

SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION

Minutes

Tuesday, February 21, 2011

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

A. Call to order (chairperson)

B. Roll Call (staff liaison)

Chairman Masterson, Commissioners Anderson, Jacox, Jacobs, Martin, Frazier, Knoerr, Segel, Platt present.

C. Approval of previous meeting's minutes

January minutes approved.

D. Discussion Items

1. Project Selection Criteria Approval

Chairman Masterson described the project selection form in detail. The form requires written responses summarizing the project; how it promotes sustainability; educational and partnership opportunities; project milestones; and project budget. The proposals are scored on compatibility with the Sustainability Action Plan (20 points); community benefit (40 points); participation opportunities (10 points); feasibility (20 points); and cost effectiveness (10 points). Commissioner Martin asked that more weight be given to "return on investment." Commissioner Knoerr moved that the commission accept the form as it is presented. Motion seconded. The project selection form was approved unanimously.

2. EECBG Funds

1. Resource Conservation Kits

Staff Liaison Cosentino described an initiative to distribute energy efficiency kits to the community at the Elgin Green Expo, May 4 and 5. This program would give Elgin residents ways to save energy, water and money. Green building technology working group members will work with local hardware stores (Ziegler's Ace, Home Depot and Menards) to create "Resource Conservation Kits." These kits would include items such as LED light bulbs, furnace whistles, faucet aerators, toilet tummys and Kill-a-Watt monitors. Once the products are chosen the kits would be purchased from the local vendors and distributed at the Green Expo. If local vendors are not interested, pre-made or custom kits can be purchased from online vendors such as AM Conservation or Niagara Conservation.

Providing residents these kits instantly helps them become more sustainable and tangibly moves Elgin's environmental efforts forward. Other communities offer these types of kits, usually utility companies.

Participation in the program will require residents to provide their name, address and other pertinent data. Follow up "report cards" will then be sent to the resident after a sufficient time to determine which items they installed. Using established metrics, energy savings can be calculated by knowing which items were installed (in addition to monitoring water use). This provides measurable results.

Members of the audience and commissioners stressed the importance of establishing a baseline to measure energy reductions. Commissioner Martin suggested the past three energy bills be collected from participants to determine baseline energy use. Green Building Technology Working Group member Rob Anderson noted that because of the limited number of items within the kits, demonstrable energy savings may not be realized.

Questions were also raised about collecting post-participation energy use data. Initially a follow-up survey was proposed. Education working group member Catherine Blair said that without an incentive to complete the follow up survey there would be low participation. She also suggested the program materials be translated into Spanish.

Commissioner Anderson was troubled that the kits would be given away free. Chairman Masterson suggested charging \$10. He also expressed a concern that items in the kit may involve self-installation, removing electrical panels, or installing items on one's furnace or water heater and other items that if misused could be harmful. It was suggested the city develop a liability waiver, so that any harm, misuse or complications from the items within the kit will not open the city to litigation. It was also suggested that a workshop be held for participants to learn about each item.

Commissioner Martin then noted that because this proposal did not involve spending the commission's budget, it should be seen as a courtesy request. He motioned to approve the proposal. Approved unanimously.

2. Traveling Sustainability Displays

Staff Liaison Aaron Cosentino described a second use of EECBG funds, to develop nine "trade show" exhibits (one for each working group) to have on display at the Expo. The displays would be the self-supporting, retractable trade show banners. They are transportable and interchangeable should the content of the display ever change. Once the displays are created, they can be used at other community events and put on display at environmental hubs throughout the city such as Hawthorne Hill Nature Center or the Lords Park Zoo.

The commission expressed concerns about who would develop the content for the displays as participation has been dwindling.

3. Complete Streets Policy

Urban Design working group member Tom Armstrong submitted a project request for the commission to develop a complete streets policy for the city. According to Completestreets.org, complete streets, “are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users. Pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities must be able to safely move along and across a complete street. Complete Streets make it easy to cross the street, walk to shops, and bicycle to work. They allow buses to run on time and make it safe for people to walk to and from train stations.”

Tom Armstrong noted that the State of Illinois has adopted a complete streets policy and that soon the city will be “behind the curve.” Other Illinois communities such as Oak Park have also adopted a policy.

Chairman Masterson asked if this policy would require zoning changes. Tom Armstrong noted that the policy involves suggested alterations to the way streets are designed, not necessarily mandatory changes to existing streets. It was motioned that Commissioner Jacox, Martin and Tom Armstrong develop a draft policy. However, it became apparent that not all commissioners had scored the proposal using the newly adopted form. The commission did not want to vote on moving forward with the project without actually using the scoring tool they just adopted. The item was tabled.

4. Electric Aggregation Outreach Methods

Staff Liaison Aaron Cosentino noted that the city was moving forward with electrical aggregation. This initiative requires the passage of a referendum, which will be placed on the March 20 ballot. He also noted that the city needs assistance outreach opportunities. The commission suggested utilizing social media, senior services, the Del Webb community and local politicians with access to free postage.

Commission Initiatives

5. Current and future sustainable landscaping on city properties (Commissioner Anderson)

Staff Liaison Aaron Cosentino described how the city has incorporated more sustainable landscaping into city property. The city has actively converted two of its detention basins from mowed turf grass with concrete channels to wet bottom, naturalized basins. These basins are located in Lords Park and at the corner of Holmes Road and McLean Blvd. As a continuation of this practice, the idea of implementing additional “no mow” zones in city parks was presented to the commission.

These no mow areas allow for the natural grasses and plants to grow in passive areas and sloped areas of city parks. This practice will not be applied to active, highly used areas in the parks. Benefits of this practice include erosion control, natural plant growth, introduces a new, less manicured aesthetic to city parks, lower maintenance costs, removes barriers for native plantings, and habitat creation. Approximately 9 acres of city owned land has been identified for “no mow zones.” These areas will simply not be mowed this season. These areas can become candidates for native prairie plantings should the commission choose to allocate funding. To introduce the concept further the commission watched a video from Pinellas County, Florida outlining their “no mow” program.

It was stressed that residents will need to be patient as native plants re-establish themselves. Other successful “no mow” policies use signage to alert residents as to what is occurring. To ensure that invasive and weed species do not grow, herbicides will still be applied to the “no mow” areas. However as the native grasses proliferate, herbicide use should decline over time.

Land Management Superintendent Jim Bell was present to answer commission questions. Commissioner Jacobs asked if the city has identified candidate locations. Jim Bell responded noting that there are areas of the city that have not been mowed for two years and this would simply expand on that. Jim Bell noted other locations within existing parks that will no longer be mowed. Locations include lesser used portions of Lords Park, Wing Park, Central Park, Eagle Heights Park and Century Oaks Park. Related to the Eagle Heights Park, Chairman Masterson asked that the city look into establishing a trail through the area. Jim Bell indicated this was possible and would be a good fit as there is an existing trail in the area. Commissioner Martin asked what residents need to do if they would like to request an area become “no mow.” Residents interested in having portions of parks naturalized should contact the city’s land management division.

The commission and Jim Bell suggested the concept of “no mow” be introduced to neighborhood groups and homeowners associations. This concept may cause concerns among residents. Commissioner Jacox noted that his neighborhood in the west part of Elgin has prairie grasses. Residents were wary at first, but have since warmed up to the idea of longer grasses in parks. It was also noted that a trend in playgrounds and parks is to encourage creative play as opposed to structured playground equipment and organized sports. The concept of “no mow” areas of the parks fits into that theme.

There were also questions as to if these areas will be accessible and their level of maintenance. Jim Bell noted that the areas will be accessible. He also noted that the city would not be completely abandoning these areas. Instead, these areas will be managed differently, but still maintained for weed and invasive species.

Commissioner Martin noted that he would speak with his neighborhood association (NENA) about this initiative.

6. Preliminary discussion on backyard chickens (Commissioner Martin)

Commissioner Martin introduced the proposal to draft a backyard chicken ordinance, allowing hens in the city of Elgin. Currently chickens are not permitted in the city of Elgin. However several communities including West Dundee, Batavia, Naperville, Downers Grove and Crystal Lake permit chickens as pets. Commissioner Martin asked a draft ordinance be created modeled after West Dundee. Commissioner Martin stressed that simply allowing chickens does not force anyone to have chickens. He sees chicken ownership in a similar light as dog ownership, the only difference being that chickens produce food on a daily basis and fertilizer.

The commission had concerns related to the regulation of chickens and chicken coops. Other communities with chickens have different regulations, but by-in-large they all regulate how coops must be built, number of chickens, coop design, coop distances from neighbors, cleanliness and ban roosters.

It was asked how long chickens live. According to Commissioner Martin, chickens can live up to seven years with the first two being prime egg years. It was asked what would be done with the chickens after they die. Most communities do not allow for the slaughtering of chickens, it was recommended Elgin do the same. Dead chickens can be brought to the butcher or destroyed like any other household pet.

Commissioner Martin discussed licensing chicken owners. Consistent with other communities, he recommends the city pursue licensing requirement to cover administration and inspection costs. The commission did not go into further detail on this topic, other than the license should be annual as should coop inspection.

Commissioner Platt expressed concerns that chickens would place a burden on code inspectors. Commissioner Martin responded noting that West Dundee, population of 8,000 has only three people that keep chickens. Applying that rate to Elgin, the city is looking at 40 properties with chickens.

It was motioned to approve the creation of a backyard chicken ordinance. This was seconded and unanimously approved.

E. Working Group Reports

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

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