

**CITY OF MENDOTA HEIGHTS
NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
Wednesday, July 12, 2023- 6:00 P.M.
Mendota Heights City Hall-Council Chambers
Minutes**

The regular meeting of the Mendota Heights Natural Resources Commission was held on Wednesday, July 12, 2023, at Mendota Heights City Hall; 1101 Victoria Curve.

1. Call to Order

Chair Swank called the meeting to order at 6:00pm.

2. Roll Call

Natural Resources Coordinator Spreiter called the roll. Commissioners present: Swank, Husbands, Stein, Tupper, McCaslin, and Fahnhorst. Commissioners Absent: Student Commissioner Byrnes. Staff present: Natural Resources Coordinator Krista Spreiter and Assistant City Administrator Kelly Torkelson.

3. Adopt Agenda

Motion to approve the agenda by Tupper, second by McCaslin

Motion passed 6-0.

4. Approval of Minutes

a. Approval of June 14, 2023 Natural Resources Commission Meeting Minutes

Motion to approve the minutes by Fahnhorst, second by Stein.

Motion passed 6-0.

5. Public Comment Period (for items not on the agenda)

6. New Business

a. Workplan Report: Quarter 2

Natural Resources Coordinator Spreiter listed the five goals and accomplishments attained in the second quarter.

Commissioner Fahnhorst will provide more information regarding ordinances after the next subcommittee meeting.

b. Planning for Q3 Work Session

Natural Resources Coordinator Spreiter noted the Commission's consensus to hold quarterly work sessions each year and reminded the Commission of the upcoming dates; September 27th at 6:00pm and December 13th at 4:00pm. She noted a proposal for the next worksession that the Ordinance and Policy Development subcommittee could help lead a discussion on developing a tree preservation ordinance.

Commissioner Tupper liked the idea to have the conversation regarding the tree preservation ordinance. In addition, she suggested starting preliminary discussions for the 2024 workplan.

Commissioner Fahnhorst would like to make final detail changes to the text at the work session, so any bigger picture changes should be brought to light by the August Commission meeting.

Commissioner McCaslin suggested the Natural Resources Management Plan be added to the 2024 workplan.

Commissioner Stein noted there might be some work needed regarding the Partners in Energy Program, if the Commission later decides to move forward with it.

Commissioner Tupper asked staff if there'd be opportunities to collaborate with other Commissions, or any of Council's priorities to consider.

Assistant City Administrator Torkelson noted that the preliminary 2024 budget will be completed by the work session date so there will be time to discuss available funds. She invited the Natural Resources Commission to articulate ideas for collaboration to be brought to other commissions for feedback.

C. Green Steps Project Priorities

Natural Resources Coordinator Spreiter reviewed the established best practice Green Steps priorities. She presented information on the current status of the action items.

Commissioner Fahnhorst asked if there's a history of easements in Mendota Heights.

Coordinator Spreiter noted a few older and current easements within the City.

Commissioner McCaslin asked if the City would be getting a sign that designates the City as a "Tree City USA".

Coordinators Spreiter noted that the City does have a sign and a flag that they are working to put up.

Commissioner Husbands asked about a \$25,000 budget item that might roll over into 2024, and asked if the Tree City Qualification was predicated on the use of that budget item. She suggested putting something forward in terms of using that budget before the end of 2023.

Coordinator Spreiter confirmed that the City does intend to use that budget this year. She'll take recommendations from the Commission for best use of the funds.

Chair Swank asked how much of that budget would need to be kept for maintenance of new tree care.

Coordinator Spreiter commented that it wouldn't be a significant part of that balance used.

Commissioner Husbands asked if the City would qualify the trees as "infrastructure", similar to the Parks and Recreation Commission's budget.

Chair Swank asked what the process would be to shift that process to another budget item.

Assistant City Administrator Torkelson noted that current funds can't be changed at this time, but if the Commission is interested in 2024 budget change proposals, staff can look at that.

Commissioner Husbands clarified that she's not asking for a reallocation of funds, but rather having a mindset that the trees are qualified as infrastructure, and then budgeting accordingly.

Chair Swank asked when that conversation should start, for future budget proposals?

Assistant City Administrator Torkelson noted that budget decisions with the City Council begin in August with open work sessions. The time to make a recommendation would be now.

Commissioner Tupper supports the recommendation to create a new budget line item for tree maintenance.

Commissioner Husbands clarified that we need to start thinking in terms of natural assets also be incorporated as much as a built item within our parks; associated with infrastructure.

Assistant City Administrator Torkelson noted that the City does already budget for tree maintenance, and asked if the Commission proposed further budget.

Commissioner Husbands provided clarification on her proposal. Coordinator Spreiter clarified that she meant suggested using any extra budget to support some trees that need some help.

Chair Swank shared a concern that the money could get used for other items if it's combined with a general infrastructure line item.

Commissioner Fahnhorst acknowledged the idea that tree maintenance is a part of infrastructure in parks, as well as the idea that staff should have the flexibility to budget for tree maintenance as its own item but also with some budget flexibility.

Commissioner McCaslin noted they could add a high value tree item to decipher which trees are in most need.

Assistant City Administrator Torkelson will ask staff and City Council to explore a high value tree line item, specifically to explore the infrastructure trees that the City already has. In addition, to explore interest in separating out tree maintenance and tree planting in the budget.

Commissioner Husbands clarified that the current tree budget is specifically being used for emerald ash borer tree removal.

Coordinator Spreiter noted there are separate line items for tree removal and tree care/maintenance.

Commissioner Husbands emphasized the importance of replacing as many trees as they are removing.

Regarding Green Steps Priorities, Chair Swank asked if the "efficient existing public buildings" action items were already completed or on their way to completion.

Coordinator Spreiter provided clarification on which items have been completed and how to meet certain requirements.

Commissioner Tupper added her ideas around supporting the “complete streets” action item.

Commissioner Stein suggested that it’s good to be opportunistic in the certain areas that commissioners also have professional knowledge and experience on.

Chair Swank suggested focusing on “complete streets” and taking advantage of commissioner’s expertise.

d. Partners in Energy Program

Natural Resources Coordinator Spreiter recapped a presentation given by Xcel Energy whom explained the program and some different options for the City. The program application deadline is coming up so there wouldn’t be time to enter before speaking to the City Council. The next deadline would be October.

Commissioner Stein shared that he was very impressed with the presentation and wanted to be opportunistic with the rebates and financial incentives available for the City in the future. With support from Council he’d suggest getting an application in by the October deadline.

Coordinator Spreiter asked for any initial recommendations.

Commissioner Stein suggested doing more with efficient heating and cooling technologies within City buildings. In addition, taking advantage of incentive programs. Finally, helping inform Mendota Heights residents of these programs and opportunities.

Commissioner Husbands suggested creating partnerships with corporate residents by getting them information on energy support.

Commissioner Stein commented on a few more specific offshoots plans regarding electric vehicle and charging infrastructure, as well as a broader climate plan.

Commissioner Tupper agrees with the priority areas that other commissioners have brought up. She asked staff what feasible next steps would be.

Assistant City Administrator Torkelson replied that this would be a significant undertaking of staff time in order to make the program successful. She asked the Commission for their level of interest in pursuing the program.

Commissioner Stein thinks that it’s a high priority based off the timing of opportunistic savings and benefits for the City and residents.

Chair Swank agrees on the timeliness of the incentives.

Commissioner Tupper added consideration of the financial savings to offset some staff time.

Chair Swank suggested digging into this action item at the October work session.

7. Old Business

a. Committee Reports – Workplan

- Ordinance and Policy Development

Commissioner Fahnhorst shared some ideas regarding ordinance guidelines and enforcement, requirements of professionals and laymen, the level of City staff involvement, value questions, and new development.

Commissioner Husbands suggested putting emphasis on redevelopment as well.

Commissioner McCaslin suggested writing ordinances more for a developer rather than an everyday citizen.

- Education and Outreach

Chair Swank asked the Commission if they could lend support at the upcoming Fishing Derby recreation event on July 20th. A kids' activity and some educational items for adults are suggested responsibilities.

Commissioner Tupper suggested a stormwater demonstration.

Commissioner McCaslin suggested a demonstration on an ecosystem cycle.

Commissioner Tupper suggested organizing a natural resources site tour and asked the commission for feedback and suggestions.

Commissioner Husbands asked if the tour was open to the public.

Commissioner Stein suggested touring the Valley Park projects that are in the next year's budget to get a better idea of what's planned.

Commissioner Tupper shared information on the potential development of an award recognition program specific to natural resources. The first step is to identify the award categories, definitions, award categories, and nomination and selection process. A rough draft is hoped to be brought to the August Commission meeting.

Commissioner Husbands suggested awarding corporate citizens using land for rehabilitation as opposed to mowing.

Chair Swank shared that she found a company that can make them a portable banner with cutout holes for photo opportunities at future events and engagement opportunities.

- Urban Forestry

Commissioner McCaslin shared no new updates from the committee.

Commissioner Husbands asked staff for suggestions on areas that would be good candidates for an understory planting.

Natural Resources Coordinator Spreiter will work with Public Works to determine a good site in a park.

- Green Steps

Nothing new to report.

- Sustainability

Nothing new to report.

8. Staff Announcements

Natural Resources Coordinator Spreiter shared information on the upcoming Fishing Derby event and a

Master Gardener raingarden education tour.

Assistant City Administrator Torkelson noted that the vacant commission position posting has closed and the interview process will start soon.

9. Commission Comments

Commissioner Fahnhorst asked for an update on the feasibility of a stewardship account in the future budget.

Natural Resources Coordinator Spreiter noted that staff will be bringing the proposal to future budget meetings.

10. Adjourn

Motion to adjourn the meeting by Fahnhorst, second by Stein.

Motion passed 6-0.

Chair Swank adjourned the meeting at 7:31pm.