Environment and sustainability commission  
Minutes  
October 7, 2020  
Community room, city hall

Members present: Stefan Collinet-Adler, Abdi Ali, Shaina Ashare, Marisa Bayer, Zoe Frank, Ryan Griffin, Paige Kane, Bridget Rathsack, McKenna Taylor, Andy Willette, and Eric Zweber

Excused absence: Chair Claire Lukens

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

Guests: None

1. The meeting was called to order at 6:34 p.m. by Commissioner Bridget Rathsack, who is filling in for Chair Lukens this month.

2. Roll call and check-in

3. New commission member – Andy Willette was introduced as the newest member of the commission.

4. Business
   
   a. The minutes of the September 2020 meeting were approved 5-4 (Commissioners Ali, Willette, Griffin, Ashare abstained). Note: Zoe Frank’s term expired on 8/31/2020 so she was ineligible to vote.

   b. Staff updates – Ms. Ziring stated the Conservation in the Park campaign is complete. Ms. Pottorff provided all the communications materials and is now working on analyzing information from the survey, which will be shared after compiled.

   The city council approved a proclamation declaring October 7 as Energy Efficiency Day. The city is still in the lead for visits per capita on the Home Energy Squad Challenge. Ms. Ziring encouraged all to schedule a visit soon.

   LHB consultants are working on a citywide greenhouse gas emissions inventory and are currently analyzing changes since 2015. Staff is working on how to display data showing Climate Action Plan progress.

   Efficient building benchmarking ordinance compliance period closed. Compliance is at 60%, in line with other cities’ rates given COVID.

   Pending funding, electric vehicle chargers will be installed at a public park within the city. Costs for different charging options will be presented and directors will review and decide what will work over the long term for the city.
The solar project at the Rec Center is on hold because of budget issues at this time.

The lighting bulb and fixture count at the Police Department is now completed.

Ms. Pottorff wrote two applications for environmental awards and both have been submitted. The commission will be notified if or when an award is received.

Ms. Ziring will start providing a quarterly report to the council on the work of the division.

Ms. Ziring asked if the Dec. 2 monthly ESC meeting can be moved to Dec. 9 instead. Commissioners did not express any concerns about the change.

Commissioner Griffin asked if the commission can see a preview of the quarterly update and what will be communicated, and if the ESC can add input also. Ms. Ziring stated this would be fine, but she will check with the director on this.

Commissioner Rathsack agreed with Commissioner Griffin about the desire for regular updates to the council from the ESC.

Ms. Pottorff said she and Ms. Ziring will be at the Browndale Neighborhood meeting at the Browndale Park Sunday from 4-7 p.m., discussing energy efficiency and the Home Energy Squad program.

Commissioner Griffin asked if there are any incentives for homeowners right now regarding energy efficiency. Ms. Ziring stated the Home Energy Squad visits are $50 or free to income-qualified households, and there are matching rebates available from the city and utilities, depending on work being done. She stated increasing the residential incentives may happen after focusing on commercial building incentives first in 2021.
stated environmental justice would be a slightly different topic, and it would be good to remind the council of the connections between racial equity and climate change. She added recommending programs that address environmental justice could be something the council would like to hear about.

Ms. Pottorff added that when the Energy Efficiency Day proclamation was read the council did have some questions about environmental justice, and added it seemed they would be interested in hearing more. Ms. Ziring said this is a timely topic as well.

Commissioner Ashare stated she would work on this for the December meeting as a draft for the ESC to review. Both Commissioner Taylor and Commissioner Willette stated they would like to help, along with Commissioner Rathsack. Ms. Ziring reminded the commission that the environmental justice resource document is always available for those who need it.

e. Environmental Justice open discussion – Commissioner Rathsack asked the commissioners if they have seen or read anything of note in the past few months related to environmental justice.

Commissioner Bayer stated an emerging approach she has heard of related to goal setting is using “IE” at the end of the goal word “SMART,” meaning “inclusion and equity.”

Commissioner Griffin stated the costs of being sustainable are significant. He added there are a small percentage of people who could do all the things the ESC proposes to do to meet climate objectives.

Commissioner Collinet-Adler added that the Climate Action Plan is inherently redistributive and by its very nature advances the city’s goal of racial/social equity.

Commissioner Griffin agreed. Commissioner Willette asked if the $50 energy program is unreasonable for low income groups and could there be help here. Ms. Ziring stated there are subsidies for this program and Commissioner Bayer added that there are households that need a subsidy but are above state income requirements. She added there is an opportunity to support households in the middle that can’t afford the visit at the full cost.

Commissioner Rathsack added we talk about residents making many of these changes, but we need to work to make change with those with power and fund those that are contributing the most, which would be businesses and organizations and government entities which can make large scale changes first.

Commissioner Rathsack asked if there is anyone or any perspective that is missing that needs to be here, that needs to be sought out before moving forward.

Commissioner Zweber asked how to get the businesses in the city to contribute to this conversation.
Commissioner Collinet-Adler stated that the ESC historically had two business members on the commission who had to work and live in St. Louis Park. He stated it might be helpful to change these strict requirements in order to get business people on this commission. The lack of business representation on the ESC is a big disadvantage. Changes to how businesses operate are fundamental to attainment of the goals of the CAP. Successful implementation of the CAP is important for the city to attain its goal of racial/social equity. Engaging businesses in an effective manner is therefore a good way to achieve the CAP and collaterally help achieve racial/social equity. Having someone with a business mindset on the ESC could make the ESC a more effective body.

Ms. Ziring stated as long as the business is in St. Louis Park, the owner does not have to live in St. Louis Park.

Commissioner Griffin stated when he came to the commission he filled one business role as he ran a consulting business. He later felt it would be better to have a business owner on the commission.

Commissioner Rathsack asked if commissioners know of business owners in the city and if they might be interested in joining, such as Nordic Ware or Park Nicollet.

Commissioner Griffin stated both of those businesses were involved in the city’s energy efficiency programs in the past. Commissioner Collinet-Adler stated he would explore if anyone from Park Nicollet would be interested in serving on the commission adding it would be very beneficial to have businesses represented.

Commissioner Kane asked if there is a chamber of commerce the ESC can reach out to. Commissioner Griffin stated the Twin West chamber is a channel to promote Climate Action Plan initiatives to.

Ms. Ziring added she will start compiling a list of business owners with suggestions from the commission and when recruiting new commissioners, an email can be sent to business owners to ask them to serve on the commission.

Commissioner Collinet-Adler stated obviously events are now on hold, but he wondered if a virtual meetings or events might be held to encourage Home Energy Squad or solar going forward.

Commissioner Griffin added leveraging virtual meetings might be a way to bring people into ESC meetings in a more convenient way vs. going to City Hall.

Ms. Pottorff stated she has several ideas around the virtual meetings idea she will share with the ESC if they decide to move forward with this.

f. Elections for Chair and Vice Chair
Nominations for Chair: Commissioner Collinet-Adler nominated Commissioner Bayer for ESC Chair and Commissioner Zweber seconded. The commission voted and Commissioner Bayer was nominated as Chair.

Vice Chair: Commissioner Zweber nominated himself to the ESC Vice Chair position and Commissioner Griffin seconded. The commission voted and Commissioner Zweber was nominated as Vice Chair.

g. Upcoming/proposed events - none

The meeting was adjourned at 7:58 p.m.