ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION
2021 ANNUAL REPORT AND
2022 WORK PLAN
2021 Environmental Commission

Commissioners
Wendy Weirich, Chair (2023)
Shannon Hansen, Vice Chair (2023)
Felix Fettig, Student (2021)
Tonia Galonska (2022)
Dawn Hill (2024)
Scott Seys (2024)
Jim Stremel (2023)
Debra Yahle (2022)
Rachel Zuraff, Student (2023)

Note: Terms run May 1-April 30

Council Liaison
Kimberly Sanberg
Larry Fonnest (through December 2021)

City Staff
Eric Eckman, Environmental Resources Supervisor
Drew Chirpich, Environmental Specialist
Carrie Nelson, Engineering Assistant
Story Schwantes, MN GreenCorps Member
Ethan Kehrberg, MN GreenCorps Member

Purpose and Mission
The Environmental Commission has been established to advise and make recommendations to the City Council in matters relating to and affecting the environment and human health.

Cover Photo: “Pondering,” by Laurie Smith, Views Of The Valley 2021
Golden Valley Environmental Commission
2021 Annual Report

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2021 Accomplishments

Curbside Recycling And Organics Collection
- Helped guide and develop the new recycling and organics program that launched in January 2022.

Energy Action
- Helped guide and recommend approval of the City’s first Energy Action Plan as part of Xcel Energy’s Partners In Energy community collaboration program.
- Recommended participation in the Residential Home Energy Squad program with an equitable cost sharing methodology for residents.
- Guided staff to reduce the number of households experiencing energy cost burden by 20 through identifying, communicating, and connecting people with programs offered by utility companies and others.
  - Sent postcards and newsletters to households, distributed multi-lingual flyers to multi-family properties, worked with PRISM to reach residents, and completed four low-income home energy squad visits and 16 home energy savings program visits in five months, which included onsite energy efficiency improvements.
- Developed an energy saver recognition program for businesses (launching in spring 2022).
- Summarized the City’s energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions reductions to date.

GreenStep Cities/Climate Action
- Achieved Step 5 of the GreenStep Cities Program, including advancement in the following topic areas:
  - buildings and lighting
  - renewable energy
  - land use
  - transportation and fleet
  - surface water
  - green buildings
- Began tracking information in new topic areas such as:
  - solid waste and recycling
  - local food production
  - home energy squad visits
A link to the summary of Golden Valley’s GreenStep Cities progress is located at https://greenstep.pca.state.mn.us/cityInfo.cfm?ctu_code=2394924

- Drafted and recommended adoption of a resolution declaring a climate emergency.
- Recommended support for Hennepin County’s first Climate Action Plan.
- Hosted an informational meeting with Hennepin County’s new director of climate & resiliency to learn about the climate action plan and discuss ways to work together to achieve common goals.

**Environmental Justice**

- Continued to partner with the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Commission (DEIC) on joint projects, events, and forums through a subcommittee formed in 2020.
  - Using the prioritization maps developed by the DEIC subcommittee in 2020, identified and explored a partnership with a naturally occurring affordable multi-family housing property in the community to target investment in trees and green infrastructure to address existing inequities.
- Started updating source maps and data for the green infrastructure prioritization maps based on the new 2020 census data and other emerging data sources.
- Began planning for the Building An Equitable Golden Valley environmental justice forum set for May 2022.

**Community Outreach**

- Explored partnership opportunities with local schools, ultimately deciding to recommend that the City Council update the City Code and Commission bylaws to allow the addition of a second student member to the Environmental Commission.
- Hosted an educational workshop on planting for pollinators.
- Promoted numerous educational opportunities in cooperation with the Golden Valley Garden Club.

**Natural Resources Management**

- Supported habitat restoration in the Briarwood Nature Area in 2021-22, made possible by a grant from the Minnesota DNR.
- Helped guide the development of pollinator habitat on two remnant City parcels along the Douglas Drive corridor.

*Developing pollinator habitats remains an environmental goal.*
Transportation

• Explored ways to reduce vehicle usage and expand transportation options in the City and how to incorporate the information into the City website.

Water Resources

• Researched and recommended participation in a rain barrel cost share program for residents. A total of 72 rain barrels are being purchased and installed throughout the community.

• Contributed to the scoping of a request for proposals for a neighborhood-level flood study for the community.

• Met jointly with the Open Space and Recreation Commission to provide input and feedback on the design of two large stormwater projects (Medley Park and SEA School-Wildwood Park).

Resources

• Discussed and explored the resources available and needed to implement the City’s environmental goals, initiatives, plans, programs, and projects and how that might shape the Commission’s annual work plans.

Medley Park floodplain map
2022 Proposed Work Plan

Proposed work plan priorities for 2022 are based on goals in the City’s 2022 Pyramid of Success, 2040 Comprehensive Plan (including Resilience & Sustainability, Natural Resources, Water Resources, Transportation), Equity Plan, Energy Action Plan, Pollinator Protection Resolution, Climate Emergency Declaration, GreenStep Cities Program, and City Council’s 2022 Legislative Priorities.

- Recycling And Organics
  - Help develop a plan to increase participation rates for organics recycling, and opportunities for multi-family recycling, including organics and onsite composting.
  - Seek opportunities to partner with non-profits and others to reduce Styrofoam and single use plastics, bags, and containers (restaurants, stores, etc) within Hennepin County.

- Energy Action
  - Help guide and participate in implementation of the City’s Energy Action Plan, including:
    - monitoring and reporting on the progress of Xcel Energy’s Partners In Energy community collaboration program
    - reducing the number of households experiencing energy cost burden by 15 households through identifying, communicating, and connecting people with programs offered by utility companies and others
    - increasing participation in energy efficiency programs for residents and businesses, including:
      - implementing and monitoring the new energy saver recognition program for businesses
      - extending the Residential Home Energy Squad program for another budget cycle
      - exploring incentivizing businesses to participate in energy assessments and audits
    - exploring options for promoting, supporting, and developing renewable energy (solar) and electric vehicles and charging infrastructure, including:
      - hosting an EV show-and-tell event at City Hall in June 2022
      - increasing EVs and expanding charging infrastructure in the community
    - supporting state and local efforts to update building codes or standards that advance energy performance in buildings
    - exploring drafting a sustainable building policy for developments that receive city funding and resources

One 2022 goal is to increase participation in the City’s organics recycling program.
• **GreenStep Cities/Climate Action**
  Continue working on actions and metrics to address climate-related impacts, improve the environment, and reduce energy consumption and costs.
  - If awarded a MN GreenCorps Member in 2022-2023, work to complete GreenStep Cities actions related to Climate Action, Energy Action, and Environmental Justice.
  - Look for ways to partner with Hennepin County to implement its Climate Action Plan, with a focus on planting trees and reducing urban heat island effect.

• **Environmental Justice**
  Continue to partner with the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Commission (DEIC) on joint projects, events, and forums through a subcommittee formed in 2020. Collaboration to include:
  - Co-hosting the Building An Equitable Golden Valley environmental justice forum set for May 19, 2022
  - Updating the source maps and data for the green infrastructure prioritization maps to address existing inequities in the community
  - Discussion on drafting an environmental justice resolution
  - Seeking and identifying a partner and sponsor one green infrastructure project in a priority area
  - Helping implement the land acknowledgement action plan by co-hosting a community event for Indigenous community members and inviting families through the school districts

• **Community Outreach**
  - Review new City website for environmental content and clarity, better promotion of volunteer programs, and best practices for yards and gardens.
  - Explore ways to promote Earth Day and Arbor Day, including staff videos and webinars.
  - Use the Commission’s $3,500 budget toward one or more of the following efforts:
    - Funding a joint project, event, or forum with the DEIC
    - Sponsoring and supporting the new energy saver recognition program

*City staff and elected officials participate in annual Arbor Day events at local schools.*
• Water And Natural Resources
  o Support habitat restoration in the Briarwood Nature Area in 2022 with DNR Grant funds; help identify the next nature area for enhancement or restoration.
  o Continue promoting educational opportunities in cooperation with the Golden Valley Garden Club.
  o Study ways to mitigate the loss of infested ash trees due to the emerald ash borer pest, especially in areas experiencing inequities in green infrastructure.
  o Explore ways to promote, improve, expand, and preserve remnant natural areas and open spaces in the City, especially with pollinator habitat.
  o Address the issue of human encroachment into nature areas.
  o Explore and understand water use in the community; look into conservation measures like a lawn watering ordinance.
  o Consider exploring participation in the No Mow May Campaign.

• Transportation
  o Review Luce Line Trail connection under Highway 169 to Plymouth and other substandard trail sections.
  o Provide input and feedback on the Hwy 55/Douglas Dr pedestrian underpass project.
  o Support and contribute to the City’s Bus Rapid Transit efforts along Hwy 55.