

City of Decorah
Sustainability Commission
August 19, 2020 – 5:00pm
Meeting Minutes

Electronic meeting pursuant to Iowa Code section 21.8 – In circumstances where such a meeting is impossible or impractical due to concerns about COVID-19 and social distancing for the safety of commission members and the public.

In support of Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds' proclamation declaring a State of Public Health Disaster Emergency in Iowa, the current COVID-19 situation makes it "impossible and impractical" to meet in one location. Due to this the Decorah City Hall was partially closed to the public for the August 19, 2020 Sustainability Commission meeting. Seating was limited to ensure distancing. The public was invited to participate via electronic means.

Members present included: Michelle Barness, Ben Grimstad, Molly McNicoll, Ann Mansfield, Jeremy Leitz, and Jim Martin-Schramm.

Absent: Brent Parker

Others present: Council Liaison Emily Neal and City Manager Chad Bird.

Consider approval of minutes from the July 21, 2020 regular meeting

Motion by Barness and second by Grimstad to approve the minutes of the July 21, 2020 Commission meeting.

Roll call vote: Ayes, unanimous.

Motion passed.

Review of assignments and assessments:

Martin-Schramm provided an overview of priority sections of the Sustainability Plan and directed discussion to those points raised and with which there is a linear sense of priority and urgency. He guided conversation through each of these areas:

Action items to commend to the City Council.

E1 Adopt and enforce Iowa's Building Energy Code (Current Residential and Commercial Building Code)

There was lengthy discussion about this topic. Bird provided history and noted the City is looking to hire a building official. There was also discussion about amending the City's residential building code program to reflect building and energy code initiatives.

Martin-Schramm, Grimstad, and Bird will consult with Joel Zook to clarify things and to develop a rationale that would accompany the commission's subsequent recommendation of this action item to the City Council. These items will be reviewed at a future meeting of the commission.

E3 Establish a Municipal Electric Utility (MEU) task force and commission a MEU Feasibility Study to be completed by fall 2021 (potential update of previous plan).

The commission discussed what additional information needs to be gathered before commending this action item to the City Council. Martin-Schramm and Grimstad together with Bird and Neal will consult the members of the Energy Task Group that developed this action item. They will develop a rationale for the action item, outline a detailed scope of work for the task force, and develop a slate of persons for the Mayor to consider appointing to the task force. These items will be reviewed at a future meeting of the commission.

W3 Install public recycling facilities in downtown business areas with trash receptacles.

Bird advised the commission may wish to speak with the Self-Supported Municipal Improvement District (SSMID) about possible partnership in this endeavor. He also noted the Downtown Decorah Betterment Association (DDBA) might be interested in partnering. Leitz and Parker will initiate these conversations and work with Mara Mergens to develop a detailed proposal related to this action item.

ED1 City-hosted, quarterly community visioning sessions with City, Luther, Banks, Museums, Hospital, and Industry leaders to share needs and opportunities. [Fall 2020 Focus on Covid]

Motion by Barness and second by Leitz, to recommend to the City Council that these visioning sessions resume at the earliest opportunity and with the assumption that the next meeting will focus on response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

AW16 Pursue Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) pre-disaster mitigation funds to assist with the purchase of pumps.

There was considerable discussion about applying for disaster funds, especially in light of the President's recent disaster declaration for the entire state of Iowa.

Barness and Bird agreed to investigate the matter in more detail, especially in relation to the County Wide Hazard Mitigation Plan, to see what might be available for permanent pump funding. Barness agreed to review application criteria and Bird agreed to visit with the County Emergency Management Coordinator.

Action items to commend to City Staff.

E4 Require each City department by December 31, 2020 to conduct analyses of all possible investments in energy efficiency (electrical, heating, and transportation fuels) as well as renewable energy systems (wind, solar, geothermal), and to implement those with a 10-year payback or less via internal financing or third party power purchase or lease agreements; repeat every five years.

Time did not permit discussion of this action item.

T1 Educate the general public on the options for public transportation (website, etc.)

The commission discussed this action item in relation to the following one about developing a comprehensive communication plan for the City of Decorah. Barnes offered to consult with Decorah Taxi and Northeast Iowa Community Action and to report back at the next meeting of the commission.

CO1 Develop a comprehensive communication plan for the City of Decorah. Evaluate and coordinate social media, website, and app-based communication, and print notification.

The commission discussed this action item and decided more work needs to be done to flesh out what such a communications plan would and what sort of resources would be required. Mansfield offered to work with Leitz, Parker, and Neal on fleshing out this action item.

S2 Provide a revolving loan program to address specific housing issues taking into consideration shortages at all income levels. (Working with Housing Trust Fund.)

Bird suggested members of the commission meet with the Housing Trust Fund about this action item. Mansfield, Parker, and McNichol offered to arrange such a meeting and report back to the commission.

Other business

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:19pm by Barness / Mansfield.

Respectfully submitted,



Chad A. Bird
City Manager

Future meetings

~~August 19~~
September 16
October 21
November 18
December 16