

West St. Paul Environmental Committee
Environmental Committee February 3, 2021
West St. Paul Municipal Center-City Council Chambers/Virtual Meeting

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm.

Committee members in attendance: Laura Zanmiller, Tara Wright, Kristy Otte, Rebecca McCarty, Polly Saatzer, Jonathan Wagner,

Non-voting in attendance: Robert Gausman, Samantha Green, Robyn Gulley, Dave Schletty

2. NEW BUSINESS

a. **Minutes**-The January 6, 2021 minutes were approved.

b. **Farewell to Departing Committee Members**

Chair Otte said that there are some members leaving the Committee. Otte thanked Polly Saatzer for her tenure on committee and her contribution. Otte also thanked Jonathan Wagner for his work and volunteerism. Otte thanked Tara Wright for her help and consistent support to the Committee especially in the GreenSteps Cities efforts. The City has benefitted from her hard work on the Committee. Schletty thanked all three members for their dedication and their work for the City.

3. OLD BUSINESS

a. **Boulevard Tree List Review**- The Committee was provided with an edited boulevard tree list. Schletty highlighted the native tree species in yellow. There are 53 trees that are native to Minnesota; this includes both deciduous and conifers. The Committee will only look at deciduous trees for the City boulevards. Otte asked if Members did their homework and if they felt some tree species should be added or deleted. Wright asked if 10 trees species were enough of a healthy variety for the City. Schletty said that what the City strives for is not more than 10 percent of one variety. The City currently has 40 percent ash trees and a large percentage of maple trees. There are about 1,400 boulevard ash trees. Wagner asked how many boulevard trees there are on an average block. Schletty said this was hard to determine. Many streets have power lines that do not allow tree planting. Wagner asked what tree species could be planted under power lines. Schletty said that there are two: Amur Maple and Spring Snow Crab. They grow to about 15-20 feet high. The City would still hesitate to plant these trees under the power lines. Schletty went on to say that there is plenty of room to plant more trees, easily 200+ spaces. The City is striving to plant more trees. Eventually the City will need to cut down the Ash trees. Boulevard trees are provided by the City. The ordinance allows for the residents to plant their own tree. However, there is strict criteria to be followed.

Otte said there is a note regarding invasive species, specifically, the Amur Maple and the Norway Maple. She does not know if it would be a best practice to have these species on the list. She asked if they could be removed from the list. Schletty said this is a good idea. He thinks that the Amur was put on the list because it was a smaller variety. It is also a maple and the City is trying not to plant anymore maple trees if possible. It would be fine to take those species out. Otte asked about the effect of the hardiness zones shifting. Schletty said because [Minnesota] is becoming a warmer climate, more trees could be pulled in from borderline 5. Wagner commented that the City will have to watch for the invasiveness of these types of trees; a lot of the trees in that zone can spread more quickly in the heat. Zanmiller did some homework on the native tree species. She was wondering if the City should put down the botanical plant name of the species on the list as well. She remarked that there are seven tree species that are common named Iron Wood. Zanmiller said that the Ironwood that is native to

Minnesota is being used at Thompson Park along the new path at Hwy 52. The Red Maple is native in much of the United States. However, the City would want Minnesota grown seeds for this type of Maple. Zanmiller is studying to be a Master Gardener for the county. The tree list is a project that she could perhaps take on to research. She does need volunteer hours for her program. Schletty agreed with Otte that this was a good suggestion. He said that the tree list was created years ago by a former Committee Member. The trees were picked to fare well on the boulevard and be salt-tolerant. There are probably some more trees that the Committee could add. It is definitely appropriate for Zanmiller to work on the list.

- b. Landscape Ordinance Revision Discussion-** Otte would like to move the Landscape Ordinance document work this out of the Environmental Committee and into the “ordinance writer’s hand.” Schletty said that there was a “hiccup” in that the City Planner would like the Council to adopt the Renaissance Plan formally. There have been two developments recently in which the Renaissance Plan was not jiving with the Comprehensive Plan. Before moving forward, the City Planner wanted the Renaissance Plan approved by Council to make things smoother. Green said that this topic may be explored in a Planning Commission work session this month. Otherwise the Commission would talk about it in March. Otte talked about the ordinance and said that the Committee’s ideas are all there. The first bullet point in the ordinance in the tree section is, “Only cut down existing trees if invasive, non-quality or necessary for design plan.” The Committee has time and time again worked to preserve quality trees. Otte feels strongly that this bullet should be kept there. Schletty said that almost all of the City’s developments are small-sized and developers could make a designation that they would need to be able to remove every tree. Green confirmed this. In small sites in West St. Paul, every inch of the site could be argued as necessary. Otte said sometimes new developments create a lot of impervious space that leave little room for landscaping. Otte said that the bullet item regarding planting trees offsite (if the site could not fit more trees,) could be deleted. The cost of the tree could be put into the tree dedication fees. As she mentioned before, Otte said that the recommended tree list had two species that were invasive. They should be removed. Schletty said that the Committee had talked about having list of recommended trees is on file with the City Planner. It would allow the ordinance to be a long standing document. Otte talked about the requirement of buying plants from neonicotinoid-free and pollinator friendly sources; the practice is too complicated to enforce. However, the Environmental Committee recommends this on every single plan. Otte would like to keep this in. Wright said that most big suppliers have lines of healthy plants. Schletty said it might be helpful to take out the word supplier and require that plants be produced neonicotinoid-free and pollinator-safe. McCarty added that not requiring purchase from particular producer would reduce the City’s risk of advocating a particular company.

Regarding site plan requirements, Otte recalled that the Committee talked about a point system. Some comments on the point system said that the suggestions may not be feasible. Otte has added some bullet points which include planting more trees than required by code, having a potential wildlife habitat on site, etc. A committee member suggested having bird habitats that feed birds. These habitats could be built in apartment courtyards. Schletty said the City Planner suggested having two items from the list required in a PUD, instead of all site plans. Otte said that this could be decided by Council. Wright agreed with Otte. Lighting requirements could be accomplished with multiple ordinances. McCarty suggested LEED standards. Leadership in Energy Design takes into account a number of things. Otte asked Schletty if there is already language on solar energy. Schletty was not able to follow up on this yet. The City Planner told him that residents are able to put up solar devices on their homes. It is not prohibited. Wagner said be careful who you hire. He has been working on it for a year. If anyone would

like more info, he would be happy to speak with them. Otte asked Committee Members if they were comfortable with the issue being, “sent off.” Schletty said that the Committee can send this item to the Planning Commission for discussion during their training session. Wright asked if the other items that were discussed previously could be passed on to the Planning Commission. Otte said that the City has Michael Orange’s template document for landscaping. Otte tried to create the Committee’s document from Orange’s document. Schletty said that Otte’s document (with her notes) could be forwarded to the Planning Commission. Otte said that her document was not pretty. Combining her document into Michael Orange’s document might be what the person writing the ordinance could do. Some of the items may need to be separated. Wagner talked about speed limits being lowered in St. Paul and Minneapolis and the environmental and safety benefits from this. He asked if this would be incorporated into West St. Paul ordinance. Otte said this was included this on the Robert Street Plan. Schletty confirmed this but it is more about zoning.

A motion was made by Wagner to accept the landscape and buildings document created by Otte and to forward it to City Council for approval. McCarty seconded the motion. The motion carried All Ayes.

4. Updates

- a. **GreenSteps Cities Updates**-Otte entered 10 things in to the GreenSteps program and she has gotten feedback already. Some things they felt were great; some things she needed to add more documentation. Schletty added a couple items as well. There are 29 best practices. There are actions to each practice and it is complicated. Number one is Efficient Existing Public buildings. The City has made some progress with indoor lighting. Schletty said in order for the City to reach Step 3, it must accomplish some specific things which include the B3 Benchmarking system. It is a state system that audits energy usage in all of the public buildings. The City started to do this 10 years ago. It has been done with the Maintenance Facility. The City has more new buildings. Schletty is working on entering the new data now. He will work with some other office staff to do this to enter the new data. The other requirement is 1.2; Low or No Cost Indoor Lighting. Schletty has entered this information already. He is waiting to see if the City meets this standard. Once the City meets the requirement in number one, it will be able to go onto Step 3. Otte said that if we wanted to move forward to the next step, the City has to submit its data by April 1. Schletty said there is a chance to have the steps done in time. It is a matter of pulling the City’s bills and entering the information.

Otte said the City has gotten to number three, New Green Buildings and completed 3.5. However, there is room for improvement. Otte said that number four was accepted by the program; Schletty confirmed this. Otte asked if the existing traffic lights are LED. Schletty said that everything on Robert Street is LED. Schletty said that he will work with the City Engineer to document this. The Robert Street plans would have the specification. Regarding number five, Otte asked if the Minnesota Mainstreet model was used for building redevelopment for Robert Street or for Smith Avenue. Schletty will check with the City Planner about this. (Otte said there is nothing to enter for number five yet.) Regarding number six, “Comp Plan”; the City has a Comp Plan. Schletty said that the Council only recently adopted the Comp Plan. Otte said that the Comp Plan is about 386 pages and has no table of contents. She suggested this as something to consider. For number seven, Efficient City Growth, Otte has nothing. Some items have been completed for number eight: community planning, mixed uses, regular transit service. For number nine, Efficient Highway, some of City’s items have been accepted. There are more things that could be added. Number ten is in process; Bird City that can be added to this line. The work on Mud Lake and the Adopt a Drain effort could be added as well. Step four consists of making progress on the program’s

goals; the City will start to fill in the gaps for this step. For number 11, Living Streets, Otte filled in something from the Robert Street Renaissance Plan. It was a big no. Schletty said that the note from the program said an item from another section fit better (11.4). So the City received 2 stars for this step. Schletty will need to work the City Engineer and having a "Complete Streets" policy. The policy talks about being pedestrian friendly and having multiple modes of traffic on one street. The policy would make streets friendly to pedestrians, bikers, cars and transit. The policy would apply differently depending on the type of streets, (for example, heavily traveled or side streets). Otte said the City has recently added two pedestrian/bike tunnels; 11.5 and 11.6 could probably be documented easily. Schletty said that 11.1 "Complete Streets Policy" is the sticking point. He needs to work on this with other departments. Number twelve, Mobility Options, needs to be finished. Schletty said that two actions need to be checked off. They include Safe routes to School. Number thirteen, "Fleets," will not be accomplished soon. Schletty said it is about electric vehicles. It is optional. For numbers fifteen, sixteen and seventeen, the City has done enough to proceed to Step 3. Otte said that Bird City can be added to number eighteen, Parks and Trails. Schletty said that 19.4 needs to be completed to fulfill number nineteen. Schletty will look more into this item. The City may be able to check it off. For number twenty, Schletty said that the City has to complete Best Practices 1 & 2. It might be doable. It is another optional requirement. Number twenty-two has been approved. Numbers twenty-three and twenty-four have been completed. The City needs more progress for number twenty-five. Schletty was working on this number today. One action is in that should pass. The City just needs another one to fulfill the requirement. Otte asked if West St. Paul has worked on a "buy local" campaign. Schletty said that during the Robert Street reconstruction, the City had the "Shop Robert" effort. Schletty will ask the Social Media Director for documentation. A committee member said that the Social Media Director did promote shopping in Smith Avenue recently during the Smith Avenue construction. Schletty knows that local shopping was promoted during the COVID-19 quarantine as well. For number twenty-six, Renewable Energy, Otte said if the Landscape Ordinance is passed, it can be applied to this requirement. Otte said that number twenty-seven, Local Food, has been completed, but there is room for growth. Number twenty-eight, Business Synergies, is optional. Number twenty-nine was disappointing for Otte. The City had passed a Climate Change Resolution; the Comp Plan has different sections that address climate change: adaption, community resilience, emergency plans, etc. Schletty edited 29.1 today and updated a new document for this requirement. This number should get approved at a two-star level. Otte talked about 29.7, Water Emergency Plans; she filled this number out and is not sure why this number was rejected. Schletty will look into it. They may want more concrete measures. 29.6 and 29.8 would be fulfilled with a Landscape Ordinance. Schletty talked about 29.2 Climate Resilience and Tribal and Low Income Areas; the City does not have these areas. Schletty asked Committee Members to look at the list and see if there are any requirements that the City has completed that need to be added. Otte said she will take the feedback from the program and send out an updated document to Committee Members for the next meeting. Otte said that the City should get going on the Bird City application. One of the requirements for it is a designated group that will meet once a year, the Bird City group. A designated Bird Migration Day is also need. The event must be tied to a site. The designated site is Marthaler Park. Originally the Committee had planned on May 18 being the Migratory Bird Day. Last year Wright had planned to do a joint Arbor Day/Migratory Bird day before the quarantine shut down. Wright said she can send the information to the City regarding her contact for the Migratory Bird Day. Schletty said that a chair person is needed for the Bird City group. Otte asked to have the Bird City resolution on next month's agenda. She would also like feedback on having Marthaler Park as the designated park. Schletty said that Marthaler Park will be under construction for the next three years; it may be tricky holding an event there during construction.

- b. **City Council-** Gulley said that she is excited is about the work the Environmental Committee has done and the thanked the Committee for their work. Council will take up the concerns about how the Committee assignments were done and the way that the process went. She said that the process did not go smoothly. Council has a lot of work to do to figure out what the process should look like. She appreciates the Committee's patience.
- c. **Staff-** Schletty said that Park and Recreation is going to look at creating an Arts Committee. Discussion about the new committee will start at the Park and Rec Committee because of its work on the Art Park.
- d. **Parks & Recreation Committee-** Gausman talked about Marthaler Park and the new county trail that will be built through it.
- e. **Planning Commission-** Green said that the Commission will be reviewing the Landscape Ordinance. Green asked for Dave Schletty to be present for the review meeting.

5. **Other**

a. **Thank You to Committee Members**

Otte thanked the departing committee members again for their work on the Committee.

6. **ADJOURN**

With no other business before the Committee and no objections, the Environmental Committee meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:36 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon G. Hatfield