

West St. Paul Environmental Committee
Environmental Committee January 6, 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, Jonathan Wagner, Kristy Otte, Rebecca McCarty, Polly Saatzer, Jade Pennig

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

2. NEW BUSINESS

a. Minutes- The December 2, 2020 minutes were approved.

b. Committee Bylaws and Election of Chair/Vice-Chair

Schletty collected and tabulated the “super-secret” ballots ahead of the meeting for this year’s Chair and Vice-Chair. The Chair for this year will continue to be Otte; Vice-Chair is Wright. Schletty bid them congratulations and the members applauded. Schletty asked members if there were any questions regarding the Bylaws and the Committee Member Expectations. It is the same as last year. Schletty reminded them that appointments are made by Council; it is a two-year term. Members officially start on March 1 of the year that they are appointed. There are three members that are up for reappointment; two members have chosen not to be reappointed. Wagner and Saatzer will be finished after February’s meeting.

A motion was made by Pennig to approve the Bylaws and to approve the election of Otte and Wright as Chair and Vice-Chair. The motion carried. All Ayes.

c. Site Plan Approval -1949 Robert Street

Schletty related that this site plan was the vacant Baker’s Square building. The tenant would like to build a brand new car wash building. The car wash will be known as Crew Carwash. The submitted plans call for a removal of 3 trees, totaling 54 caliper tree inches. Per code, 30 percent of the total caliper inches of quality trees removed must be replaced. This would be 16.2 inches. The applicant proposes to plant 15 deciduous trees (37.5 caliper inches), 109 shrubs, and 86 different grasses. Per City code, 1 tree is required for every 20 feet of lineal property. The subject property has 1,055 linear feet which equates to 53 trees. This is quite a difference from the proposed number of trees. The plan falls short of the minimum. City staff would like to see at least 11 more trees planted for a total of 26 trees. This would be accomplished by planting trees on the north and west side, (continuing the pattern started on the south and the east.) City staff feel that this spacing and pattern would work. City staff also would like the applicant to offset the effects of the site being automobile-oriented, (the large impervious surface,) with more landscaping. Schletty added that the City Planner is requesting a fence on the north and west to help shield residents from vacuum cleaner noise.

Regarding stormwater management, when a plan disturbs an area more than one acre in size, water quality and rate control measures must be demonstrated. The site is 1.37 acres. Modeling rates must ensure compliance with 10-year and 100-year storm events and 50 percent of the phosphorus must be removed from runoff. Crew Carwash said that their average carwash uses 46 gallons of water. Forty percent of the water is recycled. They will use LED lighting both inside and outside of the building.

Otte commented about putting in new sidewalk on Crusader Avenue and if the new sidewalk would require removing the trees. She also asked about increasing the number of trees required for approval

of the plan; there will be a lot of cars idling in the new establishment. This will cause a lot of emissions. She asked about other possible areas in the site for stormwater and waste water retention. Schletty said that there is an onsite underground storage tank that will initially filter stormwater. He thinks it will be in the northwest corner. The tank will store the water and then it will run off into the stormwater system. Schletty has suggested making the planter bed [southeast corner] into a stormwater retention pond. The Committee can recommend this. Schletty said it may be possible to plant smaller variety trees in the corners of the landscaping. Regarding the new sidewalk on Crusader Avenue, the trees would shift to the north toward the parking lot. Zannmiller asked about the enforcement of landscape plans. Schletty said the plans were enforced by the inspectors onsite. It is a final walkthrough piece. Schletty explained that a big chunk of the applicant's fees is escrowed and they may also have to submit a bond. Fees are not released back until final sign-off is done. The City can hold the money indefinitely; Schletty would need to speak to the City Planner to get the statistics on it. The City is working toward tree dedication fees if applicant cannot fit trees on plan. Wagner suggested adding arborvitae trees. Because of their size, a "ton of them" could be planted. Schletty suggested spruce trees on the west side to help with noise. Wagner said if the required trees were not planted onsite, they should be planted elsewhere. Schletty said that the City can request this but does not "have teeth" in enforcing it. Otte asked about the size of the trees on the site plan and if it represented their growth at full size. She wondered if there were room for more trees. Schletty said that he would need to study the landscaping and the tree varieties. On the south side along Crusader Avenue are maple trees. At full size, the trees would probably grow into each other's canopies eventually. The Serviceberry and Boxelder are a smaller variety. The Ivory Silk will get bigger as well. Schletty added that if the Committee Members wanted a specific tree, the City could request it. Gausman commented that in these developments, the applicants are assessed park dedication monies. Schletty said this was true when a property is replanted. However, no fees will be collected from this application because it will not be replanted. Most developments usually are charged the dedication fee.

A motion was made by Wagner to approve the site plan with the following recommendations:

- The number of trees planted be doubled;**
- A sound barrier be created to shield neighboring residents from vacuum noise;**
- The applicant address expanding the water retention system;**
- The applicant plant arborvitae or larger trees that are green all year round to screen the building from the street;**
- The applicant purchase plants from a neonicotinoid-free supplier.**

The motion was seconded by Otte. The motion carried. All Ayes.

Schletty said that he will work with the City Planner on tree spacing and see if the City can get a higher number for the required trees.

d. Review Boulevard Tree Planting List

Schletty said that the City does have a boulevard tree ordinance and that it was developed by this committee. Residents were concerned with current policy of boulevard tree replacement. The ordinance speaks to tree preservation in the City as well. There is a list of trees that are available to be planted; the list was created by members of the committee in about 2007-2008. The list consists of MN native trees. They are of small, medium and large variety. When the list was created, the Committee

did not worry about planting ash trees. There was no Emerald Ash Borer, (EAB). Since that time, the City has not planted any ash trees. The City uses the list for developers. Schletty asked if there were any comments from the Committee, and if they wanted to add or delete anything. An updated list would be forwarded to Council for approval. A Committee Member asked if residents know there is a list. Schletty replied that they do know. If someone wants a boulevard tree, the City first inspects the site. There are very specific instructions regarding where a tree can be planted and what type of tree can be planted. The tree should not block sight lines and should not be planted over utilities. Ultimately, if a tree is in the boulevard, it is on City property. It is the City's tree. The City allows residents to purchase and plant the tree; they can still call the City and the City Street Maintenance Department will plant the trees when schedule permits. Part of the EAB plan was to plant a better variety of trees. Right now the City has 40 percent Ash trees and 15 percent Maple trees on the boulevards. Ideally the City does not want more than 10-15 percent of one variety. A major disease can come along and wipe out all the trees of a specific variety. Residents can contact Code Compliance anonymously, if they suspect that a boulevard tree has been planted that violates the ordinance. Schletty recalled one case in which an apple tree was planted on the boulevard. Otte wondered if the trees on the list were 100 percent native trees. Schletty said that one of the former members of the Committee, Steve Cook, developed the list. He was a certified arborist. It is possible that there were a few trees are not MN native. There might be a variety of Elm that is not native to Minnesota, but is resistant to Dutch Elm disease. That is the reason why he may have put it on the list. Schletty said that Committee Members could take a month to review the list and come back to discuss it. Wagner said it would be helpful to put in red the Minnesotan native species. Pennig suggested adding the tree specie's water tolerance. Otte proposed requiring a percentage of native and non-native species into the Landscape Ordinance. Gausman has a catalog from a nursery that plants native flowers and grasses. These plants attract pollinators. Zannmiller said she had pesky overhead power lines on her boulevard; planting trees on her boulevard would be prohibited. She was wondering if an alternative could be found. Schletty said that it would be good to generate ideas for that type of problem.

Schletty introduced the new Council liaison to the Committee, Robyn Gulley. She is excited to work with the Committee. She would like the chance to speak with every member. She asked if they were interested in a half hour conversation, to please email or text her.

3. Old Business

a. Zoning Code Updates

Otte related that trying to work from actual ordinance and embedding the Committee's ideas is not the right approach. The Committee will not be the one writing the actual ordinance. She put together bulleted points and ideas for the Landscape and New Development ordinance. She broke down the items between landscape and buildings. The first thing was trees; the City does a lot of razing of trees in new developments. She wondered if the Committee could come up with language around only cutting down existing trees that are invasive, non-quality, or absolutely necessary to the design plan. With new trees, (following the caliper inches replacement plan), Otte suggested requiring a percentage of trees put forth by the U of MN Extension list to be included in any new plans. Otte listed other items which the Committee recommended for ordinance. The items included fulfilling tree planting requirements elsewhere in West St. Paul because of site restrictions or the funding for future tree plantings; requirement to use suppliers that are neonicotinoid-free and pollinator safe, rain gardens, bio retention solar panels and Dark Sky compliance. Otte asked if there were feedback. Schletty said that the City Planner, Melissa Sonnek, has commented on the list. Sonnek said that the Committee must specify

what sites they would like to affect, i.e. new developments or sites that have been rezoned or remodeled. The City Planner said that certain things will trigger site plan reviews. Regarding the trees, she liked having recommended trees, but was hesitant to require them in actual ordinance. If any changes were made, the City would have to amend ordinance. It would involve, two different Council meetings and also public meetings. In the case of required trees not being planted because of site restrictions, she likes the dedication fee for future tree planting. She was not a big fan of saying, "Go plant them somewhere else." The trees would be planted on park land and eventually be the City's responsibility. There is also limited space to plant trees on park land. The City cannot guarantee that staff has the time to plant especially with a year like this, (with a lot of developments.) It might be cleaner to only have the tree dedication fee. The Committee may need to do more research on the commercial requirement of one tree per 20 feet and the one tree per 40 feet for residential. Because sites in West St. Paul are small, almost every square foot of them are being developed. There is not a lot of green space. Developers are already building smaller buildings to fit into our sites. The Committee may need to investigate this and look at what other cities are doing as well. Wagner talked about contacting NSP or Xcel for other program like street lights replacement at a discounted rate. The City could work on some issues with them such as Dark Sky compliance. They may have some programs that promote solar power usage as well. There are tax incentives for this. Schletty said the City can do this; it is not a sustainable initiative however. It would be hard to put into ordinance.

Schletty said that the City Planner thought a certain percentage of Minnesota native plants could definitely be incorporated into developments. She is hesitant to require that developers use suppliers that are neonicotinoid-free. She does not know the legalities of using specific suppliers. Sonnek needs to talk to the City Attorney about this. Some developers will come from out of state and they may not have the same requirements elsewhere. Regarding the site plan requirements, the City Planner is hesitant to put things into ordinance if there is no incentive to do the things. Schletty said, "It would be kind of a stretch." Sonnek suggested instead to require a developer with a planned development (P.D.) or any type of variance to meet a certain number of requirements. Sonnek would prefer a point system. For example, putting in a rain garden or a solar power system would count toward a certain number of points. Dark Sky compliancy or LED lighting could also be counted in the point system. The applicant would need to meet the point threshold in order for their variance to be approved. Otte said this system makes sense, but it sounds like the system would combine landscape with outdoor and indoor [requirements.] Schletty said that it would not necessarily combine the requirements; he is generalizing site plan requirements. The City Planner is researching how the City can ensure plants are neonicotinoid-free. It is tough to put into ordinance. Wagner mentioned an article he read. The article was about architecture that uses plantings as part of the buildings. One of the unexpected problems are insects, especially with potted plants and mosquitoes. Cities have to figure out how to deal with this, especially with the increase in number of plantings.

Schletty talked about the building standards, specifically the SB2030 energy standards. The City Planner has some hesitation about this. Sonnek researched and discovered at the state level, the energy standards are only required if the applicant is using state bonding money. This is the only time it is required to meet these standards. To make this a requirement and not incentivize the requirement would be a stretch per Sonnek. It would hinder development. The City could incorporate this into a requirement of a variance or it could be tied to a TIF district.

Otte said that SB2030 standard is stated outright in the GreenSteps Plan. A lot of things on the list would hit the GreenSteps plan. To move forward in the GreenSteps city program, not everything is comfortable, or easy. The City may want to attract development that are attracted to green cities. Schletty agreed; there is a fine line between what is too much and how far the City should push [requirements.] He has to do more research and see what other cities are doing. He is interested to see if council has any comments. Gulley said she is absorbing a lot now. She did advise that the Committee be the Environmental Committee and that Council will think about the bigger things. It is totally fine for the Committee to recommend something and not spend a lot of time on what developers are going to think. Council will interact with the developers. The Environmental Committee will be the advocates [for their cause.]

Eng-Sarne said that she will commit to contacting some council members outside of the city who have made great progress in this area. She has made contact with Angie Craig and Climate Action folks; they were talking about some really cool things.

Zanmiller suggested adding the Soil Water Conservation District as a resource (with the U of MN) under the natural buffer wetland shoreline bullet item. They are a resource for developers as well. Otte said she will meet with Schletty and the City Planner to develop the final list. It is still in the building process. Even if the City Planner does not think it is a good idea, it does not mean the Committee cannot put it forward. Even if the recommendations do not become ordinance, it does not mean that the Environmental Committee cannot recommend them every time. Otte would like to connect before the next meeting; she is intrigued by the point system.

4. UPDATES

a. Subcommittee updates-NA

b. City Council Update- Gully is on day three; she had no real updates. Eng-Sarne said that the City has received Lift Station funding from the state. It is \$2.2 million. (It is a \$3.8 million project for Lift Stations 1 & 2.) The City received grant money from Met Council for I/I inspections. Eng-Sarne was on a call on December 10 with Congresswoman Craig and the Climate Action folks. They talked about the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act and the City's Climate Resolution. They want to show that there is a non-partisan movement for this cause. Eng-Sarne is impressed with Craig's knowledge on the topic. This is the last meeting for Eng-Sarne. She said that the League of MN Cities award for the City's GreenSteps work is one of the highlights of her tenure. She will go onto the Public Safety Committee and be vice president of the EDA. She related that she is a graduate of Peace Studies. She said that the work the Committee does is good stuff, and that there are many things we can move the dial to move forward. Wright thanked Eng-Sarne for her work.

Gulley said that Rick Hansen is working on getting money for the next two Lift Stations in this year's bonding bill.

c. Staff Update- Schletty said the application is in for the Tree City USA certificate; it is different this year. Most things had been shut down. The City could not have the Arbor Day celebration. The Tree City USA program is letting it slide this year. The City did still qualify for the Tree City USA rating. The Committee should start planning for the Arbor Day event soon. It will take a little more planning this year without Garlough School participation. Hopefully by April or May, restrictions will be lifted and the City will be able to have the event.

- d. Parks and Recreation Committee-** Gausman reported that there is a significant new sculpture in the Art Park now. There is a new effort to have more public arts in the parks.
- e. Planning Commission-** Green said that the last Planning Commission meeting was 4 ½ hours long. She told Committee Members, if they want to follow the City's politics or fall asleep, watch the meeting. She said that the Commission follows all the Environmental Committee's recommendations, and she is excited to see the new ordinance from the Committee and to get it to Council.

5. OTHER-NA

6. ADJOURN

With no other business before the Committee and no objections, the Environmental Committee meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:24 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon G. Hatfield