

**West St. Paul Environmental committee**  
**February 1, 2017**  
**West St. Paul Municipal Center-Administrative Conference Room**

**1. ROLL CALL**

Committee members in attendance: John Margot, Chris Gevara, Lauren Smith, Kristy Otte, Jonathan Wagner

Non-voting members present: Dave Schletty, Cassandra Schueller, Bob Pace, Bob Gausman, Hillary Shay

**2. NEW BUSINESS**

**a. MINUTES**

The minutes from the January 4, 2017 meeting were approved by the committee.

**b. Litter/Plastic Bag Ban in West St. Paul**

Schletty introduced Cassandra Schueller, the new Recycling Coordinator, to the committee. Her position is shared with the cities of Mendota Heights and South St. Paul. Schueller presented the committee with a power point .presentation from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA.) She said that it was a good place to start for background information. The MPCA published a white paper to examine local policy regarding [Product Bans and Restrictions] which is available on the MPCA website.

In order to start thinking about the issue, Schueller said that the committee has to think about its goal and purpose. She shared what other cities wished to accomplish. Some goals included reducing litter and pollution, greenhouse gases, or just waste in general. The other thing to consider is how the city will accomplish its goals, (i.e. fees on plastic bags, bans on plastic bags, or through education and promotion.)

There are tradeoffs and unintended consequences of anti-pollution measures:

- In Austin, the single use carry out bags were banned; thicker multiple use plastic bags were allowed. Litter reduction was negligible and there was no progress on waste reduction. Thicker plastic bags took the place of thinner plastic bags.
- Eliminating plastic bags did not necessarily change the “carbon foot print” of shopping bags. Portland eliminated the use of plastic bags in large stores like Target. (Single-use bags were only used in food take out or pharmacy.) The use of paper bags increased by fifty percent. Paper bags have a higher carbon footprint than plastic bags to manufacture.
- The city of San Jose has banned single- use plastic bag s and charges up to ten cents for each recycled paper bag used. The city has increased the use of reusable bags by forty percent. They have reduced litter by 60- 70 percent with no increase in paper bag usage.

- In the Grand Canyon Park, all plastic water bottles have been banned. There are water refill stations in the park. There has been a reduction in litter throughout the park.
- At the College of St. Benedict, plastic water bottles were banned. The university believes in providing healthy clean water to its students and they have cancelled contracts with Coca Cola.
- St. Louis Park has put in place a “Zero Waste Packaging” policy. All food receptacles need to be compostable, recyclable or returnable. This has been in place since January 1.
- Social Justice advocates say that bans on bags disproportionately affect poor people. Advocates do not like charging ten cents extra per bag. (Some stores give out free bags to WIC and SNAP recipients.)
- Many people are confused about recyclable and compostable products. Most communities are still not properly reusing or recycling items.

Schueller said that the [committee] must define what success is. The MPCA suggests consideration of waste volume, weight and toxicity. They suggest fees on single use bags, paper or plastic. They have no “stance” on plastic water bottles. For polystyrene and takeout containers, MPCA emphasizes reuse. Compostable packaging should only be used when there is a strong composting program.

The committee talked about the presentation. A committee member suggested a litter clean up could be done, and the litter could be displayed at the City Hall lawn. Gevera said the problem is a “behavior” issue and that the committee needs to start with small changes. Pace talked about trash receptacles along Robert Street. He would like to find out about cigarette receptacles along Robert Street as well. Wagner talked about single use bags being too accessible to consumers.

Another issue discussed was trash collection. Recycling needs to be more attractive to consumers and different receptacles are needed to make it easier for consumers to recycle.

The committee discussed regulating heavy garbage trucks traveling over city roads. Instead of having many vendors serve the city, bids could be taken for one vendor to provide service to the city. White Bear and St. Paul have put this in place. Maplewood reduced costs to the consumer by bidding out trash hauling services as well. A committee could be put together to see if the city

could be divided into territories and arrange for trash pick-up once a week to each territory.

Most apartments do not participate in recycling programs. Apartment dwellers are often multi-lingual as well. Frequent movers do not know about recycling.

The committee needs to find out what the problems are. Getting out recycling information to apartment dwellers is an issue. A "new tenant" packet was suggested as a way to get out information.

**c. RIVER TO RIVER GREENWAY**

Ken Paulman, an advocate for a citizens' grassroots group promoting the River to River trail and the pedestrian crossing on Robert Street, came to speak to the committee. Paulman has lived in West St. Paul for the last seven years and is a year-round bike commuter. He attended a Dakota County information session regarding the possible crossing that would allow safe passage to pedestrians and bicyclists over Robert Street. Robert Street still poses a significant obstacle to pedestrians especially with children. It is like a "river full of crocodiles." Paulman stressed the high traffic rates of the intersection and danger to pedestrian and bicyclists. Fatality rates increase exponentially at the current speed limits. It is especially worrisome on Saturday's, the highest day of the week of travel.

A feasibility study showed that because of terrain issues, a bridge was not possible at the old Blockbuster property on Robert Street and Crawford. Paulman shared the recommended bikeway intersection options with the committee. The first option, the enhanced crossing at Wentworth and Robert would be the lowest cost to the city but result in the loss of two million dollars in funding from the state earmarked for a loading cross. The most expensive would keep traffic open at Crawford. Another option would cut off the cul-de-sac to the town home properties near the library, (making the town homes more desirable.)

The underpass project costs 2-2.7 million dollars (specifically to build the connection) which would be paid by Dakota County.

The benefits of the having the trail system are long term; Paulson says that this type of amenity would attract people to move to West St. Paul, much like what transpired in Uptown Minneapolis. Research shows that trail systems are "magnets" for residential development. Children would be able to travel without crossing a major road to the library and Dodge Nature Center, (and to the YMCA). The new trail system would attract young families.

A committee member asked about the safety of the tunnel. This is a real concern; however these tunnels are usually well lit. The police department will

have to address this. Margot wondered about the change in attitude with the tunnel; two years ago, the tunnel was not supported by the mayor. Paulman said that he could not speak to the past; Dakota County will pay for the tunnel and the costs will not impact the City of West St. Paul.

Gausman said that the crossing at Blockbuster would only enhance Robert Street. Paulman added that there is no shortage of vacant lots on Robert Street to develop.

The Renaissance Plan mentions that the “Millennial” generation does not drive. They bike or take public transportation and do not own cars. In order to attract younger people, the city needs to build [trails]. Wagner said that the trail would be a good attraction to bicyclists. The River to River trail makes a 14- mile loop around the city.

Margot commented that signage is needed on the trails, especially for entrances to the bridges.

A committee member made a comment that she would like more boutique shops in the city. Pace said that business is based on demographics and what businesses are willing to develop on Robert Street. The chair asked Pace about his thoughts on the Robert Street crossing. Pace said his constituents, forty to one, are against the non-grade crossing. Pace acknowledges that the trails need to connect, but is categorically against a tunnel that restricts potential business within the city. Pace knows there is another way to create safe crossing. Dakota has been trying to “sell” the concept for a long time and constituents have not changed their minds.

Margot remarked that if the city lets businesses dictate what will be done, the city will have a situation like Sherman Properties. Pace said that Sherman has been brought before council and there will be changes.

Smith asked about what happened to the plans for the painted bike trail on Charlton. Schletty said that this was opposed by Charlton residents that did not want to lose their on street parking.

### **3. OLD BUSINESS**

#### **a. NEWSLETTER**

The chair suggested “wordsmithing” the article outside of the meeting.

#### **b. SUBCOMITTEE UPDATE**

No updates were reported.

### **4. ADJOURNMENT**

With no other business before the Committee and with no objections, the Environmental Committee meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:28 pm-