



CITY OF NOVI
Environmental Sustainability Committee
July 9, 2024, 5:30 p.m.
Mayor's Conference Room | 45175 Ten Mile Road
(248) 347-0445

CALL TO ORDER 5:33 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Council Members Heintz, Gurumurthy, and Smith

PRESENT: Council Members Heintz, Gurumurthy, and Smith

STAFF LIAISON: Danielle Mahoney, Assistant City Manager

ALSO PRESENT: Katherine Oppermann, Recording Secretary
Ezekiel Chojnacki, Graduate Management Analyst
Vishal Swamy, Stewards Sustainability Leadership Institute (SSLI) 4-H Club

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion: Heintz, Seconded: Gurumurthy, Minutes approved 3:0

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – June 17, 2024

Motion: Heintz, Seconded: Gurumurthy, Minutes approved 3:0

REMARKS FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

MATTERS FOR COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

1. Previous Environmental Sustainability Related Initiatives
Chairperson Smith thanked Assistant City Manager Mahoney for preparing the list of past and current city initiatives related to environmental sustainability.
2. Consideration of Solarize Project
Graduate Management Analyst Ezekiel Chojnacki spoke about Ann Arbor Solarize, a community bulk-buy solar program. Their program and toolkit emphasize a resident-led model where the City offices operate as an organizer/facilitator between residents and a vetted list of local contractors (vetting is performed by Michigan Saves). Through this program a group of residents are able to get a discount, often 10 – 20% on solar installations by buying as a group since it is more cost effective for a contractor to do multiple installations in a concentrated area. Such a discount does require a certain number of homes to sign up for the program.

Ms. Mahoney noted that City staff thinks that a similar program could be a good way for the City of Novi to “dip their toes in” to expanding solar power in the area. She noted that as Ann Arbor offers a Solarize toolkit we could easily use it as a guide for our own efforts. Mr. Chojnacki noted that other area communities, such as Farmington, are already using the toolkit.

A potential challenge, compared to Ann Arbor, that Novi would face in having a Solarize program is that we do not have a dedicated Sustainability office and staff. Any of the necessary work at this stage would have to be taken on as an additional task by existing staff.

Councilmember Gurumurthy asked if we would then go about gauging interest by holding an informational session. Ms. Mahoney affirmed that yes, we would, and that based on the Ann Arbor toolkit the pilot process would be estimated to take 7-8 weeks.

At the Committee’s request Mr. Chojnacki will be taking on the task of getting data regarding the number of successful installations that have resulted from the Ann Arbor program.

The Committee also briefly discussed the recent Michigan House Bill 5028, the “Homeowners’ Energy Policy Act” which prohibits Homeowners Associations from banning rooftop solar panels and other energy-saving equipment.

Mr. Chojnacki also noted Ann Arbor’s pledge to never include solar panels in home valuations (thereby not taxing the improvement). A similar policy could also be implemented in Novi as an additional incentive to solar installations. Chairperson Smith noted that such a pledge could also be used towards other energy-saving equipment such as heat pumps.

Chairperson Smith thanked Mr. Chojnacki for his work on the Solarize project thus far and moved onto the next Committee topic.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

1. Novi SSLI (Stewards Sustainability Leadership Institute)
Vishal Swamy, Founder and Chair of the Stewards Sustainability Leadership Institute (SSLI) 4-H Club gave a presentation to the Committee on the student group and its projects and accomplishments. The SSLI program pillars are projects, outreach, and education. Among their many noteworthy successes are the Project Solar Parks partnership with Oakland County and their Composting Education Day. SSLI is very interested in collaborating with the Environmental Sustainability Committee and the City of Novi on potential future programs and outreach events. Some proposed ideas would be a City of Novi Earth Day event, increased sustainability education to residents, having a City facilities energy audit and the development of a Sustainability Action Plan.

Chairperson Smith thanked Mr. Swamy for his presentation and noted that he was very impressed by the work and passion of Mr. Swamy and the other students involved with the SSLI 4-H club. He also said that he and the committee would appreciate a list of the successful partnerships that SSLI had as potential future resources.

The Committee affirmed that they are committed to finalizing their goals (quick wins, short-term, and long-term) and moving forward. Community education was stressed as an important 1st step on many of the items being discussed and that the modes of communicating with residents will be important. Ms. Mahoney agreed and suggested that it would be useful for the City to gather data/metrics so that they can be clearly and concisely presented.

Mr. Chojnacki let the Committee know that the City was already working towards and Level 2 Energy Audit by applying for a grant to assist with the costs of such an effort. The grant, if awarded, would also allow for any excess funds left after paying for the audit to be used towards the implementation of energy saving improvements.

The City of Novi podcast "Now You Novi" was discussed as an avenue for both community education on sustainability topics as well as an opportunity to involve young community members such as Mr. Swamy and the Youth Council in outreach.

ACTION ITEMS

1. The Action Items going forward noted were:
 - a. For committee members to continue working with their contacts in other cities/organizations, ideally arranging for them to be involved in an upcoming committee meeting.
 - b. To arrange a tour of the Resource Recovery and Recycling Authority of Southwest Oakland County (RRRASOC) facility and potentially also of an area refuse facility. Both the Committee and Youth Council are interested in this opportunity.
 - c. To speak with Mr. Jim Nash, Oakland County Water Resources Commissioner
 - d. To identify the current water and wetland management process (via City, Consultant, EGLE, etc.)
 - e. To connect with the Friends of the Rouge organization

AUDIENCE COMMENTS –

Mr. Duchesneau stated that he was here to learn and that he suggests using Engage Magazine for educational outreach purposes since it seems to be a successful outlet for the City. He noted that he has toured the RRRASOC facility himself and was surprised by the

number of recyclable plastics. He also spoke briefly about the development of the City over the time he has lived there and the importance of the watershed.

Mr. and Mrs. Halvangis spoke on their particular interest regarding Shawood Lake as residents on it and also asked if the scope of the Committee will include nature sustainability, especially the area lakes. Councilmember Gurumurthy stated that yes, that topic was also of interest to the Committee.

ADJOURNMENT – 6:44 p.m.

Motion: Gurumurthy, Seconded: Heintz, approved 3:0