

SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION

Minutes

Tuesday, January 10, 2012

6 PM, Centre of Elgin, 100 Symphony Way, West Conference Room

A. Call to order (chairperson)

Chairman Masterson, Commissioners Anderson, Frazier, Jacox, Knoerr and Segel present.
Commissioner Martin arrived at approximately 7 PM.

B. Roll Call (staff liaison)

C. Approval of previous meeting's minutes

Minutes approved with no revisions.

D. Discussion Items

Commission operations

1. Project Selection Criteria

Staff Liaison Aaron Cosentino presented an overview of the two funding sources the commission has available. The commission has its "sustainability initiative" funding (\$30,000) and the Neighborhood Improvement Grant Program (NIGP) (\$50,000) that the commission now administers.

Aaron Cosentino provided an overview of the NIGP. The NIGP was started in 1996 and provides financial assistance for neighborhood groups and other organizations to make physical improvements to their neighborhood. In 2010, the program was revised to reflect sustainability goals. Neighborhood groups may submit projects under two categories, the Small Green Project (up to \$1,000) or the Sustainable Neighborhood Project (up to \$15,000). The NIGP is open to neighborhood groups, community based organization or groups residents sponsored by community group. The program requires a 50% match in the form of cash, professional services or volunteer labor. Submitted projects must be compatible with the city's sustainability plan, benefit and be open to the general public. NIGP projects cannot be for on-going city maintenance, projects on other taxing bodies' property (unless projects or programs have tangible benefit to the sustainability efforts of the overall neighborhood), have received NIGP funding in the last 5 years or be for on-going operating expenses.

Aaron Cosentino then reviewed the scoring criteria used by staff when reviewing NIGP applications. Projects are evaluated using a point system. Evaluation categories include municipal compatibility, community benefit, participation and project feasibility. Staff Liaison Cosentino then noted past NIGP projects including the installation of community gardens and tree plantings.

Staff Liaison Cosentino then differentiated the NIGP funding with the Commission's funding of \$30,000. The commission's or "Sustainability Initiatives" funding should be thought of as funds for other initiatives within the plan that may not be appropriate for the NIGP, city affiliated projects that apply to internal city operations or items that have no sponsor or neighborhood group.

Staff Liaison Cosentino then spoke generally about the commission's intent on creating evaluation criteria noting that the commission may want to use the same or similar criteria as the NIGP. He also said the commission should be careful not to adopt overly rigid criteria, especially since the commission has not received any project requests yet. Aaron Cosentino also noted that the working groups may be waiting for the commission to establish their priorities for the year and that perhaps the commission should consider focusing on one area such as recycling or water conservation. This would help target specific areas within the plan and help in outreach efforts. NIGP applications could then be awarded based on the "theme" of the year.

The commission then discussed the proposed criteria submitted by Commissioner Martin. Chairman Masterson noted that the proposal contained many details and is fairly rigid based on points. Given the types of projects the commission seeks to fund, Chairman Masterson had concerns that the criteria was overly rigid. Commissioner Segel agreed.

Chairman Masterson then briefly discussed a proposal whereby projects are evaluated based on their merits in a less quantifiable manner. Commissioner Jacox suggested the commission adopt a hybrid approach, with both quantitative and qualitative criteria. Commissioner Segel would like to see each project have an educational component and that additional credit be given to projects that form partnerships.

The commission agreed that the criteria should be revised. Commissioner Anderson volunteered to revise the criteria based on the discussion then collect input prior to the next meeting. Commissioner Knoerr requested the revised criteria be posted online so the public could comment on it.

Commissioner Martin then spoke. Not being present for the meeting up until this point, he briefly described his proposal. This description rekindled discussion on the criteria. Aaron Cosentino re-capped of the meeting so far noting that in general the commission and audience felt the proposed criteria was too rigid. Commissioner Martin agreed that devising a point system to compare vastly different variables was difficult.

The discussion then shifted away from the proposed criteria and moved towards the commission's priorities for the year. Commissioner Knoerr asked how the commission plans to allocate its funds, through many small projects or a few large projects. Commissioner Jacox indicated that whichever route is chosen the commission should focus on building momentum and exposure for the sustainability efforts. Commissioner Segel agreed noting that this is the commission's first year and thus an important one. He urged that outreach and education should be connected to each of the projects, regardless of what working group it comes from.

Members of the audience then spoke including Lucy Elliot and Betty Skyles. Their comments were that the NIGP already provides evaluation criteria. She asked Aaron Cosentino if the criteria has worked well for the city. He answered that it has, and the biggest issue with the NIGP is the lack of applicants. The commission agreed that the criteria for the NIGP are appropriate for the NIGP, but should be revised for the commission's "sustainability initiative" funding.

Betty Skyles suggested that perhaps the criteria should be broad and include criteria such as, "Is the project feasible?" It was also noted that working groups would just like to see something get done, and have it be successful.

The notion of an annual theme was then brought up by the audience. Commissioner Anderson and Frazier indicated hesitance towards adopting a single theme of the year as it could exclude other working groups. Commissioner Frazier feels that her job is to advocate for the economic development working group and bring jobs to the city. She noted that a theme might be useful as long as the theme is not a working group. Commissioner Frazier would like to see each group be able to accomplish something this year.

More audience members spoke. David Jurina urged the commission to set priorities. Dustin Good, student trustee at Elgin Community College suggested the commission use the point system developed by Commissioner Martin as a tool to evaluate their projects, not as the final determination. He also felt the funding should be used for education, as many ECC students are unaware of sustainability and the related concepts. Malcolm Jones said that to make the most powerful impact the commission should educate the community. He urged creativity in spending the city's limited funds and suggested the commission look at Terracycle.net, which provides free waste collection for hard to recycle items.

Commissioner Masterson noted we should inform local middle and high schools, as well as ECC, Judson University, etc. about Freedom Field in Rockford, and help them facilitate class field trips.

Commissioner Martin then noted that his point system is clearly not well liked and offered to retract it from consideration. The commission and audience asked him not to do this as his criteria provide valuable objective measure that can be used as a guide.

The discussion ended with the commission agreeing that the criteria would have to be finalized at the next meeting. In the interim, all commissioners agreed that they would provide comments on how to change the NIGP criteria to better fit the commission's purposes within two weeks. Aaron Cosentino would then combine these comments into a new proposal and post that item online for the public. The commission would then formally decide on the criteria at the February commission meeting. The commission also requested that staff incorporate an educational criterion.

Ritu Khare from the audience then asked whom the commission would accept project request from the public or just working groups. Chairman Masterson said that the commission would accept project proposals from both.

2. Ad Campaign to reinvigorate working groups

This item will be discussed once evaluation criteria have been established.

3. Proposed Website Design

Aaron Cosentino noted that the commission's webpage had been updated.

4. Children/U46 participation in sustainability efforts

This item was not discussed.

Commission Initiatives

5. Facilitating food co-ops (Commissioner Platt)

This item was tabled.

E. Working Group Reports

Bob Belick of the Alternative Energy working group urged the commission to evaluate a 20 year Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with Surity Wind Energy, an Illinois wind farm project with a guaranteed price for electricity starting at \$.045/kWh with an annual 2.5% escalator that equates to a price of \$.072/kWh in the year 2032. This is an attractive offer for clean, renewable, Illinois wind energy that can put the City of Elgin on the leading edge of sustainability with no capital cost. He noted that this could supply the city with clean energy for the foreseeable future. He also noted that the purchaser of the energy receives all of the renewable energy credits (REC's) which the city could then sell. Commissioner Anderson asked if the prices he was quoting include delivery charges. Mr. Belick responded noting they do not. Additional information is available at <http://insideclimateneews.org/news/20110128/illinois-lures-wind-farm-away-missouri-bold-energy-policy>.

Bob Belick also informed the commission about the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation (ICEF) which provides grants for energy efficiency and renewable energy projects to municipal, non-profit and educational entities. He suggests we use these dollars to advance sustainable education and the implementation of sustainable technologies in our community. Additional information is available at <http://www.illinoiscleanenergy.org/>

Betty Skyles of the Transportation and Mobility working group said she would like to see outreach to new people. She suggested that the working groups use the same approach Elgin Leadership Academy uses to find new people whereby existing members find others to get involved. Another attendee suggested that each person bring two new persons with them to the next meeting, and another suggested we reach out to the Elgin Hispanic Network.

Tom Armstrong of the Urban Design working group noted that many of their group's projects may need the assistance of a consultant. He also announced the showing of a PBS documentary featuring Elgin High School on January 17 at the Gail Borden Library.

Catherine Blair of the Gail Borden Library suggested we forward information to the Library about the Sustainability lesson plans that are available for free from several agencies and non-profit organizations.

The commission then asked that a number of policies be discussed at next month's meeting including urban agriculture, wind and solar energy for residential properties, the possibility of backyard chickens, greywater recycling and complete streets. Commissioner Anderson would also like to review the city's landscaping policies.

F. Old Business

G. Commissioner comments/announcements

H. Adjourn

The City of Elgin is subject to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. Individuals with disabilities who plan to attend this meeting and who require certain accommodations in order to allow them to observe and/or participate in this meeting, or who have questions regarding the accessibility of the meeting or the facilities, are requested to contact ADA coordinator, at (847) 931-6076, or TTY/TDD (847) 931-5616 promptly to allow the City of Elgin to make reasonable accommodations for those persons.