

STERLING HEIGHTS SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
JULY 20, 2022

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

SUBJECT: Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Sustainability Commission held JULY 20, 2022

Meeting was called to order by Chairperson Inks at 6:00p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance is recited.

Roll Call: Inks, Graf, Tabbert, Matthews, Skillin

Also in Attendance: Alexis Richards, Planner II  
Ryan Fox, Planner I

Approval of Agenda

Motion: Tabbert

Support: Skillin

Ayes: Inks, Graf, Tabbert, Matthews, Skillin

**Considerations**

**5.A SUSTAINABILITY PLAN- SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY ACTION ITEMS OVERVIEW**

The Office of Planning prepared and presented another A.S.W.O.T. analysis form for tracking progress on Sustainable Mobility focused action items in the Sustainability Plan. The Commission went through each item in the priority list and identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats pertaining to the action item.

Mr. Inks asked Mr. Fox for a summary of the status of public transit in the City. Mr. Fox explained that the City is serviced by the SMART Transit system. Part of that system is the SMART Flex Zone, which is a micro-transit system centered in and around Hall Road. Mr. Fox further explained that SMART Bus Routes exist on Mound Road, Van Dyke, Schoenherr Road, and 15 Mile Road.

Mr. Tabbert asked about the fuel source of the buses used by SMART, Mr. Fox answered that he believes they burn fossil fuels. Ms. Richards indicated that she believes they will be integrating sustainable fuel sources in the future. Mr. Tabbert asked if the Flex vehicles are electric, Mr. Fox answered he is not sure.

Mr. Graf asked if it is an accurate statement to say, "100% of Sterling Heights is serviced by SMART." Mr. Fox answered no, as certain parts of the City are underserved or are located too far from a Bus Stop. Mr. Graf asked if an accurate percentage could be calculated. An exact estimate is not made, and the Office of Planning agreed to look into further quantifying the percentage of the City covered by SMART services. Upon analysis it is determined that the western and southern portions of the City are underserved by SMART, based on SMART's own maps.

Mr. Tabbert asked if the Troy SMART Flex zone covers part of Sterling Heights. It is determined that the Troy SMART Flex Zone covers Dequindre Road, the very western part of the City.

Mr. Graf asked what the limiting factor of the SMART Flex Zones size is. Mr. Fox explained that micro-transit networks are inherently less cost efficient, and thus cost was most likely the limiting factor. Other factors, such as the number of potential users in a condensed area, may also be a factor.

Mr. Matthews asked how SMART calculates the demand a community needs. Mr. Fox explained that SMART is funded by communities that partner with them. Opting in to the SMART System is voluntary, which explains why some communities are serviced and others are not. Mr. Fox explained he is unsure of exact formulas or cost percentages, but indicates that these figures can be determined with some research.

Mr. Matthews asked if a mileage is on the ballot for Macomb County to opt all of Macomb County into the SMART Transit system. Mr. Fox answered that he is certain it is on the ballot for Oakland County, but is unsure of Macomb County. Mr. Tabbert found that it is on the ballot for Macomb County voters, however it is to sustain current funding for the SMART Transit system and not to expand it.

Mr. Graf asked if municipalities subsidize the SMART system by opting in, Mr. Fox answered that that is the indeed the case. Mr. Graf asked if the subsidy was increased, if transit coverage could be expanded. Mr. Fox answered that it is a possibility, however he would need to do research into the matter before he could answer with certainty.

Mr. Graf asked if the parts of Sterling Heights not covered by the SMART Flex zone or serviced by SMART Bus routes were underserved by SMART, and if there was any way to quantify a need for transit in the un-served areas. Mr. Graf stated that he wanted to determine if more City funding was necessary to expand the services, since if there is no demand for public transit in these areas it could be a misuse of City funds. Mr. Tabbert agreed with Mr. Graf's point, and discussed how areas around Ryan Road in particular are located far from any SMART services. Mr. Tabbert expressed concern for senior or disabled residents that may have difficulty access transit, and Mr. Graf agreed. Mr. Graf wanted to determine a cost/benefit analysis for expanding SMART services.

Ms. Richards discussed that the transit system will always be more affordable for individual users than private transit such as Uber or Lyft. Dr. Skillin explained that the southern part of the City has a high concentration of apartment complexes and renters, who could benefit from expanded SMART services.

Mr. Fox explained that there is heavy pedestrian traffic on Ryan Road and 15 Mile Road, and thus could be a potential location for public transit expansion.

Mr. Inks and Mr. Fox shifted focus onto the tracking document. The Commission spent time filling out the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of each action item.

Ms. Richards corrected an earlier misfinding, that the ballot proposal on the ballot in November would expand all SMART Services in November. This ballot initiative is factored into the analysis. The Commission agreed to table discussion of the collaboration with other public entities, in

regards to public transit, until after the November election to see if SMART Services will be expanded by popular vote.

The Office of Planning presented information regarding Sustainability and the Traditional Mixed Use Node Districts identified in the Master Land Use Plan for the City. The Commission discusses specifics to each node, and a discussion is had on how to best connect the nodes through non-motorized transit.

#### Approval of Minutes \*as amended\*

Motion: Matthews

Support: Inks

Ayes: Inks, Tabbert, Matthews, Skillin

Abstention: Graf

#### **Correspondence**

There were no correspondence presented to the Office of Planning to be presented to the Sustainability Commission.

#### **Old Business**

##### **8A. TREE SURVEY UPDATE**

Office of Planning gave an update on the tree survey, specifically that the City Council approved the contract with Davey Tree to conduct the study. The study is a continuation of the study undertaken previously. The Office of Planning will sit down with Davey Tree to discuss specifics for the survey in October.

##### **8B. TREE CANOPY UPDATE**

Mr. Fox brought up a conversation from the July 2022 meeting relating to a potential tree canopy survey, in the vain of the Green Macomb survey conducted in 2016. The Office of Planning stated they would follow up with Green Macomb to learn the status of their survey, and to find if they plan on conducting another survey. In the absence of a Green Macomb study, the Commission expresses interest in writing a motion of support to have the City conduct a tree survey of its own that uses similar methodology to the Green Macomb study.

##### **8C. YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD UPDATE**

The Commission expressed that many of them cannot not attend the October 11<sup>th</sup>, Youth Advisory Board meeting. The Office of Planning will connect with the Community Relations Department to schedule a new meeting to attend this fall. The Commission also discussed working with other Commissions and Boards as well.

##### **8D. AWARDS UPDATE**

Mr. Fox explained that he will be attending the Michigan Association of Planners Conference on October 12<sup>th</sup> in order to receive recognition for the Sterling Heights Sustainability Plan's winning of the Excellence Award for Resiliency and Sustainability. Mr. Inks will also be in attendance. Mr. Fox and Mr. Inks will provide updates in October regarding the conference.

### **8E. PARK SERVE MAP UPDATE**

Mr. Inks updated the Commission on his update of the Park Serve Map, showing that 50% of the City now lives just a short commute from some sort of Park or green space.

### **8F. ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING STATION MASTER PLAN**

Mr. Fox updated the Commission that the following Friday, a meeting will be had that Mr. Inks and the Office of Planning will attend to discuss and give feedback for the EV Charging station master plan. Wade Trim, DPW, and a few other City Departments will be there to discuss the City fleet and other possible avenues for EV Charging Stations.

### **New Business**

### **9A. PLANNING OFFICE UPDATE**

Mr. Fox and Ms. Richards assured the Commission that though the Office of Planning is currently understaffed, they will do their best to ensure that the Commission has its needs met in a timely manner.

### **9B. IMPERVIOUS SURFACE ORDINANCE UPDATE**

The Office of Planning is working to provide an ordinance for review by the Sustainability and Planning Commission that would limit the amount of impervious surface allowed in the front yard setback of single family residential houses. This new ordinance would require street trees to be placed to counteract increased impervious surface.

### **Citizen Participation**

There was no citizen participation.

### **Motion to Adjourn**

Motion: Matthews

Support: Tabbert

Ayes: Inks, Graf, Tabbert, Matthews, Skillin

Meeting adjourns at 8:29pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Alexis Richards, Planner II  
Office of Planning