



CITY OF MENDOTA HEIGHTS

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

WORK SESSION

Thursday June 1, 2023 • 6:00 p.m.
City Hall • 1101 Victoria Curve, Mendota Heights

Minutes

In attendance: Vice Chair Tupper, Commissioners Stein, McCaslin, Husbands

Staff in attendance: Natural Resources Coordinator Krista Spreiter and Assistant City Administrator Kelly Torkelson.

1. Call to Order

Vice Chair Tupper called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. Roll Call

In attendance: Vice Chair Tupper, Commissioners Stein, McCaslin, Husbands

Staff in attendance: Natural Resources Coordinator Krista Spreiter and Assistant City Administrator Kelly Torkelson.

3. Approval of the Agenda

*Motion by Commissioner Stein
Second by Commissioner McCaslin
Motion Passed 4-0*

4. New Business

- a. 2024 Budget Recommendations Discussion**

Coordinator Spreiter introduced the discussion by reviewing the goals to identify a priorities for budget conversations from the green steps priorities as well as to review the project priorities from the Natural Resources Management Plan.

The group began discussions of the green steps best practices areas starting with Buildings and Lighting.

Commissioner Stein discussed the value for public buildings in setting up for funding opportunities that become available from the federal and state governments. Assistant City Administrator Torkelson shared that the city council is in early conversations about a renovation for city hall and that prioritizing conversations about energy efficiency in public buildings now could set that project up to integrate sustainability.

Commissioner Husbands inquired if there were budget priorities for this year that would be able to address efficiencies in public buildings. Assistant City Administrator replied that there are several public buildings that the city owns and that if the commission wished to prioritize this best practice that staff would look to see what opportunities existed in this upcoming budget cycle to advance that priority.

Commissioner Tupper advocated for promoting energy efficiency with private buildings as well, promoting a culture in the Mendota Heights community.

Commissioner Stein suggested that efficient outdoor lighting and signals were something that we were already doing a lot of. Natural Resources Coordinator Spreiter agreed that the city was already making significant progress on action steps in that priority.

The commission allocated priority votes for best practices in this area as follows:

1. Efficient Existing Public Buildings: 4
2. Efficient Existing Private Buildings: 2
3. New Green Buildings: 0
4. Efficient Outdoor Lighting and Signals: 1
5. Building Redevelopment: 1

The commission then moved onto discussion of best practices under the Land Use category.

Commissioner Husbands asked that there be a focus on ordinance and policy development to set the city up for when developers come to do projects that they propose their projects in alignment with the city's goals. She asked for clarification on

the zoning code update that the planning commission was working on if that should include natural resources updates as well. Assistant City Administrator Torkelson clarified that the zoning code update process that was being worked on by the planning commission was an update to align the outdated zoning code with the revised comprehensive plan. Coordinator Spreiter added that proposed changes to the zoning code can still be recommended by the natural resources commission independently of that process and that updates to the zoning code can be proposed at any time.

Commissioner Stein agreed that a focus on policy and ordinance sets the city up for success, but acknowledged the challenge of working through the details. He also reminded the commission of the recent update from the policy committee that they were focusing the time to developing a single ordinance in order to make progress.

Coordinator Spreiter reminded the commission that they needed to provide the direction on which policies and ordinances they wanted to focus on, that staff can support the commission with drafting ordinances once the direction is provided.

Commissioner McCaslin asked if there were opportunities for transit or encouraging transit.

Coordinator Spreiter shared that there is conversation and interest around transit, but that Metro Transit does not think that there is a demand for it. Assistant City Administrator shared that this is a good example of the return on investment for the priority areas. If the Commission makes that the priority and if the council wanted to put the investment in to make that happen, staff can look to see what it would cost, but likely it would be a high cost investment with a low utilization. This whole conversation is about identifying where are the priorities for the commission and what do they want staff to dig into more.

Commissioner Stein commented that highway 62 divides the community and he is interested in working with MNDOT to look at some corridor planning. Doing a corridor study would set future projects up to integrate design changes when MNDOT does construction projects.

6. Comprehensive, Climate and Energy Plans: 0
7. Resilient City Growth: 0
8. Mixed Uses: 1
9. Efficient Highway- and Auto-Oriented Development: 0
10. Design for Natural Resource Conservation: 4

The commission then moved onto discussion of best practices under Transportation.

Commissioner Husband asked for clarification about what a complete street is. Commissioner Tupper shared that her job is serving as the complete streets advisor for green steps and that she has a lot of expertise to support the city on this initiative. She shared that complete streets is looking at the full design of the street from storm water management to different transportation modes use of streets, like bikes and pedestrians in addition to cars. Living streets is another angle to evaluate the streets and that is looking at the green infrastructure around the city's streets.

Commissioner Husbands asked what the work to create complete streets would be. Assistant City Administrator Torkelson shared that this would likely be looking at developing a complete or living streets policy that would guide city projects moving forward.

Commissioner Tupper shared that the policy helps to frame the decisions for street project design and for addressing community push back that might occur.

Commissioner Husbands asked if the city had a policy, if it would also manage state projects. Assistant City Administrator shared that city policies are only internal, so it would affect city projects, but not state or county projects.

Commissioner McCaslin asked about opportunities to hire grant writers to help us either with the implementation of the policy or with the writing of the policy. Commissioner Husbands thought that was a great idea.

Vice Chair Tupper shared that there were so many opportunities to make progress on efficient city fleets that it should be a priority.

Commissioner Husbands asked if the city should hire a position to work on grants. Assistant City Administrator shared that the commission would prioritize pursuing grants and the staff would advise if current staff would be able to complete that work or if it would require additional staff.

Commissioner husbands wants the city to start with the priority and then look at what is necessary to achieve that.

Assistant City Administrator Torkelson shared that the city council is having a work session next Tuesday, June 6, which the commission is invited to which is going to be looking at public financing options that the city could consider that might provide

designated funding streams for natural resources projects.

Commissioner Stein shared the importance and challenge of developing ordinances. Coordinator Spreiter shared that the Natural Resources Management Plan has draft ordinances that are a good starting point for policy discussions. Commissioner Husbands asked what is necessary to put those in place. Coordinator Spreiter shared that that is the work happening in the policy and ordinance committee right now. Commissioner Stein shared that it is a lot of work.

Natural Resources Coordinator Spreiter shared that the commission needs to provide the direction of what they want in the policy in order to make progress on that. Coordinator Spreiter shared that it is difficult to make progress without face to face meetings. Commissioner Husbands asked if the commission could do a work session to focus on making progress on those ordinances. Assistant City Administrator Torkelson said that the commission can make that a priority if it wants to.

Commissioner Stein agreed that a focus on policy and ordinance sets the city up for success, but acknowledged the challenge of working through the details. He also reminded the commission of the recent update from the policy committee that they were focusing the time to developing a single ordinance in order to make progress.

Vice Chair Tupper shared that the green steps committee could also focus on policy development if that was a priority.

Commissioner Tupper shared that the green steps advisors are great resources that we could leverage.

Commissioner Stein shared that our roads have some long term opportunities to save money if we design for narrower streets, the projects would be less expensive. Assistant City Administrator Torkelson shared that the commission could prioritize looking at life cycle cost analysis with projects and incorporate the long term financial benefits of sustainability investments. Commissioner Husbands agreed that it was a good idea to be incorporating sustainability and resilience into project design.

- 11. Living & Complete Streets: 4
- 12. Mobility Options: 0
- 13. Efficient City Fleets: 4
- 14. Demand-Side Travel Planning: 0

Assistant City Administrator Torkelson shared that this conversation would likely be tied in with a sustainable purchasing conversation, which is the first topic of the next

section, environmental management. The sustainable purchasing best practice includes a required action, a sustainable purchasing policy or guideline, for reaching step 3 of the green steps program.

Commissioner Husbands asked if there was still a conversation about Mendota Heights being a pilot city for the County's organics collection program. Assistant City Administrator Torkelson shared that at this time, we do not have direction to move forward on that yet, but staff are having discussions about how to get us to organics collection as we anticipate eventually having a requirement to have organics collection by the county. Commissioner Husbands thought it would be a good idea to leverage existing opportunities to make progress. Commissioner McCaslin thought that the county should provide direction and resources for organics collection.

Commissioner Husbands thought that the use of sustainable pavement options would be a good priority. Commissioner McCaslin shared that it was common for grants to highlight a purchasing priority, such as American-made for the grant requirements. Commissioner Stein asked about resurfacing the city parking lot. Coordinator Spreiter shared that the parking lot project was waiting until there was direction by the city council regarding the city hall remodel. Commissioner Stein said there were lots of opportunities for small changes that would be easy to incorporate in that project.

Commissioner Husbands asked for clarification about a stormwater utility. Coordinator Spreiter shared that we have a stormwater utility fee for developers right now. Commissioner Stein thought that there were some good examples around Lake Como that the city could look to that were more than ditches, they were natural plantings.

Commissioner McCaslin thought that the floodplain work would be an easy project to take on. Coordinator Spreiter mentioned that staff was already working on that.

- 15. Sustainable Purchasing: 1
- 16. Community Forests and Soils: 3
- 17. Stormwater Management: 3
- 18. Parks and Trails: 0
- 19. Surface Water: 2
- 20. Efficient Water and Wastewater Systems: 0
- 21. Septic Systems: 0
- 22. Sustainable Consumption and Waste: 0
- 23. Local Air Quality: 0

The commission then moved onto discussion of best practices under Resilient Economic and Community Development.

Vice Chair Tupper said that Benchmarks and Community Engagement was already in the work plan and has a lot of opportunities for things that the commission can do.

Commissioner McCaslin said that it is good to prepare for renewable energy opportunities that might come along.

Commissioner Stein said that it would be a good idea to connect with sustainability and natural resources partners at other agencies like SD 197.

Commissioner Husbands said that the climate adaptation and community resilience focus was important. Assistant City Administrator Torkelson shared that this priority could prompt work on a sustainability plan or a climate resiliency plan and that those types of plans would address other areas of sustainability outside of the scope of the natural resources management plan. Vice Chair Tupper thought that a climate action plan would help to inform a lot of the other work that they are talking about.

24. Benchmarks and Community Engagement: 3

25. Green Business Development: 0

26. Renewable Energy: 1

27. Local Food: 0

28. Business Synergies and EcoDistricts: 0

29. Climate Adaptation and Community Resilience: 5

Motion to adjourn by Commissioner McCaslin, Seconded by Commissioner Stein

4-0

Adjourn at 8:02 p.m.