

City of Ashland- Sustainability Committee Meeting

Thursday, June 23, 2022

Meeting Minutes

Meeting called to order at: 6:02 PM

Members Present: Amy Rockwell Amman, Laura Graf, Dale Kupczyk, Axel Peterman, Lissa Radke, Adam Zais (Tamara Sylte joined later)

Also Present: Sara Hudson, Mandelyn Lyons (city staff)

Absent (Excused): Kate Ullman

Absent (unexcused): None

Action Items

- Sara will email the committee a “Community data dashboard” tool that tracks energy use.
- Make a list of community events in 2023 that we could attend with info about sustainability topics (All)
- Make a communications plan for promoting the energy action plan. (All)
- Laura will follow-up to see what kind of UW-Superior student help we could access and how to get access to internships and assistance.
- Amy will contact Deer Creek Seeds to see what kinds of seed mixes they sell or can mix, since they do many state DOT reseeding projects.
- Lissa will check for ordinances in other communities to find sample reseeding requirements.
- Sara will check the current Ashland ordinances to see if there are any reseed mix requirements already in place.

Agenda

1. Approval of Agenda

Axel made a motion to approve the agenda. Seconded by Dale. Passed unanimously.

2. Consent Agenda

a) Approval of minutes from the April Meeting. Amy made a motion to approve the April minutes. Seconded by Adam. Passed unanimously.

3. Citizen Comments

There were no comments from the public.

4. Introductions

Adam: Has lived here for 5 years, wants to be on the committee to make Ashland a better place for everyone.

Dale: Has lived here all his life and is interested in helping make the city and the country better.

Amy: Has lived here 15 years and wants to make Ashland more sustainable and do good things together.

Laura: Is the city councilor for District 5 and asked to be on this committee since she thinks it's a lovely city and thinks we all can do so much more and wants to help the city move forward.

Axel: Has lived here 9 years and is interested in community food systems, food sovereignty and security, and wants to contribute to the community.

Mandelyn: Is the planning and development department's administrative assistant and helps this committee do its work. She wants to help in any way to make the city better.

Sara: Has lived here 18 years, is the director of the city's parks and recreation department, and is personally and professionally interested in improving the quality of life.

Lissa: Has lived here since 2007 and is looking for fun and meaningful ways to minimize our human imprints on the city's natural environment while increasing quality of life.

5. Projects/Discussions

a) No Mow May Wrap up/Debrief – Axel

Axel thinks he saw about 2 to 3 signs within a mile as he walked around town in May. We have some photos of yard signs in front of houses to publish on web sites and social media. We were pleased with the number of signs and that someone else also made a yard sign for the month (Apostle Islands Realty). Signs were sold at the Food Coop and at city hall. Mandelyn/Sara had a total of 200 printed, and think there are about 75 left. These can be used next year.

Ashland County Courthouse put out 2 signs, as did Northland College on some of its lawns. We want to make a list of businesses to invite earlier in the spring (start in March), and invite them to hold off mowing "as long as possible in the month." We asked the visitors center, Ford car dealer, and Our Lady of the Lake this year in April, but it seemed like they needed more time to get approvals. Personal invitations to businesses could be a productive way of increasing the number of participants, and would be a source of goodwill for the participating businesses.

We'd like to do a better job of talking with public works employees to make sure they are fully invested, as we saw some PW staff mowing in a city park. We could invite them and the PW director to our March or April committee meeting, and we could invite the citizen PW advisory committee members to one of our spring meetings to engage them as champions for the idea. We can add this activity to next year's communication plan ("Invite PW employees and committee members to one of our spring meetings to personally engage them.")

We saw numerous positive comments on Facebook. A few questions about whether long grass is good for the lawn came up, so we could add info about that in next year's outreach materials. We should also suggest "holding off as long as possible," in case some places really need to mow for some reason (such as the Courthouse). Overall, we'd like to learn more about the benefits and challenges of NMM so we can be better advocates, but this first year went well and the community seemed to embrace it. We were happily surprised by the number of signs around town, and we think we significantly raised the awareness of the importance of not mowing. This event can only get better!

b) Rain Barrel Sale Updates–Sara

Sara said 8 rain barrels have been sold so far, and the sale ends June 23. The cost of barrels this year was not reduced by grant funding as it was last year, so the high cost could have contributed to low sales this year. Barrels will be picked up at a community location on July 18, and Sara will let us know if she needs volunteers to help with the distribution.

(A thought: Could a rain barrel sale be held in April or March during the home and garden show? We might reach a new audience there.)

c) EV Charging Station [Communication Plan](#)

The city council approved a downtown charging station, and the council was very excited about having it. It will likely be in the parking lot across the street from city hall. It will be fee-based using a credit card. The BART station is up and running. Both will be put on a national map of stations for visitors to use.

It would be great to get photos of both stations being used when they're open to the public.

d) Dark Sky Week Planning (date, communications, etc)--Amy

Amy has been talking with the [Starry Nights Lake Superior chapter](#) in Duluth about whether we can set up a ‘satellite incubator’ subchapter in Chequamegon Bay under their guidance as a partner. This could help a local effort grow into a full-fledged chapter of our own. Amy’s waiting to hear from the Duluth chapter about how they could help us. (A note: A new group in Duluth is fighting very bright lights and has a [short video about the issues](#).) The Keweenaw peninsula also has a “[Keweenaw Dark Sky Park](#)” with international recognition as a Dark Sky location, which could serve as a model for us if we work with the Friends of the Apostle Islands national Lakeshore to start a chapter.

A program or event could be held in August or September according to Amy who is looking at organizing something, and she invites this committee to help. We’d get the attention of lots of visitors if we held it in August, and that could amplify our messaging. We talked about inviting local artists to be involved in some sort of program to engage people visually to help us tell our story about the need for dark skies. Some groups have had a lot of success pairing artists with scientists to give a comprehensive perspective on a complex issue such as this one.

6) Announcements/Reports/Comments/Questions

a. Energy action plan updates (Sara)

City staff continue to meet with Xcel partners about reducing energy use. She asks if this committee wants to help with this. *Action Item: Sara will email the committee a “Community data dashboard” that shows energy use.* This is being promoted through the Main Street committee and coordinator, and the program allows for home energy audits that identify inefficient appliances and house features.

The group talked about a possible event to share info about this with the public. A possible place is a display at Bay Days or the home and garden show in April and the farm show in March, or farmers markets, which could be staffed by city employees or volunteers such as this committee. Many people still need general info on how to save energy, especially these days when energy costs are so high. *Action Item: Make a list of community events that we could attend with info about sustainability topics and the dates for 2023.*

Action item: Make a communications plan for promoting the energy action plan.

b. Community Gardens Update (Axel)

Axel and Northland College students were exploring a proposed garden site on the city’s east side; however, nearby homeowners rejected the site due to concerns about maintenance and the fact that many of the residents already have their own gardens.

So, instead of trying to push the siting of gardens to a location where they weren’t wanted, Axel is looking at expanding a currently operational community garden on Beaser Ave. He is talking with Sara at the city’s parks and recreation department to see what’s feasible. If so, the city council would need to vote to approve it. If they do, a written agreement that affirms permission and guidelines for use would be the best way to move forward to avoid any potential future use conflicts. It sounds like the new mayor is excited about community gardening!

Axel said a UW Extension Community Gardens Coordinator will be visiting northern Wisconsin in July to help local gardens with technical support and other resources.

c. UW-Superior Student Assistance: Laura said the chancellor from UW-Superior came to a recent meeting in Ashland to talk about the campus’s resources for communities. It’s the first time this kind of visit has been held to build bridges into local communities, but it will be an annual

event from now on. There is funding to allow students to work on community projects, which could provide this committee with help to accomplish projects and goals.

Action Item: Laura will do follow-up to see what kind of student help we could access and how to build those bridges with internships and assistance.

d. Reseeding Stock on City Property–Amy

Amy mentioned she's noticed on city properties that have been reseeded after construction that invasive or undesirable plants are growing instead of grass or native species. She's especially noticed an increase in burdock on these properties. She asked if there's a way to change the seed mix to reflect a more natural reseeding mix, and whether there could be a city ordinance requiring a certain list of acceptable or unacceptable seeds.

Action Item: Amy will contact Deer Creek Seeds to see what kinds of seed mixes that sell or can mix, since they do many state DOT reseed projects.

Action Item: Lissa will check for ordinances in other communities to find a sample reseed requirements.

Action Item: Sara will check the current Ashland ordinances to see if there are any requirements already.

e. Future Agenda Items

1. Rain Barrel Sale Update and Review
2. Make a six-month plan of our goals, audiences, and where we want to go with a display.
3. EV Charging Station Updates: City Station News
4. Dark Sky Initiative Updates: Partner with the Duluth Chapter–Amy
5. Recycling in City Parks: Can Receptacles be Added to Parks?–Sara
6. Seed Stock for City Reseeding Projects: Reducing Invasive Species in Reseeded Areas
7. UW-Superior Student Assistance–Laura
8. Recycled Paper Procurement (Lissa)

7) Adjournment

Motion to adjourn made by Laura. Seconded by Amy. Meeting adjourned at 7:09 PM.

It is possible that members of and a possible quorum of members of other governmental bodies of the municipality may be in attendance at the above stated meeting to gather information or speak about a subject, over which they have decision-making responsibility. Any governmental body at the above stated meeting will take no action other than the governmental body specifically referred to above in this notice.

The City of Ashland does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in employment or provision of services, programs or activities.

NOTE: Upon reasonable notice, the City of Ashland will accommodate the needs of disabled individuals through auxiliary aids or services. For additional information or to request this service, contact The Planning & Zoning Department at (715) 682-7041.