Environment Committee

March 22, 2017

In attendance: Tim Wulling, Michael Russelle, Betty Wheeler, Stephen Mastey (chair), Steve Yetter

Eric Hudak from Dept. of Safety and Inspections

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| Introductions and Agenda | Michael moved to approve the minutes. Betty seconded. They passed unanimously.  |
| 7:08 pm Department of Safety and Inspections, Eric Hudak –There is an ordinance on the books currently that would be revised if the changes take effect. The current ordinance calls for “environmentally acceptable” packaging, but this work would further define that to preclude foam packaging. The focus of the ordinance would apply to “To Go” food packaging and would require the use of compostable, reusable or recyclable food packaging except in cases where there are no commercially available alternatives. The following factors will be used in determining if there are any commercially available alternatives:Availability of environmentally acceptable packaging for products; Economic consequences to manufacturers, suppliers, retailers and other vendors of requiring environmentally acceptable packaging when available; Competitive effects on manufacturers, suppliers, retailers and other vendors involved in the sale of product brands or labels available only in packaging that is not environmentally acceptable packaging.They want to tie the effort to existing programs, meaning the items will be defined by the City’s residential recycling contracts and this effort would not entail amending the contract. They will also align with the Ramsey County BizRecycling program. DSI has had three meetings with a variety of stakeholders, like hospitality, restaurants, City of St. Paul, business organizations, and Ramsey County. DSI has visited 50 family-owned restaurants to do education and outreach on this. They will continue outreach to places like the Hmong Place Market. They have further gone to community meetings like this one. DSI has determined that any increase in changing to a more environmental product will be nominal and continues to come down. There will be an exception for products for which there is no logical substitution. DSI will go audit businesses after this (they are complaint-based because they do not license establishments) and issue citations if necessary. Minneapolis reports 80% compliancy, although there is some discussion about whether that is a truly accurate number.There is a special focus on minority-owned businesses so DSI is doing outreach and engagement with these groups so that no one gets caught off guard. Michael suggested advertising in the Asian newspapers. Steve wondered whether Community Councils would be expected to weigh in on this. Eric responded that they had been to five or six different Councils and everyone has been supportive of this. There will be a public comment period after the language is developed. Coming down the line, the City will be looking at short term rentals (ex. Airbnb) for regulation. There may be some deregulation of massage in the coming months because massage therapists are currently required to be tied to a business or a home.  | Eric will let Cailin know when DSI develops the language.  |
| 7:32 pm Kasota Ponds, Steve Yetter – The group worked their way through the task list for Kasota Ponds on google drive and assigned tasks. They followed up on who has done what. If Metro Metals gives volunteers, we want them to help clean up their section of the ponds. If we need a rain date and time, it’ll be Sunday. We will try to call it on the Friday night beforehand. Steve will call the rain date if necessary.  | Steve will pick up the baked goods for Colossal Café the morning of. Cailin will pick up the coffee. |
| 7:53 pm Raingardens – Michael reached out to a Boy Scouts Troop to see if there was interest to help with raingardens on a somewhat continual basis. The contact Michael has is looking into it to see if that’s a possibility. Stephen is going to reach out to Bruce Weber to set a date and time for the volunteer clean up. There’s a good network in South St. Anthony Park of people who are willing to help with the neighborhood clean up. There’s a canvass of the neighborhood from Raymond and Territorial up to the community garden. Stephen is trying to tie the raingarden clean up into that. There was enough mulching that happened last year that we just need help with cleaning out the sediment and pulling out some weeds.  |  |
| 8:00 pm Ten Year Planning, Michael Russelle – The biggest goal of the Council this year, Michael reported, is the ten year plan. We are submitting a grant to the SAP Community Foundation for planning. We can write a plan today that would suit us as a group, but it’s important that we do outreach to the community in order to have buy in and authentic engagement. Michael asked the group to think about ways to engage the community to find out from community members what issues they deal with on a daily basis. One of the things Michael thinks a lot about is the heat stress in the summer. There’s not a lot of relief available to people walking outside in the summer time. This might be one of the things that community members report to us. What kinds of ideas do we have to engage the members of our community? We need to use the Equity Framework and also understand that lots of people won’t come to a meeting or aren’t able to. How can we engage the people we haven’t ever heard from before? Steve Yetter spent some time talking with the ED of Mac-Groveland about the Ten Year Plan that Mac-Groveland got approved. One of the things they did was had a ranking system for people to be able to give opinions on various items. Before they even got there, they asked really open-ended questions. Mac-Groveland expanded the categories of the Ten Year Plan to include Water and Environment. We need to be able to get information back from people but without priming them in the beginning. How you phrase the question is important. We want to let people talk about whatever is on their mind. Cailin reported that SAPCC submitted an RFP to CURA for a graduate student to work with this summer on outreach and data visualization for the ten year planning process. Michael wondered about how to contact businesses. Steve suggested that there needs to be an intentional plan in outreach to businesses. Last time this planning process occurred, RockTenn was quite frustrated because no outreach had been done to industrial businesses. The last ten year plan was hostile to their business interests. So we need to have a plan to not make that mistake again. Stephen wondered how we get more businesses excited to work with the board and maybe serve as business delegates. We are able to email businesses a questionnaire. That’s something we can start doing. We can contact the Midway Business Association, CEZ, SAPCF, and other industries in the area to get email lists. Sandy Jacobs would know. Metro IBA and the City may also be good contacts. Michael reported that TTASAP has been thinking a lot about variable weather, among many other things. He wants to know what the scope of Council activities should include over the next ten years. Infiltration, beauty, resilience, green space. Steve suggested renewable energy. Something around energy use, sourcing of energy, and conservation should go in there. Nonmotorized transportation will probably be covered under the Transportation section. Michael noted that Excel Energy may have started to give data on energy usage per block that we may be able to access. Steve mentioned the loss of public community space in the neighborhood. The concept of shared resources may be an important one to consider. Re-envisioning shared resources for community building and efficiency. Community spaces and resources will be really important. Tim suggested walking paths in the neighborhood as an important connection tool. For instance, from Langford Park to Kasota. Where are the sidewalks not enough? We should look at the places people need to go and build in those paths and have some respite areas along the way. Those can be important for gathering and community-building as well. Benches are an important feature, but also there need to be other attractive features to make the neighborhood truly walkable. Betty noted that younger people will also be excited about more solar powered charging stations along walking routes. It’s important to think about people along the entire aging spectrum. Stephen mentioned integrating all of the recyclers we have in the neighborhood. We have some unique assets here that we should intentionally engage. Steve added that it’s important to highlight this feature as a unique asset of the neighborhood. We’re a “destination recycling” neighborhood. We need to frame up our questions and then come up with engagement strategies to collect the data and broad distribution of input. If we got our questions ready, we could start doing a trial run before anyone joins our team (ex. From CURA in June). We have information we can use from the Transition Town survey. Steve will come up with some questions and then we can do a beta test with the survey. There will be money in the SAPCF for door hangers in order to do outreach. The Environment Committee needs to have a presence on that hanger.  | Staff will start to compile a list of businesses. This will be on the agenda for next time. Steve can take a stab at writing some questions that could go out to the community.  |
| 8:38 pm 2017 Goals – The group reviewed 2017 goals. Combine goals 4 and 9 to reflect that the group is going to write up and present on air quality monitoring and GIS environment work in the neighborhood. 1. Continue to communication with and support TTASAP: Stephen asked Tim if TTASAP needs anything more from this group. Tim reported that TTASAP signed on with the Midwest Energy Fair on Harriet Island in September 9th and 10th. They’ll ask SAPCC to help advertise.
2. Work on grant planning from MWMO, Ramsey Conservation District, and CRWD: We fall under these three jurisdictions. Michael believes its important to get funds from places like this to support our work. We want to help promote and publicize the organizations. Put the fifth goal under this one as well.
3. Explore tree preservation in St. Anthony Park: Best way to do this is going to be to urge Russ to look into it. One of the trees that was cut down from by the co-op was old enough that it probably was growing before Minnesota was a state. There is a tree registry where you can nominate trees to protect them. We need to work with the City of St. Paul to save trees in our neighborhood. Stephen has been working on this since 2008. A member of the City Council needs to direct staff to take this on as an important issue. UMN Forestry Department might be able to do something on this.
4. Publish and present research results from the pollution map study and air quality monitoring: Betty reported that we will get results from MPCA at some point soon. Michael has on his list to work on drafting language for the GIS work.
5. Move up to number 2.
6. Create meaningful internship opportunities tied to Environment Committee goals: Michael wants to have someone from CURA map rainfall in the neighborhood. We could also see where to target and how much rain we need to capture. Stephen suggested that RCD has been doing some of that. Stephen thinks that we could get CWRD and RCD to do this and then fund projects on the property.
7. Continue hosting Kasota Ponds clean up.
8. Give input on the Ten Year Plan.
9. Move this one under number 4.
10. Continue to help manage and maintain public land in the neighborhood. Work to tell the story of our accomplishments, like 17 raingardens, the median on Raymond, and Hampden Park. Betty suggested having a photo archives section of the website to highlight projects. There can be a version of an electronic scrapbook on the website to point to.

We may need to be ready to support Incredible Edibles by Nadine Horchner to have micro and macro gardens scattered throughout the neighborhood. We may need to quickly turn around a letter of support for her project, perhaps by email.  | Cailin will add information on the website to support advertising these organizations. We need to add tree preservation to the agenda for an upcoming month so we can have an in-depth discussion about it. Cailin can add accomplishments to the website.  |
| 9:05 pm Other Agenda Items – Cailn and Michael discussed the grant that SAPCC is chasing on energy resilience as well as the BCBS grant. Stephen reported that St. Cecelia’s is looking to connect food directly to areas that need it. We have a food desert, so does Frogtown. St. Cecelia’s has a commercial kitchen and a community space as well. Cailin noted that Towerside and the MWMO are working on an eco-tourist center.  |  |
| 9:15 pm Adjourn |  |