Environment and sustainability commission
Minutes
December 9, 2020
Community Room, City Hall

Members present: Chair Marisa Bayer, Shaina Ashare, Stefan Collinet-Adler, Ryan Griffin, Lillian Hertel, Paige Kane, Claire Lukens, Bridget Rathsack, McKenna Taylor, Andy Willette, Eric Zweber

Excused absence: Abdi Ali, Zoe Frank

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 Chair Bayer.

2. Roll call and check in

3. Business

a. Approve November 2020 meeting minutes – The minutes were approved by the commission as presented with two abstentions.

b. Staff updates

Ms. Ziring gave an overview. She noted two reports going to the council this week, one being the Efficient Building Benchmarking ordinance overview and the other being the Solar Sundown report.

Ms. Ziring added she is still updating the Green Building Policy in coordination with Community Development. Ms. Pottorff submitted a letter of interest to MnDOT on a grant to fund electric vehicle chargers in the city. She stated the Climate Champions program is ready to be launched and staff has also been working on the Intercity Home Energy Squad Challenge, as well as a feasibility study on energy projects at the Rec Center related to the boiler to help reduce carbon emissions.

Chair Bayer asked if the Rec Center projects go out 5 years or more especially as it related to the boiler replacement. Ms. Ziring stated these are all projects in stages, but if funds are found to work on projects, they would try to get some projects done sooner.

c. Signing on to joint Local Government Coalition IRP comments

Ms. Ziring stated the ESC was invited to sign on to a comment letter to the Public Utilities Commission written by the Institute for Market Transformation. The purpose of the letter is to gather Minnesota municipalities’ under one response to Xcel Energy’s Integrated Resource Plan. St. Louis Park did send its own comment letter, but this second letter is coordinated with other cities and aligns well with the first letter sent.
Commissioner Zweber stated the letter looks fine. He is ok with sending it being that the first letter was more specific and from St. Louis Park.

Ms. Ziring added this letter is with other cities that all have climate and energy goals.

The commissioners decided the letter will be reviewed offline, and the ESC will make a final decision on the letter at the January meeting.

d. Annual retreat debrief – Chair Bayer stated she had sent notes to the group from the retreat. The google doc was shown to the group for review.

Commissioner Lukens commented on timing for communication with city council. She noted last year it was a vague timeframe, and she suggested staying with this until the ESC knows more.

Commissioner Rathsack added meeting with city council members one at a time might also be a good way to communicate instead of only through written reports. She added working with operations and the solid waste team would be great, but she did not know if that would be necessary or provide value, since staff is already well connected here.

Ms. Ziring noted the council is also looking to revisit how they communicate with commissions, so it is possible there will be more touchpoints with council in the future.

Chair Bayer pointed out other topics from the retreat such as residential and non-residential engagement and events in the city’s CAP, along with tracking metrics. The commissioners discussed keeping efforts online and virtual until summer, due to the pandemic restrictions.

Commissioner Taylor stated she would be interested in working on engagement events, adding they would be helpful in engaging residents.

Commissioner Zweber asked if it is appropriate to partner with other commissions and divisions to reach under-engaged populations, or if these are two separate initiatives.

Commissioner Willette stated having the retreat virtually was difficult, but understanding the CAP and identifying activities was all done very well. Commissioner Rathsack also appreciated the retreat and work completed to make it happen.

i. Assessing need for future group learning and development

Commissioner Zweber noted an idea about forming a legislative workgroup to dive deeper ahead of the legislative session. He stated there are some opportunities to get ahead and identify goals and objectives.

Commissioner Taylor and Commissioner Willette expressed interest in the event work group.
Chair Bayer asked if there was any interest in having a work group around bringing a business community representative on to the ESC with the upcoming vacancy. Commissioner Zweber stated he would participate in this work group. Commissioner Rathsack added she would be interested also, adding she could share with the racial diversity learning lab within the city.

ii. Suggestions for topics for future meetings

Ms. Ziring stated that if there are specific topics to discuss in the next few months that can be added to agendas, this is the time to do that.

- Roots and Shoots projects – Ms. Pottorff, Commissioner Frank and Councilmember Kraft will meet this week and discuss how to help support each other. Ms. Pottorff will summarize the discussion at the next ESC meeting.

Commissioner Lukens added the relationship between the ESC and Roots and Shoot is not clear, and it might be helpful to discuss this further with the commission. Ms. Ziring stated this is a good question and should be explored further.

Commissioner Collinet-Adler stated the relationship seems to happen naturally project by project, and maybe it should be left alone. Chair Bayer added reinvigorating partnerships in general, with groups and students within the city, would be helpful as well.

e. Work group and/or project updates - none

f. City Council written reports

i. Update on Environmental Justice report to council

Commissioner Ashare reviewed the report with the commission and asked for a consensus on what to bring forward to council.

Commissioner Zweber noted transportation should be added to the report as well as recommendations for the city on benchmarking on environmental justice and reporting. Commissioner Ashare added transportation is included as it relates to emissions. Commissioner Zweber stated it would be helpful to also include building a case for reducing emissions and what would be achieved by that goal.

Chair Bayer noted affordable housing issues and gaps in services and income levels should also be an environmental justice issue included in the report.
Commissioner Zweber added evaluating electric vehicle charging stations and if they should be included within zoning areas is another topic to include in the report.

Commissioner Taylor noted staff review of permits before they are granted should be included in the report. She pointed out how the Minneapolis Pollution Control Agency, before granting a permit, looks at the community and area where the building is going to be built, and issues that might be involved there.

Commissioner Lukens added a couple more sentences should be included to specifically ask the council to take some actions related to the items noted in the report.

Commissioner Griffin added the recommendations for council should also be strategic, targeted and timebound.

Ms. Ziring stated 2-3 policy ideas to council would be most helpful, and staff can help the ESC work on those items.

Commissioner Lukens asked if an anti-idling ordinance might be added here also. After discussion, Ms. Ziring pointed out there is also a flip side to this and she has concerns about the unintended consequences of an ordinance being used against BIPOC communities. Ms. Ziring added an anti-idling policy might be best pursued as a first step.

Commissioner Ashare stated these recommendations will be formalized and the goal will be to have the ESC meet with various city departments before presenting the report to the city council. She added she will share the link with the ESC and if the commissioners have any further changes to send them to her.

Commissioner Willette asked if there are other groups that can review the report outside of staff. Commissioner Lukens agreed and asked if anyone had ideas.

Commissioner Rathsack stated the racial equity learning lab she is working with might be willing to review a draft.

Ms. Ziring added sending this to the Human Rights Commission for review would be helpful, as well as racial equity manager Alicia Sojourner, for feedback before presenting to council. Commissioner Griffin suggested Alicia, or a member of their staff might visit the ESC as a guest in 2021 as well.

g. Upcoming/proposed events - none

The meeting was adjourned at 8:22 p.m.