

CITY OF WAUSAU SUSTAINABILITY, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Time and Date: The Sustainability, Energy and Environment Committee met on Monday, August 2, 2021 at 4:00 p.m. in the Board Room of Wausau City Hall and virtually via WebEx

Members Present: John Kroll (C), Tom Kilian, Ashley Lange, Paul Zouski, Mary Kluz

Members Absent: Paul Kage, Leah Van De Loo

Others Present: Sam Wessel, Brad Lenz, Dustin Craig, Brian Kowalski

In compliance with Chapter 19, Wisconsin Statutes, notice of this meeting was posted and transmitted to the Wausau Daily Herald in the proper manner.

Welcome and Introductions

Chair Kroll called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. Introductions were made.

Approval of Minutes from previous meetings

M/S Kluz/Kilian to table the approval of May 2021 SEEC minutes to next month to address a few errors first.

Discussion and possible recommendation for 1300 Cleveland Avenue: land use /environmental justice

Kroll moved agenda item 4 to the beginning of the meeting since Kilian had another City meeting to attend later. Kilian mentioned that the last SEEC meeting discussed engagement strategies which are supported by the environmental justice links that were in the packet. SEEC hasn't written recommendations in the past so he asked if the committee could draft a letter of recommendation for proposed uses at 1300 Cleveland Avenue.

Kroll mentioned the solar farm, which has fencing that keeps people off contaminated soil, as a possible use that keeps getting brought up. Lenz mentioned it would have to be rezoned to industrial to allow solar but City ownership of the property can keep it from automatically being setup for factories or other industrial uses to come in. Additionally, light industrial allows for both solar and industrial that is compatible with the neighborhood by not generating excess noise or pollution. Light industrial uses can also sometimes be strategically located near neighborhoods so people can walk to work.

Lange suggested recommendations about also what SEEC would not like to see on the property, such as residential, because of health concerns. Kilian mentioned that industry elsewhere in the City is moving away from wealthy areas. Lenz mentioned the reason for industry relocating was not based on surrounding neighborhood wealth. Kilian said that even if that was not the intent, it is still happening.

Lange asked about the site's zoning history. Lenz explained that it was Industrial since before zoning was first adopted, but then it was more recently rezoned to residential since neighbors wanted to prevent industrial expansion in the neighborhood. With the 2019 zoning code rewrite, the site was rezoned to industrial based on its historic use, and then later rezoned again back to residential. It is still possible to rezone back to industrial to allow solar if desired.

Kilian suggested protections in SEEC's recommendation for the property that could include remediation and protections that avoid past contamination from happening again from 3M and Kolbe. Kilian recommends no industrial use until public input supports it. Similar to Great Lakes Cheese on the north side, neighborhood perception is that big industry moves into established neighborhoods without involving them in the process.

Kroll has seen sites remediated at the surface such as a yard waste site in Wisconsin Rapids that is now a BMX venue which doesn't go below grade. If 1300 Cleveland Ave ends up residential, it should be all slab-on-grade with buried utilities needing extra protection to avoid contamination. Similar to solar, biomass like woodchips can also be used to generate electricity cleanly and sustainably. It could also be a research site for brownfields, which Lange supports since it helps us learn about how to fix environmental mistakes from the past.

M/S Kilian/Lange to have Lenz draft a land use recommendation based on this discussion for 1300 Cleveland Avenue

Kilian was dismissed at 4:25 p.m.

Discussion on Green Tier Scorecard

GTLC scorecard was used as a guide to improve the City's sustainability efforts. Lenz reviewed some metrics and mentioned areas for improvement. For example, safe routes to school is a category in the scorecard, which the City recently received a WisDOT grant to study similar to the Town of Stettin. Wessel mentioned WalkScore data and its resulting heat map that shows which areas of the City are more walkable than others. Lenz also mentioned that staff discovered graphics in the new zoning ordinance that were taken from SmartCode, so we can get more GTLC points for incorporating some SmartCode elements into the zoning ordinance. No-mow may also educate on how to reduce chemicals so scorecard points could be added there too. Lange mentioned that there's an opportunity for alternative grasses and ground cover that don't require mowing and Lenz mentioned that City Parks may experiment with that. Lenz also mentioned a draft complete streets policy in the works.

Kroll suggested keeping the City's strategic plan on future agendas to ensure continual improvement of GTLC scores. For example, the plan could set a target percent improvement in GTLC score each year. Lenz suggested starting a list of items to discuss with the Mayor and the strategic plan consultant. Kroll asked Lenz and Wessel to continue exploring opportunities for more GTLC points in the future.

Discussion on Green House Gas Emission Reduction Resolution

Kroll described how many cities have a GHG reduction resolution that usually has a target GHG level and date to meet the target by. Kluz asked if it would only track the City's emissions or the entire community's. Kroll said it can be both, and some programs track both alongside each other. Lenz showed DNR emissions data at bigger facilities in the area but this does not include all emissions. DNR might have more data but it isn't publicly available and has to be compiled.

Kluz asked if a resolution should come before or after targets and dates are determined. Lenz said a general one could be passed but it's useful to have data. Kluz also asked how "whereas" statements should be developed. Europe might be imposing tariffs on countries with looser climate change goals. Kroll asked if City would pursue data without a resolution. Lange suggested having a general resolution first, then a specific one after baseline data is compiled that includes a target and date. Lenz mentioned the GTLC scorecard only requires a "commitment" to reducing GHG without a specific target and date, so a general resolution could gain GTLC points. Kluz asked how to strategize to get resolution to Council and Lenz suggested including a list of funding sources. Kluz and Kroll discussed where funding sources might come from, with the EPA usually giving grants. Kluz mentioned a resolution could be needed for a grant application, results could depend on the current infrastructure bill, and a resolution should come first to see if council is supportive of this work. Zouski said a general resolution is a way to get the ball rolling that could be easier than starting with big goals. Kroll said a discussion and vote on a resolution should be on the next meeting agenda and Kluz will start working on "whereas" statements.

Discussion of incorporating sustainability into new development projects

Kroll, Lange, and Kluz discussed ideas on encouraging creativity and sustainability in new development like the mall site, such as awarding and showcasing projects businesses have completed. Kroll mentioned that some national programs like LEED set the bar higher than the City's requirements. The City shouldn't force people into a program but can use them as examples of incentives and possibly reimburse developers for LEED certification fees. Lenz mentioned tax incentives are limited but other incentives might be available. Kroll mentioned various rating systems based on inspections for efficiency. Lange suggested showcasing existing businesses in the City's development packet, and Kluz agreed that this sends the message that the City supports energy efficiency. Kroll asked if development application information is accessible since it would make it easier to find businesses already implementing sustainability rather than relying on nominations. Zouski said an energy efficient project might make it more appealing to vote for. Kluz said that some stipulations should give the City a way to reduce incentives if applicant doesn't follow through on sustainability ideas.

Future items for consideration and future meeting date

A poll will be sent out to find a new regularly occurring date that works for committee members to meet

Lange mentioned most no-mow May complaints were based on clippings when mowing started again, and this is an opportunity for discussing composting.

The agenda for the next meeting will include 1300 Cleveland Avenue recommendations, GTLC scorecard update, sustainability in new development, and SEEC's involvement with the upcoming strategic plan.

M/S Kluz/Lange to adjourn at 5:25 p.m.