Environment and sustainability commission
Minutes
Nov. 4, 2020
Community Room, City Hall

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

Excused absence: Abdi Ali, Chair Marisa Bayer, Claire Lukens

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

Guests: None

1. Roll call was taken and commissioners checked in.
   The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Vice Chair Zweber.

2. New youth commissioner - Lillian Hertel was introduced as the new youth commissioner, appointed by city council. She is a sophomore at Benilde-St. Margaret’s and a climate activist. She also does speech, debate and mock trial.

3. Business
   a. Approve October 7, 2020 minutes – The minutes were unanimously approved as presented.

   b. Staff updates

      • Intercity Home Energy Squad Challenge outreach – Ms. Ziring stated this program was completed in October. Ms. Pottorff did an analysis of the data.

      • Ms. Ziring is working on revising the city’s Green Building Policy. She added that the Efficient Building Benchmarking program wrapped up and the scorecards will go to owners next month.

      • Electric chargers are being added to the city, and staff will apply for grants soon.

      • The lighting retrofit at the police station will be done next month.

      • Climate champions will be launched in 2021 with incentives included. $100,000 has been included in the proposed 2021 budget for the incentives.

      • Next month’s meeting is Dec. 9, 2020 (not Dec. 2).

   • Ms. Pottorff reported on the Home Energy Squad program in St. Louis Park. She noted the city was in a competition with other cities and St. Louis Park was still winning as of August,
and she will provide an update with the final results soon. She asked the commissioners to share the information on social media or share the flyer.

c. Annual retreat (tentatively scheduled for Sunday, Dec. 6, 12-3 p.m.)

- Ms. Ziring noted the retreat will set the annual work plan for 2021. The agenda will cover the ESC goals, role of the commission, 2021 project focus, how to interact with staff and council, and messages to get across. She added staff will provide data, maps and information related to environmental issues within the city for reference.

- Ms. Ziring stated the work plan comes out of this and will be presented to the other commissions in February 2021, and to the council in June 2021.

- Ms. Ziring stated according to the survey responses, the retreat will likely be on Zoom and will be approximately 3-4 hours in duration.

- Commissioner Collinet-Adler stated it would be helpful to look both forward and back during the retreat. He added it is important for the commission to also get to know each other better, and stated if commissioners are comfortable meeting in person, and masked, it would be a good opportunity for social time as well.

- Commissioner Rathsack added doing one-on-one calls with each other might also help. She added she is hesitant to meet in person especially with cases going up, and being it’s getting close to the holiday season. She said Zoom breakouts, and small group mingling would help, and other tools could be utilized.

- Ms. Ziring stated as long as there is no quorum, 6 commissioners can meet at one time for social time.

- Commissioner Griffin agreed with Commissioner Rathsack’s comments. He agreed that meeting with masks is not the same or as effective, and it is better to meet over Zoom to see commissioners’ faces for overall effectiveness. He added an outdoor event in the spring could be added as well.

- Ms. Ziring stated staff will discuss this and work on various tools and breakout spaces that can be utilized virtually.

d. Work group and/or project updates

- Commissioner Ashare is chairing the council report work group. She stated the goal is to have something to share in December with the commission, and then take it to council. Commissioner Rathsack added anyone is welcome to join the group, and they will have a discussion after the ESC meeting.

- Vice Chair Zweber added he would like to discuss the work plan and social justice topics at the retreat also.
Commissioner Collinet-Adler added the retreat is a good time to also discuss events to increase awareness and enthusiasm for the Climate Action Plan via virtual meetings. He added a work group could be developed and then the group could brainstorm how to keep doing these events.

Ms. Ziring stated the Conservation in the Park campaign research could also be useful for event planning.

e. Upcoming/proposed events

Ms. Ziring stated council is focused the budget right now.

Commissioner Rathsack stated Environmental Initiative is hosting a free webinar on Nov. 18. Three case studies will be reviewed to share the business case for sustainability and cost saving-metrics. She can forward information to those who would like it.

Additional items:

Commissioner Griffin discussed the city’s use of electric vehicles and electric power tools and noted a video story on that might be interesting to share on social media to promote.

Commissioner Collinet-Adler added that electric tools seemed to be of interest, but when he explored partnering with a hardware store to demo the tools it didn’t go far with hardware stores. He stated he was surprised this wasn’t more interesting to hardware stores in the city. He added it’s a win-win and this could also be discussed further at the retreat, as well as how to attract more attention to this, adding he was quite surprised at the lack of enthusiasm.

Vice Chair Zweber stated a list of pros and cons can be developed to give to hardware stores and explain why it’s an advantage.

Commissioner Rathsack added discussing higher price points and thus higher sales with the hardware stores might help also.

Commissioner Collinet-Adler stated he hears that people don’t think electric works as well, so that might be part of the problem. He added there is an advantage we are not thinking about, and that we need to listen and hear from folks who do not think about sustainability.

Commissioner Griffin added a trade-in program is something to think about, along with incentives, with hardware stores.

Commissioner Rathsack asked if there are any rebates through Xcel for swap-outs.

Ms. Pottorff stated that Fresh Energy and the American Lung Association, along with Xcel Energy, have done seminars on this and would be a good place to start also.

Commissioner Willette added maybe electric tools could be demo-ed at events within the city.
Commissioner Rathsack added a short clip of demos could be shared on city social media also with any member that uses these tools.

Commissioner Collinet-Adler stated the demos were tried at the electric vehicle event. He added he is thinking about ways to engage residents, and think about how to reach people who just ignore environmental messaging.

Ms. Ziring added it might be better to talk to the manufacturer or distributor vs. talking to the hardware store. She stated staff or a commissioner could reach out to them.

Commissioner Griffin asked if the city does own electrical tools. Ms. Ziring stated they were planning to demo these items at Ecotacular, which was cancelled. She added the city has videos on the city’s YouTube sustainability channel, noting these demos could be posted there.

Ms. Potteroff added if the city doesn’t have the ability to film the videos, commissioners can do a video on their own and give to staff to edit and post on the YouTube channel.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:31 p.m.