



CITY OF NOVI
Environmental Sustainability Committee Meeting
August 19, 2024, 5:30 p.m.
Mayor's Conference Room | Novi Civic Center | 45175 Ten Mile Road
(248) 347-0445

CALL TO ORDER 5:35 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Council Members Heintz, Gurumurthy, and Smith

STAFF LIAISON: Danielle Mahoney, Assistant City Manager

ALSO PRESENT: Katherine Oppermann, Recording Secretary
Ezekiel Chojnacki, Graduate Management Analyst

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Amend the agenda to allow the Novi High School (NHS) Student presentation regarding replacing gasoline powered lawn equipment to be the first Committee matter, in respect of their time.

Motion: Heintz; Seconded: Gurumurthy; Approved 3:0

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – July 8, 2024

Motion: Gurumurthy; Seconded: Heintz; Approved 3:0

REMARKS FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

Chairperson Smith briefly touched on a Ted Talk he had recently watched and been inspired by regarding dinosaurs/the 5th period of extinction. He spoke of how the dinosaurs were ignorant of the changes around them but as humans we can work to protect the environment and world around us. "You know what you know, you protect what you love, and we're smarter than the dinosaurs...".

He then discussed some of what he views as pillars of the committee including: knowledge, community, "making it fun", reducing friction, etc.

He then directed to the Committee to the Matters for Discussion and welcomed the Novi High School students who were presenting to the group.

MATTERS FOR COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

1. Replacing Gasoline Powered Lawn Equipment - NHS students, Rushil and Rujula Yeole

The NHS students, Rushil and Rujula Yeole, thanked the Committee for the opportunity to present before them. They spoke of their concern about the negative effects that effects gas-powered lawn tools have on the environment and their wish for the City to implement an incentive program for residents to switch to Battery-powered tools. Their presentation went into detail on the negatives of gas-powered tools to the atmosphere, local wildlife and water sources, as well as human health. Likewise, they spoke of the benefit that switching to battery-powered tools instead on all of these as well as the overall cost efficiency. They hope that that the implementation of rebates and options for the return/recycling of old tools will encourage residents to make the switch and make Novi cleaner and greener.

Following the presentation, the Committee had a brief questions and answer session. Councilmember Heintz confirmed with the students that they envision the City of Novi itself as the source of the rebates. Chairperson Smith noted that a scrapyard or recycling center (such as Haggerty Metals) could process the old materials. He then asked the students if they had further information on the impact of operating a gas tool. The students replied that while they did not have comparisons for all tools, they had found data that suggested operating a gas-powered lawn mower for one hour has about the same environmental impact as running a car for 45 minutes. Councilmember Gurumurthy stated that she was impressed by the students bringing this presentation before the Committee, she also asked if other cities have rebate-programs like the one they've proposed. The students noted a few other cities in the state and across the nation that have implemented similar programs. Councilmember Heintz asked, in regard to other city programs, if there were outside sources of funding or if the cities took on the full cost themselves. The students were uncertain but fairly sure that the cost was taken on entirely from City expenditure. They also noted a program in California where rebates were offered to commercial lawn care companies to make the switch. Councilmember Heintz then further inquired as to what prompted the students to want to present to the Committee today. The students answer that it was largely driven by their own initiative and interest. After their own family switched to battery-powered tools and they saw the benefits directly they felt compelled to promote it further within the City.

All Committee members congratulated the students on a great job with their presentation, they hope to see them continue to be active and are always welcome to the Committee.

The Committee then briefly discussed seeking grants that might help fund such a program or working with local businesses to offer reduced pricing/rebates for battery-operated lawn tools to residents.

2. Implementing Solarize Program in Novi

Graduate Management Analyst Chojnacki informed the Committee that he had created a shortlist of Novi residents that had recently installed solar collectors on their property. These residents could be reached out to as potential hosts for a Solarize

Session under the Ann Arbor model. He had also collected billing information from DTE regarding surplus power/solar production revenue received by the City (this revenue is applied towards our facilities bill). Unfortunately, he has not yet been able to determine our total solar generation from the small (26-panel) roof-mounted unit on the ITC Park maintenance building. Mr. Chojnacki hopes to receive more information regarding our return-on-investment, as well as other suggestions for additional buildings that could be solarized, soon.

The branding and formal name will still need to be finalized, with assistance from the Community Relations team. Additionally, Mr. Chojnacki suggested that a position to manage the program and other possible environmental initiatives should be considered. In Ann Arbor the position was established within the City Manager's office.

Ms. Mahoney requested that, in order to direct staff, the Committee determine the order of business for the program, I.E. should this small project be developed on it's own as a "quick win" first, developed after/as a component of the creation of the City of Novi Environmental Plan (EP), or developed concurrent to the aforementioned plan. Councilmember Heintz remarked that there are several necessary actions before we move on with the final product. Councilmember Gurumurthy thinks that we should take a balanced, phased approach. Many "quick wins" can be done in parallel to the EP but she thinks the Solar Project could and should be done as one of the Pillars of the EP itself and/or included in the Committee's Final Report.

The Committee then briefly discussed how the process of developing the EP should progress, that which would come from them/City Council and that which would be done by a potential consultant. Chairperson Smith stated that the Committee/Councilmembers would set high-level policy, with metrics for goals, and then could bring in a consultant to formalize the plan.

3. Revisit Goals from Brainstorming Session

Ms. Mahoney suggested that the Committee could take their existing goals (those written individually on June 17th) and use them to guide larger goals for the Committee/Council. Some broad strokes framework for the plan would be a good starting point.

Both Chairperson Smith and Councilmember Heintz noted that connecting/working across boundaries/creating synergy with other organizations (Oakland Country, SEMCOG communities, etc.) was important to them. Councilmember Gurumurthy suggested that the final report should have a section both on the current state of the City as well as pillars/goals. She also noted that "Education" could be a pillar, which Chairperson Smith agreed with. Councilmember Heintz suggest "Three Es": Energy (clean energy and reducing consumption), Educate, and Environment.

Ms. Mahoney suggested that the Committee could consider coming up with a short mission statement.

Mr. Chojnacki noted that when he was a resident in Ann Arbor they ran surveys where they started out with large pillars/goals and then asked residents to select their own prioritization to guide funding for these ideas. Chairperson Smith thought that utilizing FlashVote would be a great avenue for a similar survey. Ms. Mahoney said that we can start formulating questions even just to gauge general interest/sentiment towards sustainability. Councilmember Gurumurthy suggested holding a designated public input session to solicit resident thoughts and options on the matter.

Councilmember Heintz talked about some of his ideas for quick wins including a property swap event, a city event to feature activities built around energy efficient suggestions, park clean-up events, etc. Mr. Chojnacki updated the Committee on some existing modules and initiatives that would address or be similar to said suggestions.

The Committee also discussed adding information to resident's water bills that could include trend data on their usage vs. average usage, though it was noted that due to the large variance in home sizes a true usable "average" metric could be difficult to produce.

Additionally, Councilmember Gurumurthy stressed that being present and educating the community was important. She suggested that the Committee could have a booth at Earth Day, Arbor Day and other such events. The group decided they would like to have a table at the upcoming MSU Tollgate Pumpkinfest and will determine additional details for that at their next meeting.

REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS

1. To arrange for a Pumpkinfest Booth
2. For each Committee member to continue brainstorming their "Pillars"
3. For Staff and Committee members to determine the next meetings dates
4. Create a high-level framework to facilitate public input

PUBLIC COMMENT – none

ADJOURNMENT 6:52 p.m.