

City of Ashland – Sustainability Committee Meeting

Thursday, October 24th, 2024

6:00 pm – 7:00 pm HYBRID MEETING:

**Meeting Link: <https://meet.goto.com/740241965> | Access Code:
740-241-965 - CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS (601 Main Street W)**

Energy Action Plan, 25x25 Plan, Sourcewater Protection Plan linked here:
<https://sites.google.com/view/ashland-sustainability/themes>

Present: Charlie Ortman, Amy Amman, Beth Gehred, Brant Kucera (City Administrator), Steven Wiley (Planning and Development Director)

Absent: Kelly Westlund

Agenda

- 1) Approval of Agenda
Chair Ortman asked for approval of the agenda. Salmon-Tumas moved and Gehred seconded. Motion carried 4-0.
- 2) Approval of minutes from the August 22nd, 2024 meeting
Chair Ortman asked for approval of the minutes. Salmon-Tumas moved and Gehred seconded. Motion carried 4-0.
- 3) Citizen Comments
None
- 4) Projects/Discussions
 - a) Great Lakes Friendly Restaurant Certification – Presentation, Discussion, and Action if necessary
CJ O'Brien Weddle is with Surfrider and Bob Pokorney is the local chair of the Duluth chapter. They provided an overview of Surfrider. It is a non-profit organization with a powerful activist network. There are 10 regions, 80 chapters, and 130 plus student clubs. It was established in 1984. A goal is to help move the needle on plastic reduction. O'Brien Weddle passed it over to Pokorney. Bob Pokorney is the Chair of the local Duluth Chapter. He was born and raised in Duluth. Currently he was visiting family on Madeline Island. He is currently a nurse but has worked as a mariner on Lake Superior, and worked as chair of the chapter for 5 years. The chapter is made up of kayakers, swimmers, and other people who recreate on Superior and want to protect it. They do beach clean ups, educate people on environmental concerns, and their big triumph was to get the beach act passed at the federal level to give the MN Dept of Health funds to test water quality on Superior. The Great Lakes Restaurant Initiative is new for them. They are hoping to grow the program. They wanted to start in Duluth for a couple reasons. Restaurants create a lot of plastic waste and they want to reduce this. Duluth has changed in the last 15 years. People come to Duluth to recreate on the water but also pass through. They noticed that the draw for a lot of visitors is that tourists are really drawn to the lake and water. This is the real reason people come there. Pokorney used to give sailboat tours on Lake Superior. People asked what they could do to preserve it. It is easy to go and spend money with family but not feel you are connected to the place. It became clear there is a need for

this. Reduce plastic and give visitors a way to feel good about their visit. O'Brien Weddle can go through what the process looks like for restaurants. Often restaurants do not have a lot of time but hPokorney will often hear how easy it was to go through the process. O'Brien Weddle explained that the Great Lakes program is spin off of the Ocean Friendly program. It makes sense to have a Great Lakes Friendly name and logo. They provide a simple straightforward framework for restaurants to make the switch. It is technically not a certification. This is more so a recognition program Surfrider runs. Nationally they have 560 restaurants and counting. The restaurants probably serve 36 million single-use plastic free meals per year. They have a lot of different businesses in the program. The Great Lakes Friendly Restaurant process has the following steps:

- 1.) Identify lead or committee to recruit restaurants.
- 2.) Compliant restaurant signs up via online form
- 3.) Restaurant featured on map. Gets access to brand portal and use logo, vendor discounts.
- 4.) Compliance check within the 1-year membership
- 5.) Restaurant renews after 1 year. Membership is up. Repeat steps 2-4

Membership lasts one year. Surfrider periodically checks in with them. They send out automated emails. A volunteer works with businesses to make sure they are renewing and helps with the process. There are 7 mandatory criteria:

- 1.) Only reusable food ware for onsite dining.
- 2.) Paper straws only available on request or naturally occurring material straws.
- 3.) No plastic bags for takeout.
- 4.) Single-use utensils, straws, condiments, accessory items only available upon request
- 5.) No Styrofoam used at all
- 6.) No beverages sold in plastic bottles
- 7.) Proper recycling practices.

Optional Criteria - Choose at least 3

- 1.) Discount for customers with reusable items
- 2.) No single-use or bio-based plastic containers
- 3.) Energy efficiency efforts in place
- 4.) Water pollution and conservation mitigation efforts in place
- 5.) Vegetarian and vegan options offered regularly
- 6.) Pre-packaged items not sold in plastic
- 7.) Composting efforts in place
- 8.) All seafood is "best choice" or "good alternative" as defined by Seafood Watch or locally sourced

Ortman asked on optional ones if they were selling for example chips in plastic bags would this exclude a restaurant completely or do they just have to follow three other optional items?

O'Brien Weddle explained that they just have to ensure they are following three optional ones.

Gehred asked if someone is actually monitoring to ensure that a restaurant is up to date or if they expire are they kicked off the map? O'Brien Weddle answered that once they expire they are automatically off the map and Surfrider also asks for compliance checks. O'Brien Weddle manages the data and makes sure up to date info is there. She manages the database. Salmon-Tumas asked if there is a cost to restaurants at the signup stage or renewal. O'Brien Weddle stated that it was completely free to join and there was no financial requirement. She showed the

surfrider.org/gflr signup page. It takes only a minute to complete for busy restaurant owners. The restaurant benefits: Surfrider mails a decal the restaurant can put up. They have table tents and are listed on national and chapter websites. There are vendor discounts on sustainable restaurant to go products. Surfrider is a nationally recognized nonprofit. There is a lot of visibility that can happen. Food trucks can be registered as ocean friendly if they meet criteria. Bars also. Great lakes Friendly Resources are available also. The next steps of how we can help: It is important to develop goals and objectives. How many restaurants do we want to recruit? Identifying activities built around achieving objectives. Creating metrics for success in activities. Help with material assets. Determining how we will assess the program. Pokorney stated that he had nothing additional to add. Amman thanked O'Brien Weddle and Pokorney for the presentation. She stated that they mentioned us joining up with the chapter Pokorney is a Chair of. She asked if this was still on the table. Pokorney answered that it was and Ashland would not have to start a new chapter. Ortman asked who joins a chapter and what the role is of a chapter. O'Brien Weddle answered that restaurants become a part of the Great Lakes program but can also be volunteers and go to chapter events. Pokorney explained that their chapter has been in place for 5 years. The way people find us is out in the community in the water. They introduce things via word of mouth and are excited about getting new people. They have retirees that are passionate. Once folks are members of the chapter they can take part in events. They take part in beach cleanups for example. People are taking part in educational programming, beach monitoring, and get-togethers. Ortman asked about advocacy and advertising/promotion. Pokorney answered that these were functions of the organization. Ortman does not see an enforcement arm in the chapter. Pokorney replied that for regional purposes it would be him. It could be an unannounced visit or an ongoing conversation. He checks in with managers from time to time to ensure they are still in compliance or help keep them in compliance. Ortman asked if there has been a case of mid-year someone not playing by the rules. He wants to see how the program manages itself. O'Brien Weddle stated that goal is to create relationships with these restaurants. It is usually a fairly easy conversation checking in with them. They will work with restaurants or take them off the map. Sometimes supply chains are a problem. The Chapter wants relationships versus taking off a bunch of restaurants. Ortman asked how many people we would need in Ashland and if Pokorney would be able to do it or we would we need a designated person like Amman or himself. Pokorney would be excited to help in anyway he can to introduce the program to restaurant owners. We probably have pre-existing relationships already but he is happy to help. Ortman stated that we just have to find a champion. Pokorney is happy to serve as the closest point of contact. Ortman summarized that we would join Pokorney's chapter, take literature, do a test meeting, go to a restaurant and recruit them. Ortman stated that we can touch base in a couple of months. O'Brien Weddle asked if we want to do some recruiting of restaurants or try one out. What do we see as a best-case scenario? Ortman stated that we will have a meeting and if Surfrider can provide recruiting materials, we can go ahead and try. The City cannot be the focal point because staff are busy. The Committee can try. Pokorney explained that he has had most success in the beginning of fall and winter. Get set up over winter so we can unveil when we get going in spring. Ortman can think of a restaurant and store that meet criteria and suggested swing at low hanging fruit. O'Brien Weddle and Pokorney thanked the committee and the committee thanked them. They left at 6:45 pm. Ortman asked for thoughts from the committee. Amman is glad we got to hear the presentation and got a taste of the program. She is happy to be a member and then tie back to how City can support it with tourism, etc. Get people to sign up and then promote that we have it here. Ortman does not anticipate problems especially

since O'Brien Weddle was willing to help. Access to eco-friendly stuff is important. Amman stated that we have a composting facility here but they are specific on what can go there. Ortman asked if the committee wanted to have another meeting. Gehred stated that these national things are thought through but not easy. If we are going to have impact locally we need engagement. She suggests we either engage with some excitement or let it go. If we as a committee do not latch onto it we are not really owning it. Get into it or let it go. State policy may have changed to allow people to take their own to-go containers. It is important to educate the diners and not put the entire onus on restaurant. If we are asking restaurants to do something sweeten it with emphasizing that we are here for them. Gehred asked if we could write a grant to help. She suggests making it worth it. Ortman stated that we could jump in enthusiastically but he is not sure how much time we have. He is happy to be involved if enough of us are there. Gehred could see jumping in and handing this off to an enthusiastic group. Ortman suggested maybe sitting down with the Black Cat owners and seeing what they think. Amman was cautious about the role of the committee. A suggestion was made to come to next meeting with list of all the people we could talk to including businesses, Northland, food trucks, etc.

5) Potential Grant Opportunities – Beth Gehred

Gehred brought a handout and passed it out to the committee. If money would help it would be good to explore it. She highlighted 3 foundations she thinks we would have success with. Gehred is a good grant writer and is happy to write a grant. She stated that the applicant would be the sustainability committee. We have 501c3 equivalency. She wants to dream as a committee without the constraint of needing money. Sometimes things are lacking passion, skill, and leadership. Gehred gave a summary of these. Local grants are far easier to get than national or state ones. When we come up with a project where the problem is money, go here. Amman asked about options if we decided to replace lights in parks for example. Gehred suggested researching which lights, the number, and if we have Public Works support.

6) Update – City Solar Assessment

Wiley updated the Committee on the status. Gehred stated that Bad River was working with muGrid so we can learn from them. Salmon-Tumas stated that it was exciting. She was looking back at the Energy Action Plan. We want to capture progress. The question was whether this ties back directly enough. Gehred explained that Fort Atkinson did the same thing. The WWTP there was a top user and pump station. Plans have been done everywhere. There is still a 13-17 year payback so it can often be challenging. She stated that we have to frame it properly.

7) Mission Statement

Ortman asked if we want to shove this to the next agenda. Gehred stated that we can shove it to the next one. Ortman provided his draft.

8) Future agenda items

These include the mission statement and Great Lakes item. Kucera wanted to talk about mowing at a future meeting. The message is not getting out on why we are doing something or not. Ortman explained why we are not mowing some areas. There is controversy. Kucera stated that the education is not out there. Opinions on aesthetics are out there. The question came up of whether we look at different locations. Kucera wanted to talk about No Mow May and this at some point. Reduced mowing of some parks came out of the city. Gehred asked if we can have a map of the City showing where these are

when we discuss. Ortman and Kucera answered yes. Kucera mentioned that the City is applying for a \$25,000 grant to remove rectangular brick areas to plant them with native plants downtown. Ortman asked Wiley to summarize the next meeting agenda. Wiley did. Amman stated that she will reach out to Black Cat management.

9) Adjournment

Ortman asked for a motion to adjourn. Salmon-Tumas moved and Amman seconded. The motion carried 4-0. Meeting adjourned at 7:17 pm.

Recorded by:

Steven D. Wiley, AICP
Planning and Development Director