

Memorandum

TO: Sustainable Environmental Advisory Commissioners

FROM: _____
Andrew D. DeCanniere, Commissioner, Sustainable Environmental Advisory Commission

DATE: March 14, 2023

**SUBJECT: February 28, 2023 Sustainable Environmental Advisory Commission (SEAC)
Meeting Minutes**

Meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM in Conference Room D/E at Skokie Village Hall. This meeting was also streamed live on YouTube. A recording may be viewed online by visiting the following web address: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOdESxHuL50>

Present: Chairperson Jennifer Grossman, Vice Chair Jim McNelis, Commissioners Christopher Buccola, Andrew DeCanniere, Michael Gershbein, Lisa Gotkin, Alma Likic, Olivia Mahoney, Rick Moskovitz, Emily Okallau, Robert Render, Charles Saxe, Trustee Liaison Khem Khoeun, Trustee Liaison Ralph Klein, Director of Public Works / Staff Liaison Max Slankard, Assistant to the Director of Public Works / Staff Liaison Elizabeth Zimmerman

Also present: Lauren Grodnicki, Skokie Resident

Absent: None

I. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the January 24, 2023 meeting of the Sustainable Environmental Advisory Commission were unanimously approved.

II. Old Business

a. Refuse and Composting Update

Challenges relating to Oakton Park composting drop-off site were discussed. Staff Liaison Slankard stated that the site just hasn't had much activity as of yet. Staff Liaison Zimmerman noted that there also have been some issues with contamination (e.g. diapers, used oil containers, etc). Chairperson Grossman inquired as to whether there is the potential to add additional compost drop-off sites around town if those that currently exist are being fully utilized.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that she would say that it would be possible, except they would prefer the composting sites to be located near a facility. That is the model that is working right now, and so that is what is highly preferred. Other locations could potentially be considered in the future.

Chairperson Grossman asked about the idea of adding compost drop-off sites at schools.

Staff Liaison Slankard said that they may eventually consider adding compost drop-off sites at schools. He said that they had met with the school superintendents last week. They also met with individuals from Niles Township, the Skokie Park District, the Skokie Public Library. They talked about the Environmental Sustainability Plan and some of the things that are being done. They talked a lot about food scrap composting. If there is the interest, would be interested in partnering with them at some point. He'd say that they were all interested in composting, but there are multiple school districts. The districts are all kind of in different places, with regards to composting, right now. However, there definitely is interest. They continue to actively monitor all of the sites, in order to figure out which ones seem to be working well. If there are those that do not appear to be as well received, they will try and assess what the challenge at that site may be, and why it is that it isn't working as well, and make the necessary modifications.

Vice Chair McNelis said it would be interesting to know whether schools have their own compost programs.

Staff Liaison Slankard said that we will see what comes out of the conversations that took place. For some of the districts, there may have been some trepidation when it came to doing food scrap composting in the cafeteria setting / in a student setting. It could potentially be done back of house, in the prep area, and professional staff could do it as part of the process. He went on to note that Niles Township and the food pantry are very interested. They also work a lot with Erlene Howard of Collective Resource, and are interested in understanding their options. Additional discussion ensued.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman stated that the compost drop-off sites also need to be in a location where people need to go out of their way for them a little bit, otherwise you tend to get all of this contamination (e.g. recyclables can make their way into bins that are intended for compost).

Staff Liaison Slankard said that, on the whole, it has been very encouraging. Staff Liaison Zimmerman noted that the discount (for Collective Resource's Curbside Composting Program) is live on the website. We should get the stats on how many people are signing up pretty soon. Typically, we get that information monthly. Additionally, they did order four-gallon buckets. She isn't sure as to the delivery status of those at the moment. They will be giving some of those out at the Farmers Market and other events. People will be able to use those if they don't have a container, and they will be able to store their compost in them. The containers will feature a sticker illustrating the sorts of things that are compostable, and will be made available free of charge to those who are interested in the program.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman noted that Collective Resource did reach out to those existing customers who are currently on a monthly plan to see if they would like to convert their existing monthly subscription to an annual subscription. She said that she does think that

the idea was that a discount would also apply to those existing customers that choose to convert from a monthly subscription to an annual subscription.

Commissioner DeCanniere asked for confirmation as to whether the discount is mentioned on the Village website, specifically. Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that there is a new Composting page on the Village website and it is mentioned there, and it is also mentioned on the Collective Resource website as well.

Commissioner DeCanniere went on to note that he did include information about the new Composting webpage in the 2023 edition of the Recycling & Disposal Programs brochure.

b. EPA Grant Submitted

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that she just wanted to make us aware that they did submit for a grant and, more specifically, what that grant was for. They want to continue the solid waste intern program and the door hanger program. They also want to create some cart tags for refuse, just as they did for recycling. If they are opening a refuse container, they are checking if there are recyclables that are mixed in — not only single-stream, but also whether there are any textiles that are thrown in. If so, a tag would be left, which could have a QR code on it, so that they could figure out where to go with that stuff. The second thing that they wanted is to get able to get out to the schools and do the zero-waste programming where the lunch programs are concerned. The schools were pretty receptive to doing that. Even if they don't continue with the zero-waste program, there's a lot of benefit as far as the kids doing that once, learning about it, and bringing that information home and talking about composting. They requested money so that they are able to do business audits. That's an Action Item that is right out of the Environmental Sustainability Plan. The final component was some non-traditional advertising. There is a lot of research out there that says that seeing advertising in unique places is very effective. Therefore, they were talking about doing vehicle wraps or posters at bus stops, perhaps places of worship. So, they submitted for that grant. It's a long shot, as it is a really popular grant.

Commissioner Mahoney inquired as to when we should hear as to whether Skokie has been awarded this grant.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that we should know by the end of April.

c. Library Seminars

Commissioner Saxe said two seminars have been planned. The Beautification Commission is doing something about native plants on April 1st. There is also an agreement with the Citizens Utility Board (CUB) to do a program regarding geothermal on May 23rd at the Skokie Public Library. He also has been talking with Niles Township Supervisor Bonnie Kahn Ognisanti regarding food scarcity in Niles Township. They're looking at June for that. They still need to set the exact date and location for that event.

He went on to say that he also has been speaking with Staff Liaisons Slankard and Zimmerman about doing something regarding refuse pick-up and composting. Staff Liaison Slankard has suggested a number of possible dates. They will be checking with the Skokie Public Library to see what dates may be open, and officially set a date with them for that program as well. He noted that Lauren Grodnicki has also been working on something that has to do with composting.

Ms. Grodnicki went on to note that a bunch of Go Green Skokie members who are interested in doing some kind of programming just had their first meeting. They are hoping to have multiple programs at the library, because there are different constraints for different types of households. She went on to inquire whether the Village would consider a rebate to be able to provide residents with a heavily discounted orange bucket, which people would be able to keep in their homes, would fill it, and then take it to one of the provided compost drop-off sites. She said that she had also spoken to one of the other parents who is also active in PTA Devonshire, and they would like to do an Earth Day program. It sounds as though doing something regarding composting would be good. They could bring it into the classrooms and talk to the kids, at different levels, as to why this is important and how it is done, etc. Additional discussion ensued.

Chairperson Grossman asked whether Ms. Grodnicki is suggesting that a bucket be provided, so that somebody would be able to bring it to one of the free composting sites. Ms. Grodnicki confirmed that this is what she is suggesting. It was noted that something of this sort is already in the works.

Commissioner Mahoney inquired as to how these events are to be promoted.

Commissioner Saxe said that some of the promotion will be done through the library, but they are hoping to be able to utilize *SkokieNews* (the Village's electronic newsletter) as well. Exactly how an event will be promoted will depend upon who is involved, but the events will be promoted via multiple vehicles/outlets. Additional discussion ensued.

Commissioner DeCanniere inquired as to whether it might be possible to push text messages that would alert individuals to upcoming events. Ideally, there would be a way for people who would be interested in participating in such events to opt-in to text alerts. Texts could contain some basic information about an event, as well as a link to additional information and, if necessary, a page where they would be able to register to participate in the event. Would there be an ability to do that?

Commissioner Saxe said that a "Newsflash" type of thing, almost like a digital Press Release, may be an option.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that the only alerts she is aware of have to do with Village operations or emergency situations. She isn't sure whether this would be feasible.

Commissioner Saxe suggested that he will follow up with (Communications Manager) Meredith Gioia and assess what the options are. He is aware that if it is a library program,

the library has its own outlets. If it's an official Village program, there is *SkokieNews*, and hopefully that gets the word out. CUB does its own social media push for events. He is aware that, when it comes to the CUB program, they are looking for it to be a statewide program. So, perhaps there are other outlets for us to get the information out. For the Niles Township program, they likely have their own outlets with which to get the information regarding their upcoming program out there as well. Additional discussion ensued.

III. New Business

a. Weed Ordinance and No Mow May Update

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that with regards to the weed ordinance, internal staff has met, and they have some ideas for edits. They would need to amend two separate codes. One is for the parkway and another is for landscaping.

Chairperson Grossman asked whether Staff Liaison Zimmerman has the language of the ordinance with her. She said that she did not have it on-hand.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman stated their intention would be to make some edits. It would just be a draft, and then they would bring it to both the Sustainable Environmental Advisory Commission and the Beautification Commission for review.

Some initial thoughts on what they are thinking of doing is raising the height to allow turf to get up to eight inches. Currently, up to six inches is permissible. They will not allow anything over eight inches on the parkway, as there are too many visibility issues that could arise if they were to permit that, which could create significant safety problems. Allowing anything over eight inches in the parkway is a non-starter with every single staff member. They are also looking at requiring some sort of a buffer, so that, if people do have natives, they are not flopping over onto the sidewalk when it rains or snows or when it is windy outside, etc. Other than that, they are trying to be as open about it as possible, and are trying to be as encouraging as possible, for people to plant natives and rain gardens and those types of things. They are looking at it with an eye toward minimizing some of the possible conflicts, so that it promotes the program in the long-term. The idea is to create some rules, so that everybody is safe, and so that everybody can see what they need to see, which is good for the program as well.

Chairperson Grossman asked, other than the turf height being increased by two inches, if you still are unable to plant anything taller in the parkway, what currently prohibits somebody from turning their front yard into native plantings? Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that, when it comes to the front yard, there is nothing. When it comes to the parkway, you are currently required to have grass in the parkway. It specifically says that you must have turf in the parkway. Additional discussion ensued.

Commissioner Okallau said that, based on her own experience, she would be intentional about the language, because people will say “Oh, but it’s native,” and it turns out to be completely overgrown and not maintained.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman stressed that this change is not something that they want to rush. Even if they started now, she does not think that this is something that they could push through for this spring. They would like to provide time for both of the commissions to review it and provide input. They want it to bring some change, and for it to encourage native plants and to get some publicity. However, they also want to minimize conflicts as much as possible.

Commissioner Saxe asked for clarification as to whether there can only be grass on the parkways. Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that is the case right now. Commissioner Saxe said that is not what he sees. He went on to say that we are talking about the proximity to driveways and curb cuts and intersections. When it comes to most of the parkways on his street, there are alleys and garages. There are very few curb cuts. So, there’s no conflict with pedestrians or cars coming across the sidewalk.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that there still are some conflicts that exist. If you have taller plantings and cars are pulling up to things, you still have that conflict that occurs when parking alongside the curb and people try to exit a vehicle. So, there still is a little bit of a safety issue.

Commissioner Okallau said that, in her experience, having something universally applicable would be preferable / easier than making exceptions.

Commissioner Saxe expressed concerns about getting too prescriptive in terms of what people are permitted to do with their lawns, when the whole point of this is to be more flexible. He said he thinks that it would defeat the purpose of what we’re trying to do by changing these regulations, if we were to get overly prescriptive.

Commissioner Mahoney asked whether the Village will address what to do in the fall, because residents are encouraged to keep their garden beds up through the winter.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that she thinks that, once the Code gets changed, that is the opportunity to do an educational campaign.

Commissioner Okallau said that it is okay to have things that are more naturalized, but it should be intentional.

Commissioner Saxe suggested that we need to define what a “healthy landscape” means. There need to be intentional, articulated guidelines as to what that means.

Chairperson Grossman said that it is typically pretty clear when somebody has a yard that is obviously being neglected, versus someone whose yard is more wild but you can tell

that there's still intention there. You can tell there are plantings, and not just long, non-native grasses.

Commissioner Okallau said that, when they changed the codes in Evanston, they said that it had to be maintained. The maintenance aspect is a part of it. Additional discussion ensued.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that where No Mow May is concerned, she sent out a proposed draft. She said what she loves about No Mow May is it has brought a lot of attention to our pollinators — more than any other program she can think of. What she doesn't love about it is that our climate here is a bit different than in the United Kingdom, and also that of Northern Wisconsin. She asked if Commissioner Gotkin heard back from the professor that she had reached out to.

Commissioner Gotkin said that she had not heard back from the professor as of yet. She said that she wanted to point out that, in what the Beautification Commission has put out, there is already an expert who she feels might have satisfied Staff Liaison Zimmerman's concern. It is in the Glenview question-and-answer document. The expert cited within that document is in favor of No Mow May. Frankly, Appleton, Wisconsin's weather is just a little bit colder than ours. It's not that much different. They're about three hours and twenty minutes north, so it's a little bit different. Glenview's weather is obviously just like ours. She feels as though, if the expert likes No Mow May, then that should be fine.

She went on to say that it seems that the Beautification Commission has already recommended the Village suspend their weed ordinance. Did this already go to the Village Board? She inquired as to what happens with their recommendation, and whether we going to make a competing recommendation. Why are we talking about this if they are making a recommendation? Are we not able to see how their recommendation works out? If it doesn't work out for some reason, we can then change it for next year.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said she is just concerned if it doesn't work out, we could be killing pollinators.

Commissioner Saxe said that if the Beautification Commission has already come out with a recommendation, he is with Commissioner Gotkin. We should just let it play out and see what happens, unless there are any reservations about their recommendation.

Commissioner Gotkin said that literally the whole reason to do this seems to be that it helps pollinators. Though she is not a scientist or biologist, that seems to be where the science has led.

Commissioner Okallau said that she doesn't think it is a true net-positive in all conditions. She doesn't think you can objectively say that not mowing your lawn in May helps pollinators. Additional discussion ensued.

Commissioner DeCanniere suggested that whatever approach we ultimately decide to take, and whatever our recommendation may be, we ought to consider making an online guide available that would encourage residents to plant native plants on their properties.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that the Beautification Commission has been wonderful. They've gotten a whole list of resources together. She just hasn't had a chance to upload that information to the Village website. The next couple of days is the first chance she'll have to start getting that information posted on the site.

Commissioner DeCanniere noted that this clearly is an important issue, as there's obviously a significant environmental impact as well, in terms of how people are maintaining their properties.

Chairperson Grossman asked whether anything further is desired or required from us, as a group, concerning No Mow May.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that she thinks she has the general consensus from us. She'll bring it up with the Beautification Commission, and if she has any questions, she can follow up with our Commission's liaison for that particular sector.

Commissioner Gotkin asked what will be relayed to the Beautification Commission as the general consensus of our Commission. It doesn't seem to her that there was a general consensus.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that we want to make sure that the tone is a little bit more positive, and we want to change it so as to put much more emphasis on the native plants. She will also reach out to the Beautification Commission, to see what they came up with, because they sent an email to a lot of members in the group, but she did not receive that. That's why she wrote what she wrote in the first place. She was unaware that they were working on it. She also noted that she's confident that we, collectively, can pull all of this together. She'll visit with the Beautification Commission and, ultimately, we all want more pollinators. That's our goal. We all want the same thing.

b. Workplan Update from Commissioners

Chairperson Grossman said that we are still figuring out our role in the new Environmental Sustainability Plan. This plan is very different from the first plan in a lot of ways. One way is that, with the last plan, it felt as though the implementation was very much SEAC-driven. With this version of the Environmental Sustainability Plan, there's an implementation team, and there's a lot of Village staff working on it. So, we don't want to step on people's toes and dictate how the plan ought to be rolled out, because there are professional staff working on that, who are ultimately the ones who are responsible for the plan being carried out. We have to work with them, as opposed to coming up with ideas and pushing those independently, as we did previously. They met last week, and she thinks that the conclusion that they came to is that there are two approaches to tackling this. One, which is what Staff Liaison Zimmerman

emailed everyone about, is that each sector will have a liaison. That's not necessarily somebody who is actively working on coming up with how to work on Action Items from that sector. Rather, it's just that when something comes up Village-wide, then that is the Commissioner who Village staff may come to, to just say that they want to get SEAC involved. For instance, if it is something about Green Space, they would speak with Commissioner Okallau. These aren't set in stone, but then that would come to the whole Commission and we then figure out how we do whatever it may be. So, they came up with a list of who they thought would be best for those various positions, based upon Commissioner's past interests or based on their expertise, etc.

Chairperson Grossman went on to say that, as we have been discussing since December, we are trying to determine which Action Items we, as a Commission, would like to focus on. For those, we would come to a decision together. For example, let's say that we pick 10 things to focus on for this year. From there, we parse those things out. However, by going about it this way, way we've made the decision together, or at least by consensus, in terms of what we would like to pull from the plan and focus upon — as opposed to what we were just talking about, which is how we plan on responding when Village staff come to us. Additional discussion ensued.

Vice Chair McNelis asked if we know what the Commission should work on, as opposed to what the Village should work on. Is that broken up?

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said she did go through the Implementation Plan today. She has a binder and she highlighted anyplace in the Implementation Plan where it is highlighted that they're looking for a partnership with SEAC. Not every sector has that yet, but there is enough to start with. Additional discussion ensued.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that anything is challenging to do without any staff. For instance, you may want to promote something in *SkokieNews*. So, you always need a Staff Liaison. However, a lot of the Action Items that are looking for help from SEAC are things like community partnerships. We may have closer ties to certain community groups than Village staff does. She also went on to say that there is a lot more staff interaction. If we were to attend one of their meetings, she thinks that everyone would be very happy. They have virtually every department engaged. So, there is a lot of work that is happening. When Village staff gets to a certain point, and they are ready to work on the next Action Item, they have a resource with all of our contact information and they can be aware of who to reach out to. That's a nice resource for Village staff to have — almost like having a Commission liaison.

Chairperson Grossman said it would be helpful for us as a group to really dive in and have this conversation as a group, rather than each person looking at the plan and saying "I want to do this and this," because we're also figuring out what we think the Commission as a whole can do. We can have more of a discussion on feasibility. She thinks that is the next step of what was started with the spreadsheet. We can take that and talk about it together, and figure out what we're going to do.

Staff Liaison Slankard said that they would hope that Commission liaisons develop a familiarity with their plan sector, so when other partner agencies in the community might have occasion to want understanding of the plan — when they want someone they can talk to about a plan segment that relates to what they do — then they also have somebody that is at a community-appointed official level. Within some components of the plan, he does think that Village staff will have occasion when they want to reach out to the liaison to get an opinion or feedback. Many of these examples that he is thinking of will relate to transportation. For instance, one example of something that they were just talking about today, is the deployment of additional electric vehicle (EV) charging stations — likely in the downtown area. They know that they need to do additional charging station deployments in the downtown area, but how do they go about getting feedback on where some of those might be? Commissioners don't necessarily need to be subject matter experts on charging stations, but they might be looking for someone to weigh in on the subject. Sometimes, they just may want an outside perspective on something. Staff may be looking for feedback or some advice, or may just want to know what Commissioners' thoughts are on a particular subject. Additional discussion ensued.

c. Spring Greening: Sunday, April 2nd — Volunteers needed

Chairperson Grossman stated that Skokie's Spring Greening will take place on Sunday, April 2, 2023, and it looks as though there are volunteers needed for the event. Additional discussion ensued.

d. Community Solar Update

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that she just wanted to mention that they were really hopeful, because they were told that there will be another solar farm that will be coming online in March. So, that would be right around now. That has been delayed, and they are expecting a large amount of solar to open up for the community in early fall. They have promoted it before they found out that information. There are a bunch of people on the waitlist. People are still able to sign up, but it is looking as though it will be September when there's a large amount of solar opening up for people. It is expected that they're going to be able to handle everyone on the waitlist and some new subscribers. She went on to say she's told that, shortly after that, community solar will be widely available for a period of time. Additional discussion ensued.

Commissioner DeCanniere asked if we know how many are currently on the waitlist. He said that he's just trying to gauge the interest. Liaison Zimmerman said that there are 218 people on the waitlist.

Commissioner DeCanniere mentioned that participants may need to sign some renewal documents to remain with the Community Solar program. MC Squared Energy Services sends some renewal documents that you need to sign, in order to make it official and to remain enrolled in the program. He said it was very quick and very simple. He went on to note that the program supports the growth of the renewable energy industry. In addition,

he noted that participants in the Community Solar program receive something like a 20 percent discount off of the electric supply rate.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that they are trying to change some legislation. Right now, you have to pay your supply bill through MC Squared, and then you pay ComEd for the delivery. She thinks that will be changed shortly, so that everything can be on the ComEd bill.

IV. Public Comment

On February 10, 2023, Staff Liaison Zimmerman provided Commissioners with a copy of an email from Emi Yamauchi, and which was addressed to the Sustainable Environmental Advisory Commission. The email concerned inclusionary/affordable housing.

V. Other Business

Staff Liaison Slankard noted that on March 16, the Plan Commission will be having a discussion about drive-through facilities in the community.

VI. Next Meeting

Based on the expected availability of Commission members, the next meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 21, 2023.

VII. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:02 PM.