

PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES - CITY OF INVER GROVE HEIGHTS

Tuesday, April 2, 2019 – 7:00 p.m.
City Hall Chambers - 8150 Barbara Avenue

Chair Maggi called the Planning Commission meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Armando Lissarrague
Elizabeth Niemioja
Tony Scales
Dennis Wippermann
Pat Simon
Annette Maggi
Jonathan Weber
Joan Robertson
Brett Kramer

Commissioners Absent:

Others Present: Allan Hunting, City Planner
Ally Hillstrom, Environmental Specialist

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes from the March 5, 2019 Planning Commission meeting were approved as submitted.

ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES PRESENTATION

Ally Hillstrom, Environmental Specialist, gave an overview of the environmental initiatives the City is currently involved in. She advised that the Environmental Specialist position was created in August 2018 and oversees the City's recycling projects, landfills, and environmental programs, as well as acting as the staff liaison for the Environmental Commission. The City receives funding through the Dakota County Community Funding Program to support the City's solid waste management efforts. The MPCA and Dakota County create solid waste masterplans every six years. The State of Minnesota has adopted a new goal of reaching a 75% recycling rate by 2030, which will be a 25% increase from the current recycle rate of 50%. The County plans to do this by providing the Community Funding Grant to help with the implementation of recycling best practices at City facilities, providing community recycling opportunities, and increasing recycling education. For example, the Community Funding Grant has been used to provide the funding for clearly labeled paired trash and recycling containers at the Inverwood Golf Course and Community Center.

Commissioner Weber asked if the need for water bottles to be empty was listed on the recycling labels.

Ms. Hillstrom replied it was not; however, there was a picture of an empty water bottle on the label. She advised that City Hall is also in the process of being equipped with paired trash and recycling containers. The Community Funding Grant also supports Cleanup Day, an event where last year over 600 Inver Grove Heights residents attended, and 35 tons of recyclable material was collected.

Commissioner Niemioja supported this event, stating with current trends attendance would likely increase in 2019.

Ms. Hillstrom advised that in 2018 the County started requiring cities to have two shred

opportunities each year. To fulfill this requirement, this year there will be a shred event in May as well as Clean Up Day in September. The City is also doing a six-month challenge for plastic bag collection, with collection boxes at the Community Center as well as the City Hall entrance. The City is partnering with Trex, a private company that uses the bags to make decks and patio furniture. Ms. Hillstrom advised that plastic bags do not belong in recycling containers as they get tangled up in the sorting equipment and cause shut downs.

Commissioner Robertson hoped the City and County could make it more accessible for residents to drop off plastic bags.

Ms. Hillstrom advised that Trex also has drop-off locations at Cub, Walmart, and Target. Currently the County has no drop sites for plastic bags; their way of supporting the effort is by funding the City's initiatives. She suggested that the conversation should steer towards using fewer plastic bags to begin with. The City has currently collected 850 pounds of plastic bags.

Commissioner Niemioja asked if the City still collected holiday lights.

Ms. Hillstrom replied in the affirmative, stating they are collected for a limited amount of time. Over 1,000 pounds of holiday lights were taken in this year, and they are picked up by Proact, a local non-profit who employs people with difficulties to disassemble them.

Chair Maggi asked Ms. Hillstrom to address the organics program.

Ms. Hillstrom advised that organics recycling collection at City Hall will be implemented by the end of the month.

Chair Maggi asked if they were working with residential trash haulers regarding an organics program throughout the City.

Ms. Hillstrom replied that currently there are no residential waste haulers that collect organics in Dakota County. There are logistical questions that come with implementing organics county-wide, such as must another truck be purchased, does the City want additional trucks on the road, etc. A useful tool that the County has created is a widget on our website that allows residents to research the best way to dispose of an item.

Ms. Hillstrom advised that the City is one of 127 cities that are part of the Minnesota Cities GreenStep Program, a free program designed to help cities achieve their sustainability and quality of life goals. It is managed by the MPCA and other partners and offers step-by-step assistance to implement 29 different best practices. The City has documented 40 completed actions; many of which were completed prior to joining the GreenStep Cities Program. The City was recognized for reaching Step 2 of the program in 2018 and is working on completing the steps necessary to move up to Step 3 of the 5-step program. Ms. Hillstrom showed Commissioners the GreenStep Program website and explained the data and resources available. The City is currently taking advantage of an Xcel Energy grant opportunity by having 20 vehicles collecting data to determine whether it makes financial sense to convert any of the City's fleet to an electric vehicle.

Commissioner Niemioja asked for clarification that the Minnesota GreenStep Cities Program included grant opportunities.

Ms. Hillstrom replied in the affirmative.

Commissioner Robertson noted the importance of grant writing and questioned who wrote the grants for the City.

Ms. Hillstrom replied that she sees grant writing as part of her role as Environmental Specialist. She noted, however, that grant applications would likely be given to the person at the City most knowledgeable of the grant topic, however, she would be available to assist if needed.

OTHER

Mr. Hunting advised that Commissioners whose terms expire this year (Simon, Wippermann, and Weber) must reapply for reappointment no later than May 10 at 4:30 pm; interviews will be held on May 20.

The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 7:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kim Fox
Recording Secretary