carbon-based and comments such as this, would be acceptable.

Ms. Ziring stated these letters will need to be voted on tonight as they go to council on August 17.

**Commissioner Zweber made a motion approving the draft letter and adding the additional comments noted earlier, and having Chair Lukens review them before they go to the council. Commissioner Rathsack seconded. The motion passed unanimously.**

Chair Lukens noted the CenterPoint Energy letter also signed by the Mayor. Chair Lukens noted the letter acknowledges that a greater energy cost will fall on BIPOC folks and we are encouraging CenterPoint to do inclusive financing. Chair Lukens noted this is similar to the letter done by Minneapolis as well.

Ms. Ziring noted there is collaboration going on related to this with Minneapolis and other neighboring cities, as well as non-profits.

**Commissioner Ashare made a motion approving the draft letter, and Commissioner Schaber seconded. The motion passed 9-0-1 (Commissioner Collinet-Adler abstained). (Commissioner Anderson left the meeting, and Commissioner Griffin absent.)**

10. Discuss October elections for Chair and Vice Chair – elections will be held in October and all are encouraged to consider serving in these roles.
Chair Lukens and Commissioner Collinet-Adler are nearing completion of their terms as Chair and Vice Chair respectively. Chair Lukens noted duties of the chair and vice chair, and noted commissioners can contact her or Commissioner Collinet-Adler for further information on the roles. Chair Lukens stated the terms are 1 year and are rotated between commissioners.

11. Upcoming/proposed events

- **Westwood Hills Interpretive Center (at the Nature Center) ribbon cutting**: September 13, 2-4:30 p.m. – Ms. Ziring stated the interpretive center is net-zero energy designed, and added it would be great to see everyone there.

- **National Night Out**: October 6 – Ms. Ziring stated she is not sure of the official date this will be held, but she encouraged commissioners to discuss ESC topics with neighbors during the event.

- Ms. Pottorff added the virtual Home Energy Squad audits from Xcel are currently taking place with both free virtual visits and in-person visits for a reduced rate of $50 in St. Louis Park. Right now it a great time to do this as St. Louis Park is participating in a competition. The city will the highest participation at the end of the year will win a traveling trophy, and all are being encouraged to participate. She stated staff is looking for the commissioners to help get the word out and media kits are available. She encouraged the commission to reach out to her if questions.

  Commissioner Rathsack asked if any of the older materials could be used as well for National Night Out. Chair Lukens stated the commission could develop a short email to be shared with neighbors and links to materials as well. Ms. Ziring added this can be posted on Next Door also. Ms. Pottorff added the neighborhood Facebook groups are another place to post information as well.

- Chair Lukens added Recycling Champions is also another topic to share at Neighborhood Night Out as well, and more information is available from staff if commissioners are interested.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:27 p.m.