

City of Ashland - Sustainability Committee Meeting Minutes

A meeting of the Ashland Sustainability Committee was held on **Thursday, May 27 2021 at 6:00 p.m.** in the **Ashland City Hall Council Chambers (601 Main St W)**

Committee Members Present: Kate Ullman, Lissa Radke, Laura Graf, Parker Sterling

Committee Members Absent: Dale Kupczyk, Tamara Sylte

Staff Present: Megan McBride

Guest Speakers Present: Chue Lee Chang (Northland College), Marisa Bayer (Partners in Energy), Tami Gunderzik (Xcel Energy), Michael Bebeau (Xcel Energy)

Megan McBride opened the meeting at 6:00 p.m.

Agenda

1) Consent Agenda

Motion to approve the consent agenda by Kate Ullman, seconded by Lissa Radke. Passed unanimously.

2) Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the minutes from the April 29, 2020, Sustainability Committee meeting by Lissa Radke. Seconded by Laura Graf. Passed unanimously.

3) Public Comment (non-agenda items)

None.

4) Projects/Discussion

a) Partners in Energy Project Presentation/Discussion by Marissa Bayer, Mike Bebeau, and Tammy Gunderzik

Marissa Bayer with Partners in Energy, as well as Mike Bebeau and Tammy Gunderzik with Xcel Energy explained that the purpose of the program and the City of Ashland's participation is to collaboratively create an Energy Action Plan with community residents and stakeholders, which will guide implementation efforts and support which Partners in Energy staff will provide.

Mike Bebeau noted that this program gives power to the community to develop an action plan about energy use in the future, and expressed his excitement on offering the program to Ashland.

Tammy Gunderzik agreed, and emphasized the importance of receiving community and committee input through this process.

Marissa Bayer initiated the discussion by asking the committee how is Ashland already supporting energy efficiency and renewable energy?

Responses from committee members included:

- Installing the first City-owned solar array on the roof of the new Police Station
- Xcel Energy constructing a solar farm in the City
- The City has been converting light fixtures to LED over the past several year, and has done HVAC replacement projects at the biggest energy using buildings owned by the City
- Some private businesses and nonprofits have begun installing new solar arrays over the past several years
- Bill Bailey with Cheq Bay Renewables has been a tremendous resource for the area, and facilitate a group buy which had numerous City of Ashland residents participate
- Ashland developed a 25 by 25 plan in 2009, which was then updated in 2018 by the Center for Rural Communities
- Xcel provides renewable energy (Goal of 100% carbon free by 2050)
 - Technology is a factor
 - Worked with BART in obtaining electric buses

Marissa asked why sustainability matters to Ashland residents and businesses?

Responses from committee members included:

- Large supply of older housing, which can make it difficult for property owners to know how to best prioritize efficiency improvements but the long-term cost savings could be very beneficial for area residents
- Sustainability is a priority for the community overall
- Impacts of climate change have direct and measurable impacts on water quality and quality of life for Ashland residents
- Electric Vehicles are becoming more common, so installing EV charging station infrastructure is important for residents and tourism

Marissa then asked, what barriers do Ashland residents or businesses face when asked to support renewable energy?

Responses from committee members included:

- Cost is typically the most significant barrier for a variety of reasons including
 - Ashland County is not a wealthy county, and many residents do not have the means for upfront investment in energy efficiency upgrades or renewable energy
 - Older folks who do not see the payoff for return on their investment
- Information and education is a barrier for many property owners, both in knowing where to start prioritizing energy efficiency improvements and knowing what incentives are available
- Related to information and education, having readily available educational materials and information on qualified installers would help streamline projects

Marisa Bayer explained that the Partners in Energy team will incorporate the Sustainability Committee's feedback into a draft action plan, which will come back to Sustainability Committee for further review and comment.

b) Native Plantings in Ashland Waterfront Development Plan Presentation Chue Lee Chang

Chue Lee Chang, a Northland College student of Sustainable Community Development, explained that he worked with the City Planning and Parks Departments to provide context and recommendations for a native planting projects within City waterfront parks. Goals of the project would be to reduce mowing demands, increase biodiversity of native plants, and engage volunteers and residents in education and ongoing oversight of the planting areas. This would promote goals identified in both the Comprehensive Plan and Waterfront Development Plan, and provide water quality as well as aesthetic benefits.

Key recommendations provided by Chue Lee Chang through this project included:

1. Working with Northland College on identification of plant species and growing of some plants to be installed in the planting areas. This would be a great partnership, and also help reduce costs.
2. Continue with city wide volunteering and education events to involve the community in waterfront conservation and restoration projects.

Elise Kehle asked if there are ways for residents to get involved with this project.

Megan McBride explained that the City has already submitted a grant application to fund this project, and will hear about grant funding for this project in July 2021. If the grant funding is secured then volunteer recruitment for planning this project could start in summer of 2021, otherwise the project will move forward in spring of 2022.

5) Announcements

a) Waterfront Zoning and Code Updates

Megan McBride explained that she has been working with consultants to review and recommend amendments to the city's waterfront zoning and design standards to better represent goals identified in the Comp Plan and Waterfront Development Plan. The recommendations will likely center around being more intentional with the waterfront overlay zoning district to make it less general, with goals of limiting impervious surface coverage for future waterfront development, connecting landscaping and stormwater management standards to encourage green infrastructure and other best practices, and promote the types of public and private uses identified in the Waterfront Development Plan.

6) Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Kate Ullman. Seconded by Laura Graf. Unanimously approved.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:10 pm. Minutes done by Mandelyn Lyons and Megan McBride.