

CITY OF WAUSAU SUSTAINABILITY, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Time and Date: The Sustainability, Energy and Environment Committee met on Wednesday, May 26, 2021 at 4:30 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

Members Absent: Paul Kage, Leah Van De Loo

Others Present: Gary Gisselman, Joel Lewis, Dan Barth, Brad Lenz

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 4:30 p.m. Introductions were made.

Approval of Minutes from previous meetings

Motion by Kilian, second by Lange to approve the minutes of March 24, 2021.

Discuss Green Tier Scorecard

Kroll mentioned that Lenz finalized and submitted the City's Green Tier Scorecard. Lenz explained that scores are subjective and 2020, the first year, provides baseline data. There are 6 categories, each with subcategories, that comprise the City's overall score. Discussion highlighted that some categories are easier than others but there is room for the City to improve. There is no requirement for specifically which points the City needs to work on. City staff will recommend areas that are able to be improved this year.

Discussion Strategic Plan

Lenz gave an update that following an RFP process, staff is now interviewing consultants to choose one to work on the strategic plan this summer and fall so it can be incorporated in time for the City's budgeting process. The mayor wants the plan to be community-led rather than being just written by staff. This process hasn't been laid out yet but it should include this committee. No materials are needed from the committee right now but it can stay on the agenda so the committee can continue to be updated.

Discussion and possible recommendation for 1300 Cleveland Ave regarding land use and environmental justice

Kroll switch the order of the agenda to discuss Green House Gas (GHG) Emission Reeducation Resolution before this item.

Kilian gave an update on this site that could be developed but needs to be cleaned up. It was rezoned back to MR-12 Residential to correct a mapping error which was a good process to get the neighborhood involved. RFPs have been issued for the site and asked if the RFP could be included in the next Economic Development Committee meeting next week. Alder Neal and Kilian agree that remediation should occur regardless of what the site is developed as, and DNR mentioned a small possibility that more rigorous remediation may have to occur. Kilian mentioned the pillars of sustainability and cited a transportation study that had an environmental justice component. Remediation of the site meets the goals of environmental justice and there are best practices available to use when going through the process of deciding what happens with this site. Kilian stressed that allowing industrial uses at

this site would be the worst policy decision that could be made based on this kind of guidance. Neighbors of the site have provided feedback, including 40-50 emails, regarding the site's future use. Kilian is curious what the best process is to include all the information gathered about the site and existing public input used to make a decision on the site. The EPA stresses that environmental justice should protect and include people equally when these decisions are made.

Zouski agreed that the committee can have ideas but public input should be a part of it, and Lange agrees that public input is required for environmental justice. Kroll would like the committee to compile all input from the residents and document it to help generate a list of acceptable uses for the site. Kilian mentioned that public comments were also provided during the rezoning meetings. Lenz mentioned environmental testing is still being done on the site and proposals wouldn't be entertained until the results are back.

Kilian mentioned the first round of testing exceeded several soil and possibly groundwater standards for PAHs, arsenic, and thallium. The City's consultant brought the DNR in to review the property after the first round of testing, and the second round should provide more details on how extensive the remediation will have to be. 3M is also currently pursuing the property for adding rail yard and storage but got a letter saying they were responsible for arsenic cleanup on some land they acquired. Both 3M and Kolbe & Kolbe have proposals for the properties but have a history of contamination and a history with regulatory agencies. Kilian feels the history of these companies is enough to demonstrate that the industrial uses are not a good fit for the surrounding residential area.

Gary Gisselman, former council member, has been involved with 1300 Cleveland Ave's history and affirmed that the site's issues with contamination need to be resolved and the public needs to be involved. Personally, Gisselman feels nothing should be built on the site. The contaminants could be so bad that it might be worth just fencing off and not even converting to green space.

Dan Barth also spoke recommending a solar panel installation on the site and residential shouldn't be developed. Solar reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and there is need for solar in Wausau. Barth believes there will be a dramatic shift in the next 5 to 10 years towards sustainable energy. Nothing will leak from solar panels except maybe a few electrons. Renew Wisconsin is a nonprofit that assists with advancing solar facilities throughout the state. Barth also says solar is too expensive for low-income households to afford but this would allow access to solar and a level-2 charger on site for electric vehicles. It is better to invest in our own solar than pay a corporation far away from Wausau to provide the community with solar.

Joel Lewis mentioned that Menomonie identified 3M, the school district, Chamber of Commerce, and other local businesses and utility companies are partnering with the City as an "energy action team" to implement the climate action plan, so there's the possibility to team up with Apirus or another large employer nearby to invest in a solar setup, which Lewis supports.

Kilian asked what a typical acreage is needed for a solar array.

Barth mentioned there are solar farms and gardens. Gardens are smaller but sometimes allow utilities to sell green energy to energy customers. There will likely be more funding in the near future for these kinds of projects.

Lenz mentioned the current zoning doesn't allow for a solar array.

Kilian mentioned the deep history of pollution for the site and why the mapping error was so important for the neighborhood to address with the latest rezoning. Until a better, non-industrial use is identified, the property should stay zoned residential to keep potential undesirable uses out in the meantime.

Lenz mentioned the acreage of the site is just under 7 acres. Zouski mentioned a good sized solar array could fit on the site.

Barth stated that a solar array would be a great way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Discussion and possible action on Green House Gas Emission Reduction Resolution

Other communities like Menomonie and Eau Claire already have GHG plans. Kilian noted that generally those plans were well-received by the public. Lenz mentioned that other communities had detailed resolutions with several “whereas” statements. Discussion involved how to set target dates for carbon neutrality and Lange mentioned the City’s energy consumption is among the lowest scores on the Green Tier Legacy Scoresheet, so there’s opportunity for the City to commit to green energy goals. Kroll mentioned the strategic plan could also include GHG reduction goals. 2050 is often used as a target date by other communities, and it’s important to have something that can be measured along the way. Kilian mentioned specific facilities and changes in emissions need to be measured. Kilian wondered if a DNR employee could attend a committee meeting to provide ideas.

Lewis made a public comment and discussed Menomonie and Eau Claire’s Climate Action Plans which monitors the community’s progress in reducing emissions, and those communities requested help from local utility companies. Lenz mentioned that some data from utilities had been collected in the past. Lewis thanked the committee for its leadership and hopes to see Wausau be the next municipality to adopt a Climate Action Plan showing how goals will be met and paid for, suggesting things like a solar field at 1300 Cleveland Ave rather than homes to generate revenue. There’s an upfront cost to adopting a plan but it can pay off long term.

Lange asked if both a resolution and strategic plan were needed or just one of the two. Lenz mentioned a resolution may not be necessary but wouldn’t hurt, and this could make its way into the strategic plan. Resolutions also may have to go through a standing committee. Kilian mentioned the Comprehensive Plan is often used to support resolutions. After discussion, Kroll reminded the committee to think about what approach to take and what goals could be for a resolution and/or plan.

Update on No Mow May program

Lenz said there were 488 people who signed up along with 37 citizen scientists. A few people got warnings from Inspections, and a few signs got stolen. Appleton also had around 500 participants but a larger population than Wausau. Kilian suggested publicizing the program’s success, constituents who had called to complain about the program were more concerned about grass on the sidewalk after being cut rather than the no-mow program itself. These concerns can be addressed next year with additional advising to residents.

Update on the Sustainability Award program

Lenz said this was launched on Earth Day (April) last year and is on a twice per year cycle but no one has applied for this cycle. The deadline continues to be open and the committee can look for ways to publicize it. Kroll mentioned it would be ideal to hand out one award every Earth Day.

Discussion and possible action on article for City newsletter

Kroll asked for ideas for anything that should be discussed in the newsletter. Lenz can recap no-mow May.

Future Items for consideration and future meeting date

Previously discussed were the Green Tier scorecard, 1300 Cleveland Ave, and the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Resolution.

A motion was made by Lange to adjourn at 6:02 p.m. Seconded by Zouski. Motion passed unanimously.