



Village of Skokie Beautification and Improvement Commission

Meeting Minutes

January 12, 2022

Commissioners Present: Sherwin Ditlove, Vernell Ellison-Smith, Joseph Hasten, Dalya Horowitz, George Hubchak, , Frederick Lisiewicz, Bob Quane (Chair), Rachel Rosenberg, Mitchell Sandler (Vice Chair), Brooke Sprague, Anne VanOsdol

Commissioners Absent:, Ann Goldshaft, , Bahram Khazni, Charles Levine, Edward Potash, Valerie Shuman, Joshua Shpayer

Staff Present: Cathy Stevens, Staff Liaison; James Johnson, Trustee Liaison

I. Approval of Minutes

Chair Quane called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM. Vice Chair Sandler provided corrections on the previous meeting's minutes, stating that there had been a typo and that acronyms should always be spelled out in the first instance of usage. The minutes were approved with these amendments.

II. Report, Beautification Education Sub Committee: Chair, Rachel Rosenberg

Commissioner Rosenberg reported that the education subcommittee (ESC) was working on a revised main page for the commission website as well as new content for an education section. She asked Liaison Stevens what the next step would be after the ESC developed a final edited version of the content. Liaison Stevens reported that she was not sure what next steps should be, but that the village was already working on an updated website for sustainability and she wasn't sure where native gardening information would be. She said that the ESC should pass on the new content and the communications team may respond with suggestions or ideas. Commissioner Rosenberg responded that she wanted the staff to see the new content as soon

as possible. Commissioner Lisiewicz added that he felt the content on native gardening should be on the Beautification Commission's page.

Liaison Stevens added that the content for the main webpage could be updated at any time. Commissioner Rosenberg explained that the revised content is a fairly robust addition to what's currently there in order to put things into context and give people tools. Chair Quane added that the main page, educational content, and awards information and timeline all needed to be updated. Commissioner Rosenberg asked whether the webmasters would be doing offline construction so that the commission could see the content before it's launched. She added that the goal was to get them the revised material that the ESC has been developing by shortly after the next subcommittee meeting.

Commissioner VanOsdol reported that the ESC was working on setting up some educational programming at the library so people would be able to hear from experts on how to make additions and conversions to their landscaping to make it sustainable and native. Commissioner Rosenberg added that they were still figuring out how to potentially align it with the Emily Oaks Plant Sale. Liaison Stevens reported that she has been attempting to get ahold of Lee Hansen at Emily Oaks about collaborating but was waiting to hear back. Chair Quane suggested that at the next meeting the ESC would come up with a letter for Emily Oaks detailing what the commission's participation in a plant sale would look like.

III. Report: Beautification New Initiatives Sub Committee: Chair designate

Chair Quane shared the Beautification Awards updates that the New Initiatives Subcommittee (NISC) had made, including revisions based on commission feedback, and asked for approval.

Commissioner Rosenberg said that she had been asked to supply a list of approved pesticides to be provided with the awards language, but that this concept was a problem. She explained that all pesticides must be approved by the Environmental Protection Agency in order to be legal. Furthermore, there are thousands of names and categories of pesticides, and any list that the commission might provide would be confusing or would quickly become obsolete. In the new educational section for the Beautification Commission Website, Commissioner Rosenberg drafted a paragraph on why sustainable gardeners should not use pesticides as well as types of pesticides (e.g., neonicotinoids) that are particularly bad. She explained that it is best practice not to list the names of products, but instead to list why pesticides should not be used and offer better alternatives. In short, she said, insecticides are 100% bad and should not be used. Liaison Stevens agreed that the language on pesticides should be removed from the awards page.

Vice Chair Sandler agreed with the concern regarding listing brand names. As an official organ of Skokie, the commission would open up the village to litigation if the website named brands and said not to use them. Instead, he suggested that the general recommendation of the commission could simply be to not use pesticides.

Commissioner Rosenberg added that information on how to avoid pests without using pesticides is readily available. The Beautification Commission website should not be a source for that information.

Chair Quane said that he originally thought the commission would be approving this new awards program language at this meeting, but given the pesticide discussion, the commission might want to approve gist of it but not in full. He asked if there were any other comments or concerns.

Commissioner Horowitz noted the language about food in the front garden and stated that she thought there was a rule against this in Skokie. Commissioner Quane said that it was allowed in Skokie, and Commissioner Lisiewicz added that in fact it was state law now.

Commissioner Rosenberg asked whether the scoring list was just for judges or external. Liaison Stevens clarified that the guidelines are just for the Commission, but the standards are listed on the back of the nomination form. The commission would need to rewrite the standards for the public-facing materials, but the wording would be very similar to the scoring form (minus the points, which would be for the commission only).

Commissioner Rosenberg shared the updated timeline developed by the NISC, with winners announced by September 15. The goal of the new deadlines would be for village members to get to see the winning gardens in their September glory. There was a discussion about whether pictures could be taken when houses were nominated or whether members had to wait until after winners had given permission; it was concluded that permissions were required to share houses but not simply to take pictures, and these could be taken earlier in the summer. Commissioner Rosenberg added people would have to work quickly with the new timeline, but the hope would be to get the new awards signs out in yards by September.

Liaison Stevens wondered if the commission might want to put something about the awards in the spring hard copy of the Skokie News. She looked up the deadline and reported that it was the following day, January 13. Commissioner VanOsdol said there was no need to rush it, and the commission could wait for the electronic version since there was not much finalized information to share at this stage. The commission agreed. Commissioner Hasten volunteered to work on the content, and it was agreed that he would discuss drafting this with Chair Quane.

Commissioner Rosenberg asked if the group approved of the new dates, and all members present approved. Chair Quane said that the new criteria and timeline were agreed upon, and the processes and procedures could be worked on. He added that both subcommittees should work on a coordinated messaging timeline.

IV. Development of Beautification main page on Village web site (working draft)

Chair Quane shared the revisions on the main webpage that he had been working on. Commissioner Rosenberg said that she had been working on additional revisions on a Google Doc in the commission's shared folder. Chair Quane responded that he didn't realize this and would take a look. However, he had received, and incorporated, feedback from Commissioner Shuman.

Commissioner Horowitz asked what No Mow May was. Commissioner Quane said that he hoped the commission could discuss this in February, but that the gist of it was authorizing higher turf height in May. Commissioner Rosenberg added that waiting as long as possible to do the first mow in spring helps support early-blooming plants that serve as food for native pollinators and promotes better lawn health than cutting the lawn short at the first hint of warm weather.

Chair Quane reported that he would look at the additional changes provided in the Google Drive and work on a revised version for the main page.

V. Tree Incentive Program, Chair, Bob Quane

Chair Quane said that the tree canopy was an important issue raised in the sustainability plan, so he had been looking around at nearby villages to see what kind of programs they had to encourage canopy growth. Liaison Stevens reported that there were currently 26,000 parkway trees in Skokie and 28% canopy, and that the goal by the end of the Sustainability Plan would be 30% canopy, which is a lot of trees to plant. Chair Quane shared an incentive program for a nearby municipality and asked whether Skokie should investigate a tree incentive for private property. In this model, the homeowner would sign up for the program and purchase the tree, and submit a receipt to the village to be reimbursed for up to \$300.

Liaison Stevens said that this is something she's thought about. The commission would need to do outreach to private landowners. Because of the ambitious canopy goal, Liaison Stevens thought that targeting larger land areas like schools that have a lot of space would be important. Liaison Stevens also explained the various considerations for sites and parameters to be considered before planting trees and the extensive amount of time and effort required.

Chair Quane said that the particulars weren't worked out, but he was looking for a motion to send the recommendation up the ladder for the village to consider a similar tree incentive program. It would just be a suggestion based on the commission's knowledge of what other municipalities are offering. Commissioner VanOsdol mentioned that from a functional standpoint, the kind of incentive program requiring staff support would not be manageable for Skokie's one forestry staff member. Chair Quane concurred, but clarified that it would be about getting a message across, not an all-or-nothing recommendation.

Liaison Stevens said the main issue was maintenance, and that having programs for larger institutions like schools was particularly important to add to program recommendations. Chair Quane agreed to include that. There was a consensus that that would be part of the suggestion for the program.

Chair Lisiewicz motioned to move the message forward, and Chair Hasten seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

VI. Report by Cathy Stevens, Staff Liaison

Liaison Stevens reported that March was a heavy time and she wanted to get Beautification Awards preparation finished as much as possible before then. Chair Quane said he was putting together a subcommittee to plan for awards. It was concluded that awards preparation was a simple delegation process that didn't require a subcommittee formation. Chair Quane said that he and Vice Chair Sandler could plan for it and share updates at the next meeting.

Liaison Stevens shared that she had the awards letters and could send them out. Chair Quane said that in the future, there would be no honorable mentions on the publication or at the board meeting and reception. However, since they were nominated, they would still receive a letter.

Liaison Stevens asked if anyone had a good idea for the Arbor Day event location, which would take place on Friday, April 28. Elizabeth Meyer School, a pre-K school on Cleveland with a lot of green space, was suggested. Liaison Stevens liked this suggestion because the school was not hemmed in by major roadways, meaning less traffic and better hearing for attendees.

VII. Report by James Johnson, Trustee Liaison

Chair Quane asked Liaison Johnson to echo comments he had made at recent village board meetings. He explained that he had encouraged the board to delegate as much of the tasks and responsibilities within the new Sustainability Plan to the commissions as possible. He noted that much of the plan's greenspace section related to the Beautification Commission's activities.

Chair Quane said that he had emailed the Sustainable Environmental Advisory Commission leadership with information about the Beautification & Improvement Commission's new awards program, but hadn't heard anything back.

Commissioner Rosenberg asked about how getting new commission members was promoted. Liaison Johnson said that he had requested a village page listing vacancies but that there was no such page. Commissioner Rosenberg said it would be great to be more proactive about the process. Chair Quane said the commission could list vacancies on the village's e-news letter, but members were also free to share on local gardening lists. Liaison Johnson said that framing the types of applicants the commission would want to see would be helpful.

VIII. Old Business

Skokie weed Control Ordinance Recommendation (in progress)-Bob Quane and Fred Lisiewicz

Chair Quane reported that he and Commissioner Lisiewicz had been working on the weed ordinance, and that there was a challenge on making it stand out. Many models were looked at for benchmarking purposes, and the Green Bay, WI ordinance stood out for its strong, proactive approach to promoting native planting. Chair Quane and Commissioner Lisiewicz reviewed key points of the Green Bay ordinance and modifications that would be made for Skokie, which they were working on revising.

Liaison Stevens mentioned that when talking about natural landscape areas, it was important to make sure to still have triangle of visibility for alleys and intersections. She noted there should be nothing over 2 feet in the parkway. She also encouraged the commission to think about education once the ordinance is changed aimed at residents because the village staff gets many complaints pertaining to the ordinance. Commissioner Rosenberg said that anyone with complaints could be directed to the website. Liaison Stevens clarified that by education she meant thinking about the kind of information the commission was pushing out on the website. Commissioner Rosenberg asked when the ordinance might be implemented, and Liaison Stevens replied that she couldn't see it being implemented until fall. Commissioner VanOsdol said that if the commission had the resources available on the website, it would give staff coverage to say, "here's the website you can go to if you want to learn more."

Liaison Stevens reminded everyone that the weed ordinance was on the village's to-do list.

Chair Quane circled back to the awards program and asked for an official motion to precede with the new categories and deadlines. Commissioner Rosenberg motioned to move the new changes forward, and Commissioner Lisiewicz seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

Meeting adjourned at 8:00pm.

Meeting minutes submitted by Brooke Sprague.