

City of Decorah
Sustainability Commission
September 23, 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 September 23, 2020 Sustainability Commission meeting. Seating was limited to ensure distancing. The public was invited to participate via electronic means.

Members present included: Michelle Barness (at 5:30pm), Ben Grimstad, Molly McNicoll, Ann Mansfield, Jeremy Leitz, Brent Parker, and Jim Martin-Schramm.

Others present: Council Liaison Emily Neal (at 5:10pm) and City Manager Chad Bird.
There were three guests on the Zoom link.

Consider approval of minutes from the August 19, 2020 regular meeting

Motion by McNicoll and second by Parker to approve the minutes of the August 19, 2020 Commission meeting.

Roll call vote: Ayes, unanimous.

Motion passed.

Update on the status of the resolution related to action item ED1

- a. *City hosting quarterly community visioning sessions with the next one focusing on COVID planning*

Martin-Schramm asked for an update on council on this item from Bird.

Bird noted there had been no progress on this item yet. He will mention to the Mayor again.

Update from groups that have conducted further research about various action items:

- a. Jim and Ben: Action item E1, which is about adopting and enforcing Iowa's Building Energy Code

Martin-Schramm reported he and Grimstad had meet with Bird about adopting a code and discussed the process and procedures for doing so. Bird added he would like to have the City's new code compliance officer on board before adopting a code. He anticipated that to occur by the end of the calendar year.

Martin-Schramm referenced a Google sheet in the Commission's shared folder with notes and comments. There was also brief mention of the "green building" checklist Bird had used in another city. Martin-Schramm mentioned the possibility of an extern from CEEE may be available to help the commission with various items including updating the green building checklist.

- b. Jim and Ben: Action item E3, which is about establishing a task force to study establishing a municipal electric utility

Martin-Schramm led the commission through a discussion regarding the development of the task force. There was general discussion of whether to have a Mayoral appointment or full council appointment.

Bird recommended the commission consider the size of the task force and then a slate of names to present to the council. He also recommended council appointment due to the potential length of time the task force may serve and the items they may be addressing, which may have financial impact for the City.

Neal noted this item has urgency owing to the community looking to complete the feasibility study before the next possible municipal electric utility referendum.

Martin-Schramm referenced a Google sheet in the shared drive that contains the current list of names and prospective scope of work for the task force. Goal is to firm this up for possible action by the commission at the next meeting.

- c. Jeremy and Jared: Action item W3, which is about installing public recycling facilities in downtown business areas

There was general discussion about recycling in the downtown area. Leitz noted he had spoken with a local hauler who was interested in the program of picking up recycling downtown but was concerned about staff resources and time to do such work.

Parker noted he works part-time with Winneshiek County Recycling and there was discussion about their ability to engage in a pick-up service through downtown.

Parker and Leitz also offered to visit with the Downtown Decorah Betterment Association (DDBA) and the Self-Supported Municipal Improvement District (SSMID) boards to see what interest and support they may offer. Bird said he would arrange for the meetings.

Neal suggested contacting the City of Northfield to learn how they have integrated trash and recycling collection. Martin-Schramm offered to find the appropriate contact for Leitz and Parker.

- d. Chad and Michelle: Action item AW16, which is about using FEMA funds to purchase pumps

Bird and Barness shared an updated about the feasibility of funding permanent pumping for the levee system. Bird share that funding is difficult under current disaster declarations due to the low scoring such a request was likely to receive.

Barness noted her discussions with Iowa Homeland Security regarding the BRIC and FMA grants. She also stated the requests were unlikely to be funded unless part of a larger grant program or project.

Bird stated the pumps are extremely important for the City and it is important to keep them on the list for possible funding.

Martin-Schramm noted the Woods Hole Research Center is conducting a flood resilience study for the City of Decorah, which may be completed by the next commission meeting on October 21.

- e. Michelle: Action item T1, which is about educating the public about public transportation options

Barness shared her information regarding the city website and creating space for links and information. She also noted she is working with the Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission (UERPC) and the Regional Planner on ways to promote and discuss the existing transportation modalities in the region and how those may be communicated.

- f. Ann, Molly, and Brent: Action item S2, which is about housing issues

There was discussion about the Northeast Iowa Regional Housing Trust Fund and how this program might be better communicated and utilized in the community.

Bird provided a brief review of the Trust Fund and how it has been used in the community in the past. He noted the City has contributed to this fund and it has been very beneficial.

He also noted it is often underutilized because of awareness and perceived application complexity.

Martin-Schramm noted the growing energy burden many poor and low-income households face and encouraged the commission to find ways to use the Housing Trust Fund to address this issue.

- g. Ann (and others): Action item CO1, which is about developing a comprehensive communication plan for the City of Decorah

Mansfield reviewed her work on this item and stated it is a very complex issue. She recommended a broader conversation and perhaps a consultant to help develop a full plan.

Martin-Schramm asked for public input and comment after each agenda item. There were no comments and all participating members of the public left the meeting by the end of item C.

Other business

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:23pm by Parker / Barness / Mansfield.

Respectfully submitted,



Chad A. Bird
City Manager

Future meetings

~~August 19~~

~~September 23~~

October 21

November 18

December 16

Purpose

The purpose of the Sustainability Commission shall be to advise the City Council and recommend action on policies and practices that relate to the sustainable use and management of our collective resources, including both human and environmental, as well as our economic resources. The Sustainability Commission will help to ensure that such resources will be sustained and continue to provide for a high quality of life for present and future generations of Decorah doing so by following the processes outlined in the Decorah Sustainability Plan and updating the plan accordingly every 5 years.