

STERLING HEIGHTS SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
February 16, 2022

LOCATION: Room 106, City Council Chambers, 40555 Utica Road, Sterling Heights MI

SUBJECT: Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Sustainability Commission held February 16, 2022

Meeting was called to order by Chairperson Inks at 6:02 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance is recited.

Roll Call: Graf, Matthews, Tabbert, Farooqi
Remotely: Inks

Also in Attendance: Chris McLeod, City Planner (*Remotely*)
Allison Bittner, Planning Coordinator

Approval of Agenda

Motion: Matthews

Second: Graf

Ayes: Matthews, Graf, Tabbert, Farooqi, Inks

Considerations

A. Drain Stencil Project: Updates, Drain Locations, ETC

The Office of Planning provides an overview of the ultimate implementation of this program may look like, based on conversations with the Community Relations Department. The idea is to place stencils on the drains about two times a year, and would be volunteer based. The City has approximately 10,000 storm drains, so this project would be done more gradually. This could be done in conjunction with the SHINE Program (which occurs early spring and late summer). The goal is to do a few sections at a time based on funds, time, number of drains, and potential other issues that may emerge. The Office of Planning notes that we will receive the stencils at the end of the month. Additionally, the sections noted at the prior meeting were selected by the Department of Public Works at random. There was not a true reason why certain sections were selected over others, just was a way to get the program started.

Mr. Graf notes that he has spoken to Sue and Melanie in Community Relations regarding the project and its implementation. He states that we could start with a few groups of volunteers, and eventually open it up to homeowners.

B. Tree Inventory Review by Davvy Group

The Office of Planning displays the specified benefit yield that was collected as part of the tree survey done by the Davvy Group. Mr. Matthews asks what the exact definitions of each of these benefits are, what they entail specifically, etc. Ms. Bittner states that we can find the direct definition for property benefits, vs. other benefits and what these qualify as.

The Sustainability Commission notes that there is a discrepancy in the benefits noted in Centerline compared to Sterling Heights. The Centerline benefits appear to be greater, despite fewer tree inventory, and includes individual tree benefits, which the Sterling Heights Inventory does not include. The Office of Planning will reach out to the Davvy Group to inquire about this discrepancy and hopes to resolve such.

Mr. Inks asks the Office of Planning if the City is inventorying more sections. Mr. McLeod states that there is currently a proposal from the Davvy group regarding surveying the remainder of the City. He notes that this would occur sometime after July 1st, after the budget is approved to begin this work. Mr. Inks asks about what the extent of the survey would be. Mr. McLeod notes that it would primarily be trees in the public right-of-way. This would allow the Department of Public Works to create a maintenance plan, and allow the City to know where they would need to plant trees specifically.

Mr. Graf brings up the eco benefits category, and the associated dollar value - which he would like to see presented accurately to its true value. He mentions the reviews of the Canton Tree case, and

notes that Canton did not factor any values of trees into their legal argument based upon the discussion at the seminar regarding such case. Mr. Graf notes that he thinks having these numbers would benefit in demonstrating tree preservation for such ordinance. Mr. Inks agrees. He notes that the information from the tree survey could be utilized to provide the value of trees. Mr. McLeod notes that the Office of Planning has not seen the draft ordinance yet, but will have such potentially by the March meeting. He states that the City Attorney's office has discussed the potential need for a consultant review within the planning process, which would take into account the economic benefit or loss of tree canopy on individual sites. This would envision that a consultant would do private surveys and provide estimation of benefit loss on behalf of an applicant, and the city would have their own private environmental consultant either to verify or refute such.

C. Strategic Planning Recap, Next Steps

Ms. Bittner notes that the Strategic Planning meeting was held on January 25th. Given the feedback from City Council, the Sustainability Commission can discuss how they propose to work through such action items. Mr. Graf discusses fleshing out these action items further, and go into details as to what is current in the City today, and what it would look like in the future. Mr. Inks states that the Office of Planning will be beneficial in providing what the City is doing currently, and can provide such information to the Sustainability Commission, who can then put items into action, and determine how to move forward. Mr. Inks notes that he wanted to discuss the items outlined in 5.D as they relate to various action items of the Sustainability Plan. The Sustainability Commission decides to discuss the action items in Natural Assets at the March meeting.

D. Action Items Pursuant to Master Plan

Mr. Inks states a Council Member asked the Sustainability Commission to give information/presentation on a specific vacant property within the City and discuss a pedestrian bridge from Kleino to Edison which is located on the South side of Clinton River park.

1. Acquisition of Property along 17 Mile Rd, Utica, and Schoenherr: This is part of the Recreation Master Plan. Mr. Inks notes this could be something City used ARPA funds for. Mr. Graf asked how exactly do we pursue this? The Office of Planning states that the Sustainability Commission would provide what we feel would be best course of action from environmental standpoint/benefits. Ultimately, the decision is by City Council, but also acquisition of park property or general open space land typically falls with Parks and Recreation Department via City Council. Mr. McLeod notes one portion of the property is owned by the Department of Roads, other portions are privately owned, and the City and County own the remaining parcels already. Mr. McLeod notes that property is on market for over a million dollars. So it would be a significant land acquisition and that any grants are at least 25% to start; and the City want to go higher. Discussion continues. Mr. Inks asks what is timeline for City to determine how it will spend the ARPA funds? Mr. McLeod mentions that these are ongoing. The money has to be allocated or dedicated by 2024, and spent by 2026. Mr. Inks asks what would next steps be to actually preparing a resolution to send to City Council? Mr. McLeod says at this point- this would be Sustainability Commission's response to start gathering attributes and benefits environmentally benefits to start drafting a potential resolution.

2. Pedestrian Bridge along Kleino Road and Edison Court: Mr. Inks states that this property is located between Kleino Court and Edison Court. This project would connect the Clinton River trail system. There used to be a bridge between the two courts, but was removed in the 1990s and never was replaced. Mr. Inks states the idea of this being focused on southern half of the City and to provide easier access for southern residents to access the Clinton River trail system. Mr. Inks says thought on how to proceed would be similar to the first item. However, it is advised to prioritize the first item, as it is higher priority. This one may be easier to draft up resolution outlining what benefits would be, etc.

Approval of Minutes

January 19, 2022

Motion: Matthews

Second: Inks

Ayes: All Present

Correspondence

The Office of Planning discusses a potential meeting with the Youth Advisory Board. There is hopes to have a joint meeting on Tuesday April 12th at 6pm in the Community Center. This would be potentially to organize something for Earth Day, and discuss other topics. Typically the meetings will last for an hour. The Sustainability Commission members will get back via their availability.

Old Business

A. Tree Removal Ordinance Updates

This was discussed previously at the meeting. Mr. Graf mentions he attended the webinar along with Mr. Inks and the Office of Planning sponsored by the Michigan Association of Planning. There has been no updates from the 6th Circuit Court regarding whether they will re-hear the case or not. The Office of Planning notes they should have updates in March. Mr. Graf says he has couple of notes about how the speakers at the meeting stressed to have clear documentation and value of trees. Also mentioned bring up recommendations of best practices; such as needed vegetation requirements in ordinance; pretty good explanations of why that is like that. He notes that we should document that it is better to plant native species and why it is beneficial. Mr. McLeod mentions the implementation and documentation of these items, and how it would tie back to the Master Plan, Zoning Ordinance, etc.

New Business

- The Office of Planning notes that the Sustainability Commission will help work on and provide input for the Electric Vehicle Master Plan.
- Sustainability Commission can provide feedback for Master Land Use Plan for the Planning Commission. Mr. Inks notes if we have any thoughts on the commission making a recommendation on changing the MLUP designation for that property to not be a mixed-use node, and to note it as a park or nature preserve. Mr. McLeod says it wouldn't be a bad idea. Discussion ensues.
- Mr. Graf notes one item he has been accumulating a lot of plastic bags in his garage for a long time. Senior Center is taking plastic bags to make them into mats for the homeless. Only take plastic grocery bags. No mention of this program at the Senior Center. Is it best for the Office of Planning to contact DPW, or should he? Ms. Bittner states she can talk to DPW and Community Relations.
- Mr. Inks has an additional website change, which is to update our page so that it lists the officers on there. Ms. Bittner notes that she can do that.
- Mr. Inks asks if Ms. Farooqi has any update regarding her potential move. She says the next meeting will be her last.

Adjournment of Meeting

Motion: Graf

Second: Farooqi

Ayes: All Present

Meeting adjourned at 7:28pm

Respectfully submitted,

Chris McLeod, City Planner
Office of Planning