

Decorah Sustainability Commission

AGENDA

Present: Jim Martin-Schramm, Ben Grimstad, Jeremy Leitz, Molly McNichols, Michelle Barness, Ann Mansfield, Emily Neal, Lorraine Borrowski, Stephen Knipe

Absent: Brent Parker

1. Call to order
 - Jim Martin-Schramm called the meeting to order @ 5:03 pm.
2. Consider approval of minutes from the regularly-scheduled Sustainability Commission meeting on March 17, 2021.
 - Attachment: [March 17, 2021 - Sustainability Commission Minutes](#)
 - Motion by Grimstad, second by Leitz to approve the minutes from March 17, 2021
 - Motion approved unanimously
3. Discussion and possible action regarding Decorah 2020 baseline feasibility studies:
 - E5 Renewable energy per capita (kW/per capita)
 - Recommendation: Volunteer group to calculate
 - Discussion: Martin-Schramm has explored consultative resources and recommends that we try and do this ourselves. Perhaps have Jeremy Brill suggest volunteers. Jim can lead the effort. Need to obtain high quality aerial shots of Decorah. Possibly contact FD to see what they have for addresses for renewable energy sources. Develop a volunteer group to calculate renewable energy per capita. (above) Variety of ways to do this including an “ad”/news release in the paper, Luther students. Molly is willing to contact Luther faculty to explore possibilities for student project.
 - Motion by McNichol, seconded by Barness to establish a group of volunteers to calculate the renewable energy per capita in Decorah.
 - Discussion: Grimstad; does Alliant have this information? Good point. They should have it. We need to call Alliant. Also think of names of people who might be interested in volunteer.
 - Motion: Motion approved unanimously
 - E6 Primary energy consumption (Total \$, units)
 - Recommendation: Volunteer group to estimate via NREL’s free State and Local Planning for Energy ([SLOPE](#)) tool
 - We could do this in a volunteer group but the reality is that we will get what we want by the following agenda item for E7
 - Next steps; discuss benefits of the SLOPE tool with Grimstad and Joel Zook.
 - E7 Carbon footprint of city and citywide (MT CO2e)

- Recommendation: Contract with the University of Northern Iowa's Center for Energy and Environmental Education. \$2,500.
 - Attachment: [GHG Inventory Agreement Decorah 4-21](#)
 - Discussion: Barness – fee seems reasonable. Martin-Schramm – they use a robust calculator tool, will provide a 2020 baseline and can compare in the future. Grimstad agrees that this is a lot of information for the fee.
 - Motion by Grimstad and second by Leitz to recommend to the city council that we commission UNI CEEE to do the professional greenhouse study for the \$2,500.
 - Motion unanimously approved

4. Discussion and possible action regarding the Sustainability Commissions' anticipated expenditures for FY 2021 and FY 2022.

- Attachment: [Decorah Sustainability Commission Estimated Budget FY 2021 and 2022](#)
- Specific line item discussion:
 - Child care project – will need to provide a match for upcoming grants (CAT grant, etc.)
 - Purple Air line sensors – Luther faculty work this summer to determine baseline; this request is for the DSC is to purchase 2, city has 2, and there are 2 others in town; which makes a total of 6.
 - Waste – Recycling bins. Not sure what to ask. SMID may be helping. Process for pick up not yet determined. Can provide estimated expenses; will need to purchase containers and additional infrastructure for downtown recycling. Receptacles @ \$750 each. Estimate for 2022; \$3,000.
 - Composting pilot this spring by Luther students; will report to DSC.
 - Communications plan development, outreach/messaging – will need consultation for plan development, technology and human resources. Estimate proposed to support a community wide survey possibly in early 2022. Survey could include feedback re communications, recycling, several aspects of DSC plan = \$5,000. (Consider it an essential informational tool for decision making)
 - Potential housing grant 2022 match - \$10,000
 - Budget consideration/comment – whenever we can source locally such as IR for recycling containers
 - Storm water projects – Rain gardens, etc. Or is it all coming from the Utility fee change? Maybe this will fall under Communications & Outreach? (DSC Plan AW 5 & 6 – Providing incentives for homeowners to implement storm management practice projects.) Need education & outreach to make this happen. Estimate in AW category = \$5,000

- Land Use – request matching funds because of the housing piece (is above in housing line)
- Motion by McNichols seconded by Barnes to move this estimated budget to the city council
- Motion approved unanimously
- Attachment: [Decorah Municipal Electric Utility Taskforce Projected Budget Needs](#)

5. Discuss Social Sustainability Items:

- The following notes included in minutes; not discussed at this meeting

Housing – update

- Follow up small group meeting 4.14.21 with Nathan Thompson, Jeremy Leitz, Jim Martin-Schramm, Emily Neal and Ann Mansfield

Overview by Nathan Thompson:

- Affordable Housing

AMI = Area Median Income, calculated annually by HUD by Metropolitan Area (MSA) or by county in rural areas

Addressing demand

Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers: Tenants have to apply to get on waiting list, even here. In urban areas can be thousands of people. Portable vouchers that will guarantee payment of portion of rent to landlord by Public Housing Authority (UERPC Housing Inc).

Addressing supply - rental

- Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC)
- Subsidized housing (Public Housing): Owned by public entity
- Section 8 Housing: similar to public housing but owned by private entity.
- NOAH: Naturally-Occurring Affordable Housing, existing privately-owned housing stock that is older and/or less desirable, was not built with and does not receive public subsidy, and rents for lower rates than newer market-rate housing.

Addressing supply – Owner-Occupied

- Example - Bear Creek “Pocket Neighborhood,” Maquoketa: Key take-aways are small lot sizes, simple and replicable design, and many partners.
- Homes for Iowa: pre-fab product designed to be affordable and portable and fit in lots anywhere. \$95k+ base cost and must be sold to households earning

less than \$100k (regardless of location or household size). 2 in Oelwein and 2 in Waukon so far. <https://www.homesforia.com>

- NOAH: many affordable houses are being turned into short-term rentals instead of owner-occupied or rented, or 2nd homes.

Planning & Zoning

- Majority of residential zoning in Decorah is R3, meaning 3 dwelling units per lot by right. Rental units are allowed in all residential districts. P/Z did not distinguish between long-term and short-term (AirBnB) rentals after discussion of issue in 2019 (2020?).
- Zoning code does have manufactured housing district but no land is zoned as such in the city: *Chapter 17.80 - R-4 MOBILE HOME PARK RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT*
- “More zoning than planning” Not much of a proactive approach to issues. Need more focused group, larger-scale community planning around housing issues.

Determining key partners and process for getting projects planned and completed

The city has had several discussions in the past about affordable housing and how to get more built, but few results. The only complex built in the last 40 years is the new 7-unit on St Lawrence street. Cole Quandahl has been open to discussion about how to build more housing and may be a good developer / contractor to talk to about how it works on his end.

- Childcare – update – not discussed at this meeting
 - Steph Fromm – This week – launch of \$8M campaign for new childcare and discovery center in Decorah
 - News release 04.19.21:
 - Representatives from the two groups spoke to the Winneshiek County Board and to the Decorah City Council's Community Development Committee on Monday April 19, 2021. Winneshiek County Development Director Stephanie Fromm announced a plan to raise \$4 million in private contributions for the project, while WCDT's Lora Friest announced a goal of securing at least \$4 million in grants for the project. The project has already been awarded a \$760,000 Child Care challenge grant.
 - Sunflower currently serves 130 children between the ages of 6 weeks to 12 years old. It is currently in a building built in the early 1990s and has several structural issues that cannot be overcome.

- In addition to wanting to build new space for childcare, the proposal calls for construction of a Discovery Center, which will have two indoor play areas and six STEAM learning areas and will provide an additional source of funding for the child care center.
 - Teri Orr – CCR&R
 - Fundraising campaign for new Sunflower childcare center announced 4.19.21; Stephanie has a great opportunity to present to the city economic development committee.
 - Advocacy and education is the focal point of our work right now as other pieces continue to be rolling out. There are some federal funds coming out soon for new and existing programs to apply for. This will help expand opportunities for both center and home providers to start or expand.
 - We keep working with interested new providers and support the current providers in maintaining their business. DHS has extended monthly stipends through June for programs/providers, which is helpful. It may help them maintain some of their business expenses, but possibly not make many changes in improving wages or increasing capacity.
 - Also, DHS has unveiled the WAGE\$ program for eligible staff and providers. This will help give bonuses to some who meet the criteria. It is a great program, but not all providers or staff will be eligible. I attached a little information on that.
 - It feels like we are moving in the right direction, but it of course, will take time.
- Vision -- Discuss recommendations for the development of a community vision that includes action step S1: “Adopt equitable community vision statement and values”
 - Not discussed - Consider for May 19th agenda

6. Discuss Economic Development Action Item ED1: “City-hosted, quarterly community visioning sessions with City, Luther, Banks, Museums, Hospital, and Industry leaders to share needs and opportunities.”

- Not discussed – Consider for May 19th agenda

7. Other business

- Review replacement slate for the MEU Task Force members presented by Martin-Schramm:
 - Reginald Laursen
 - Larry Willson
 - Tom Marquardt

- Motion by McNichols, seconded by Grimstad to recommend this slate to the city council
- City manager search
 - Mayor – council working with consultants, developing timeline - hope to have someone in place by end of August
 - Martin-Schramm – request participation of DSC in interview process
 - Mayor agreed and indicated that consulting firm has a sustainability background
- Adjourn
 - Motion by Barnes, seconded by Leitz; Motion approved unanimously
 - Meeting adjourned @ 6:20 pm.
 - Minutes submitted by Ann Mansfield