

Memorandum

TO: Sustainable Environmental Advisory Commissioners

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

DATE: April 14, 2023

**SUBJECT: March 21, 2023 Sustainable Environmental Advisory Commission (SEAC)
Meeting Minutes**

Meeting was called to order at 7:06 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=ro9Y_nDS9Kw

Present: Chairperson Jennifer Grossman, Vice Chair Jim McNelis, Commissioners Christopher Buccola, Andrew DeCanniere, Michael Gershbein, 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

Absent: Commissioners Lisa Gotkin, Alma Likic and Olivia Mahoney

Public Present: Lauren Grodnicki, Skokie resident

I. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the February 28, 2023 meeting of the Sustainable Environmental Advisory Commission were unanimously approved.

II. Old Business

a. Library Seminars

Commissioner Saxe said that all of the library seminars that he had been planning have been confirmed. The Beautification Commission is doing the seminar on native plants, which will take place on April 1st at 1:00 PM. The seminar on geothermal heat pumps for homeowners will be taking place on Tuesday, May 23rd at 7:00 PM. Staff Liaisons Slankard and Zimmerman will be doing a presentation on the transition from twice-weekly refuse collection to once-weekly refuse collection and composting. That presentation will be taking place on June 6th at 7:00 PM. He also received a confirmation from Niles Township Supervisor Bonnie Kahn Ognisanti about the planned presentation on food scarcity in Niles Township.

Commissioner Gershbein inquired as to who will be doing the geothermal heat pump presentation. Commissioner Saxe stated that somebody from the Citizens Utility Board (CUB) will be doing that.

b. Delay Until Mother's Day mowing

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that they decided to keep the messaging to addressing the issue of early pollinator bees. That's what No Mow May is for, and that has kind of helped a lot. The messaging does not get into natural lawn care. They will be addressing that as part of a future messaging campaign. In short, the Beautification Commission really likes this final draft, and our own Green Spaces committee really liked this second draft. They will be pushing this out in a couple of weeks. Chairperson Grossman inquired as to how this information is to be sent out.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman stated that they will be sending it out via the Village's electronic newsletter, *SkokieNews*, as well as via social media. It will also be available on the Village of Skokie's website, www.skokie.org. She went on to say that she thinks the real benefit to it is that when the Village's property inspectors are out in the community and are seeing tall grass complaints, and when they're working with neighbors on tall grass complaints, they are going to have something to give them. In the end, they also decided to add some signage that people can place in their windows, if they so desire. She said that now that we've worked this one out, she thinks that we have a really nice format for future messaging on natural lawn care and the like.

Chairperson Grossman asked whether there are any updates where the Weed Ordinance is concerned. Staff Liaison Zimmerman said she knew that she wasn't going to be able to do that before the No Mow May stuff, but that is on her list. She said that there have been internal meetings, and they are ready to go on that. She just has to get the draft out. She went on to say that there's a lot that can be done with the current ordinance as far as natural lawn care and the like. It's not that prohibitive. She would say that the big change is going to be that change of not having to have turf on the parkway.

c. Skokie's Spring Greening — April 2, 2023

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that things with Spring Greening are rolling along. It is coming up very soon. It will take place on Sunday, April 2nd. There was messaging regarding the event that went out in *SkokieNews* today. The vendors should be finalized any day. The Skokie Park District will be updating the Skokie's Spring Greening website, www.skokiespringgreening.info. All the main vendors are there, and everything has been going very well. The only concern is the weather, which has the potential to make or break the event.

Commissioner Render inquired as to whether one can bring fluorescent bulbs to Spring Greening or not. Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that is one of the ones that

they are trying to finalize. She said that he should check the Spring Greening website in a couple of days, and any final vendor questions should be answered. Either they will be on there or they won't.

III. New Business

a. Plan Commission Drive-Thru Discussion

Chairperson Grossman said that the Plan Commission had a discussion regarding drive-thru facilities in the community, and went on to note that Commissioner Saxe provided some additional information. Commissioner Saxe said that Staff Liaison Zimmerman sent out the memo that Community Development Director Johanna Nyden put together, and it is pretty thoughtful about ways to improve the efficiency of drive-thrus, as well as some suggestions about changes in the zoning permits, as well as recommendations as to where it would be appropriate to locate such facilities. If any Commissioners haven't had the opportunity to take a look at the memo, it would be worth reading through it. He said that he is not sure what prompted this conversation. He is just glad that they are having it. In her memo, she addresses a number of concerns about drive-thrus. He went on to note that he did make a statement on Thursday. He thinks that his feelings on drive-thrus are known — namely that they are fundamentally antithetical to sustainability, due to their very nature.

One of the things he did also address on Thursday, during the Plan Commission's discussion on drive-thru facilities, was the economics of them. He did a comparison of an area that was recently redeveloped with drive-thrus in Skokie (the area where a hotel once was on Skokie Boulevard), and compared that with the commercial stores on Main Street (just west of Crawford Avenue). If you do an analysis of property tax generation per acre, the older commercial areas generate more property tax by about 24 percent than the new areas. Property tax analysis is complicated, and it is difficult to come to any firm conclusions about what's going on based upon that. However, it is illustrative of the impact of having auto-oriented development, where you are pushing buildings further apart and you're making room for driveways and parking lots. It definitely reduces the economic productivity of an area. So, in terms of the justification of drive-thrus being economic development, that is basically untrue. Drive-thrus and auto-oriented developments are a pretty significant economic downgrade, and that has been a pattern that we've been seeing in Skokie for some time.

Commissioner Saxe then went on to inquire as to what we are doing. Are we making recommendations? If not, what are we doing when it comes to this issue? When Ms. Nyden put the memo together, he thinks that she was looking for some guidance from the Plan Commission about how to proceed. He doesn't know if we want to have any input. Staff Liaison Zimmerman said Ms. Nyden is looking for comments from this Commission as well.

Commissioner McNelis inquired as to from what perspective. Commissioner Saxe said that he thinks that if we can talk about it in terms of sustainability, we can also

talk about what her recommendations are, and how consistent they are with the Environmental Sustainability Plan. He said that it certainly is moving in the right direction. He would be of the opinion that, from a sustainability perspective, drive-thrus are fundamentally antithetical to sustainability. He thinks that there can be some cases made for having a drive-thru if, for example, you have a pharmacy and you have people with ambulatory limitations.

From a sustainability perspective, Commissioner Saxe said that he is unable to see any justification for drive-throughs at all. He doesn't know what other people may feel about that, but he thinks Ms. Nyden's intent of limiting the location of drive-thrus, which would make them applicable only in very specific areas, is a step in the right direction. One of the other things she recommends is reducing the parking requirement. Right now, drive-thrus and dine-in restaurants have the same parking requirements, in terms of relative ratio of parking spaces to square footage. If you're talking about drive-thrus, she is suggesting there could perhaps be a different ratio. Instead of having both parking spaces and the drive-thru lanes, you could maybe only have the drive-thru lanes. That would be an improvement as well.

Chairperson Grossman noted that she thinks that some of the businesses that have drive-thrus are businesses that also are less sustainable overall.

Commissioner Saxe said that, in his review, he focused specifically on fast food drive-thrus, looking at the impact in terms of appropriate land use. That said, there are other types, such as pharmacies and banks. He thinks that Ms. Nyden was speaking to that broader set of land uses as well. He would not say that, categorically, there shouldn't be fast food establishments — though he is not a big fan of the idea of having more fast food establishments in the community. He thinks that there are characteristics of those types of businesses that we need to take a look at. Fundamentally, they are ancillary uses. We have a lot that are standalone. When they are standalone — especially with a drive-thru — then those really are a nuisance. If you have a food court in a shopping mall, where you have a lot of different kind of restaurants — that isn't the primary purpose of the shopping mall, but it is an ancillary use to that establishment — he thinks that there is a case that can be made for having different kinds of restaurants that are an ancillary use to some other kind of development.

Commissioner Saxe went on to note that he would say that if a business relies on drive-thru as a primary source of revenue, he doesn't think that is a reason why drive-thrus should be allowed. Many fast food establishments will tell you that they cannot survive without a drive-thru. He said that his feeling is that, in those cases, then we don't have to have that business in the community. However, if they can establish a presence without a drive-thru, then he would not necessarily say that business should not be here. He does think that the issue of single-use plastics, and that sort of thing, is something that we need to address more generally. He said that he thinks that it will be much more difficult getting drive-thru establishments on-board with what we want when it comes to issues like the use of single-use plastics, simply by the very nature of their business model. He would not say categorically that there shouldn't be any fast

food establishments or anything like that in the community. He would just say that that a business needing a drive-thru in order to be in business, is not reason enough for us to say that having a drive-thru is okay. That was the point of approaching the issue from the economic side of things. Additional discussion ensued.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said the question she would have is that automotive technology seems to be changing. She feels as though, at some point, the technology will take care of the emissions that are produced as a result of idling vehicles. It won't be for several years, but she would think that is coming. Commissioner Okallau concurred, but said that she think it is probably going to take a couple of decades before that is the case.

Commissioner Saxe noted that there is a lot more to the embedded carbon footprint of an automobile than just the emissions. Right now, if you go to certain areas of the community, you cannot walk around. It is not being built to minimize the number of trips taken by car. While, if you have a vehicle that has an internal combustion engine, you are generating emissions, then you are generating emissions. By contrast, if you have an electric vehicle, you are not generating emissions. However, there is still a significant environmental impact of depending upon an automobile. There also is a pretty significant impact on the economic resiliency of a community, if you have only one means of getting around. Additional discussion ensued.

Commissioner Okallau said that she appreciated Lauren Grodnicki's analysis of cars and emissions and trees, which demonstrated the order of magnitude. She said that she was very happy Ms. Grodnicki brought that to the table, but one thing that she herself sees and feels is that we are not going to be able to plant our way out of this. She thinks that we should most certainly plant more trees, but not as a solution to anything other than the fact that we need more trees.

Commissioner Render said that he was thinking if we want to have a more walkable community, we should have a zoning philosophy that encourages that. We do not want to create a situation where a permit is automatically issued. We should have a discussion about a walk-up window versus a drive-up window versus no drive-up window for any business. We cannot focus solely on food. For example he will, on occasion, use a drive-up window when banking. There will be five cars in the line, and only one station will be open, but there are three of them. So, maybe zoning might say that you must have more than one — or that you have to have two or three — but then it doesn't tell the bank that they must have tellers at all three. He would just like to be sure that there isn't an automatic rubber stamp, and wants for there to be more of a process or conversation for zoning when permits are granted. Of course this should be supported by collection of data that we can use to help us make decisions.

Commissioner DeCanniere said that when he did a walk audit with Commissioner Saxe, back in the fall of 2019, the whole issue of drive-thrus came up as well, so it is good to see that this issue is being considered and that things seem to be moving forward.

Chairperson Grossman inquired when we discuss walkability (outside of Downtown Skokie), whether Commissioner Saxe envisions having little shopping plazas, where there's a bigger parking lot and people go to all of the surrounding stores. What does walkability look like outside of the community's downtown?

Commissioner Saxe said that there are many ways in which this could be approached. Many places they talk about drive once, and then you go to multiple places in that one trip. Many of the newer places are single-occupancy vehicle, single destination trip, and getting away from that. The other is having more mixed-use development, so that you have more reasons to be in a place than just for single purpose or for a single time. That would reduce the number of car trips that would be necessary in a particular area.

Chairperson Grossman asked whether, in the second example provided, that would still require a large parking lot.

Commissioner Saxe said that he feels that we over allocate the parking right now by quite a bit. A lot of communities are eliminating parking minimums to allow for more opportunities for different kinds of businesses.

Chairperson Grossman inquired whether, when Commissioner Saxe is talking about "mixed-use," what kinds of developments he is referring to. Commissioner Saxe said it could be residential, it could be office space.

Commissioner Gershbein said that the other thing that comes to mind is the redevelopment of Westfield Old Orchard Shopping Center. It sounds like they are going for something of that sort (mixed-use development).

Commissioner Saxe indicated that they are looking at doing a similar thing at Village Crossing Shopping Center as well. He went on to say that the other thing that he thinks we need to come to terms with is that we look at commercial areas, and we think about commercial activity, but the reality is that the nature of commercial activity is changing. Retail is cratering. So, it could be that many of these areas should not continue to be thought of as commercial areas. For instance, we've been looking at Main Street, and everybody thinks "Well, how do we revitalize the commercial area on Main Street?" Maybe you don't. Maybe you just have a certain amount of that area that is then going to be residential, and then you have a much more compressed commercial area with commercial activity, but it also includes mixed-use. So, there are residential uses mixed in with the commercial ones.

Chairperson Grossman said that it seems like a lot of these new developments that include residential and office are great if you're coming to that as a new resident. However, almost all of Skokie is already developed.

Commissioner Saxe said that, over a period of time, there are going to be redevelopment opportunities. One example is the area around where the Carvana

tower was formerly proposed to be. That whole area is ripe for redevelopment. It doesn't have to be office. Right now, it's a single-use. It's zoned for office use. We can reimagine what that entire area is. It doesn't have to be the same thing, and that's a pretty substantial piece of property. There's a lot of opportunity to rethink what's going on. Similarly, the cement site (on Old Orchard Road) is a pretty substantial site, and that was redeveloped recently. If you look at some of the retail on Skokie Boulevard, there is going to be a lot of turnover in that area over the next few years. There's an opportunity to really rethink that whole area. So, there may be some opportunities to do things differently, rather than trying to retain what is already there or substitute for another single-use kind of activity.

Ms. Grodnicki said that during a forum that was held in 2019, where people talked about what they would like to see in Skokie, one recurring theme was that we want to have more shopping where we live. For instance, she doesn't want to have to go all the way over there to the grocery store. She wants to have a little grocery store nearby. Commissioner Buccola noted that is one of the keys to walkability. Ms. Grodnicki concurred. Additional discussion ensued. Ms. Grodnicki also clarified that what she is advocating for is for changing the zoning of some areas, so where previously you only could have had residential, you can now have a grocery store, cafe, etc.

Chairperson Grossman said that another thing she had been wondering about is if you have fast food restaurants that don't have drive-thrus, but that are not in the city where everyone is walking, do they then require bigger parking lots and more pavement than a drive-thru would? If parking lots are as full as they are, or they are two-thirds full at busier times, how would you address that then? It seems that they would need that additional space for all of those people with cars who are then going inside instead.

Commissioner Saxe said that what we've done with a lot of the way that we do things is that we have supplanted foot traffic with car traffic. The reality is that there is just not enough real estate to keep doing this, unless you spread everything out. Chairperson Grossman said that you still need to have space for people who are coming to that business from somewhere else with their cars.

Commissioner Saxe said that the question is what we are prioritizing. Are we building a place to drive through, or are we building a place where we can be? Let's build places where people can be and imagine that, rather than trying to figure out how we are going to fit all of these cars in places that end up making the place unpleasant to be in. He went on to note that, from a sustainability perspective, he does not feel as though it makes sense to fill up the town with more spaces that have been designed around cars. Additional discussion ensued.

Commissioner Saxe asked what it is we would like to do with regards to the recommendations on drive-thrus in the community. He said that he feels Commissioners should read it and get some thoughts on it, and he can go through it and perhaps identify some areas and how they relate to the Environmental Sustainability Plan, so that people can have a guided walk through it.

Vice Chair McNelis inquired as to what is being sought from the SEAC where this is concerned. Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that they are just looking for commentary on the memo and the discussion that took place. He went on to ask about what other cities are doing to make these businesses more sustainable. Additional discussion ensued.

Chairperson Grossman said that it seems that this issue is being put to us, though not with a specific prompt. Staff Liaison Zimmerman agreed and said that she feels as though it is kind of open in terms of what this Commission wants to do. It's a complex issue, and perhaps not everybody agrees with every single thing that everyone is saying. It may be too difficult to give one report. She went on to say that she was taking notes during this discussion, and she can certainly compile notes from the meeting. If somebody wanted to do something else and summarize, and have pictures that support that, then that would be okay.

Commissioner Saxe said that he wants to bring it back and suggest something specific. He said that Commissioners should read what she says, because Ms. Nyden has some very specific recommendations that she makes in the memo. If there are suggestions that go above and beyond what she is suggesting, then perhaps we could suggest that, or if people feel as though her recommendations are good and that she should proceed, we can let her know that as well.

b. Compost Week

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that the composting drop-off sites have been going over really well. They had to add twice-weekly service at both the Devonshire and Village Hall sites. They had to add totes to every other location. Contamination has been pretty low. Occasionally they will see some plastic mixed in. The other day, someone dropped their compost off at the Public Works site, and they had all of these deli containers. They just threw them all in with their compost, but it is rare. Such instances are unusual. Collective Resource has not been too worried about it. For Compost Week, which is the first week in May, the buckets that they ordered have come in. They are waiting for the stickers to come in. They will be putting waterproof stickers on the buckets, which will list all of the different compostable items. The goal is to launch two additional compost drop-off sites for Compost week. One location would be Fire Station 17 on the east side of the community, because there isn't a site in that area right now. Niles Township also agreed to put some totes over by them, so there's a nice equity component. They're really excited, and so all that remains is for the signage to be ordered and to get the sites up and running.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that she and Ms. Grodnicki had also been discussing doing some pop-up composting sites near synagogues for Passover. She doesn't know if it's going to work just yet, but they are trying. Chairperson Grossman asked if this would take place before Passover. Ms. Grodnicki confirmed that the intention is to do this prior to Passover, when people are cleaning their homes in preparation for the holiday. Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that she thinks that if, for some reason, it doesn't work out this year, it is on their radar for next year.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman also noted that the City of Chicago reached out regarding our composting program. She spoke with them for about an hour, and they were fantastic. Additional discussion ensued. She also noted that for Pi Day (March 14th), the Village sent out a message about how people should try to recycle their clean pizza boxes, if they are able to do so. She said that the issue with recycling a pizza box is not the box itself. The problem is the grease that can be on them. They want people to recycle as much as possible. However, any pizza boxes that are greasy should be composted rather than recycled.

c. Action Items for SEAC in the plan

Chairperson Grossman said that we had spoken last time about a two-faceted approach to implementation of the Environmental Sustainability Plan on our end of things. One was the assignment of liaisons to each sector of the plan. The other one was going through the plan and picking out some of the Action Items that we thought we would like to pursue as a Commission. The complicating factor there is that we do not really know what the Staff Team is working on at the moment. It's not productive if we were to duplicate what Staff is already doing.

Commissioner Gershbein said that there could be items that they have reached out to us about. Chairperson Grossman noted that there have been a few of those. Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that because we have bumped this month's meeting up by a week (it was originally scheduled for March 28th), so we missed a staff meeting in there. She said that she can report back to us about the staff meetings, but they are two hours long, they are really fast-paced, and we would use up all of our own meeting time just learning about what Village staff is doing. The model she has been using is that she has made note of all of the SEAC liaisons, and then whenever staff needs help or wants some input, then they get the contact information for the applicable SEAC sector liaisons.

Commissioner Okallau said that she could see another way this could work as well. If there are things that Commissioners see that we are passionate about, we could forward that to Staff Liaison Zimmerman and then she could pass that along to the appropriate Staff Liaison for that particular sector of the Plan. Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that she could email out the Staff Liaison list to all of the Commissioners as well. Additional discussion ensued.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman asked the Commission about how we might go about pulling in other volunteer groups that may want to help. Go Green Skokie is one example.

Vice Chair McNelis said that he likes the idea of Staff Liaison Zimmerman providing Commissioners with a list of all of the Staff Liaisons, and which sector/group they're assigned to, because then Commissioners can look through the Plan, identify what they would like to work on, and then they know who they are able to reach out to in order to see what staff within that sector are working on. If they aren't working on it, that item can then be brought to the Commission, and we can talk about it as a group.

Commissioner Saxe said Staff Liaison Zimmerman talked about reporting on the progress that Village staff is making. He then inquired whether the Commission will be getting regular updates on the progress that is being made.

Commissioner Saxe suggested that Commissioners could also monitor the Village website to see what progress is being made, and inquired as to whether the webpage is detailed enough for Commissioners to be able to get a sense of what is going on or not. Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that she would say that there are detailed notes on the website. However, she would say that the most helpful thing may be if they did a quarterly meeting or a bi-annual meeting or something of that sort, providing periodic updates. There's just so much information from each meeting. Commissioner Saxe said that perhaps a bi-annual meeting (at which the staff's progress is reported upon) would be good. It could be a high-level overview of what has been going on. Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that there is a lot that is going on. The benefit of that is that there is a lot of work being done. The difficult part is figuring out how best to ensure that everybody is aware of all that is going on. Additional discussion ensued.

Commissioner Saxe inquired as to whether hiring a Sustainability Coordinator is a part of next year's budget. Staff Liaison Zimmerman said she had not heard that it isn't. She is not sure that she would be the person who would know. Additional discussion ensued, including the possibility of funding such a position via a grant. Commissioner Okallau noted that if a grant were available, it may only be able to fund such a position for a year. Commissioner Gershbein said it would be nice to see a commitment to this position.

Commissioner Okallau went on to say she does think that this position should exist. She just doesn't know that a grant would be the most effective or efficient. Commissioner Saxe said that if there were grant funding available that could support the position, he thinks that would be something feasible to do, but the Village really needs to commit to the position. His concern is that if there isn't somebody in that position, there are a lot of opportunities that exist now, given the recent Federal legislation. There is money that is available. There are a lot of opportunities. He was talking with some people about this, and there are opportunities, for example, for residents to take advantage of some things that are consistent with what we are doing. It would be nice to have somebody with the Village who serves as a resource that people could go to, or who would promote these opportunities, so that people could take advantage of them. That is not going to happen if it is not a dedicated position within Village government. He is aware the Village has lost a lot of positions through attrition and through a hiring freeze. Thus, he is unaware as to what the capacity of the existing staff is. However, his sense is that there is not a lot of capacity to take on additional work.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that staff, in general, has been supportive of the Plan. Even though everyone is busy, everyone supports it. She said that she also wanted to acknowledge the Skokie Police and Fire Departments, both of which are very supportive of the Environmental Sustainability Plan as well.

Commissioner DeCanniere noted that he spoke with Communications Manager Meredith Gioia recently. He wanted to get her take on an idea that he had in terms of public education / community engagement. He went on to inquire whether Staff Liaison Zimmerman feels as though there is anyone else who he should be getting in touch with about this matter, so that they can also be included in any conversations. Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that he could start with her, and then they will figure it out as things go along.

d. Regional Leaf Blower Report Discussion

Commissioner Saxe said that he sent an email to Commissioners. There was a task force that involved a number of municipalities as well as some landscaping companies, and the intent was to look at ideas for how to regulate leaf blowers. They came up with a final report in December of last year. That's available at that link in the email. In it, there are a number of recommendations. He hasn't gone through it in too much detail, but they provide some alternatives, such as having periods of the year in which there is a ban on leaf blowers. They also talk about a gradual process of limiting gas powered ones. So, if a community is at the point where there are no restrictions, then maybe they move to having a period of the year where there are restrictions on their use. If there already are restrictions in place within a community, maybe you eliminate gas-powered leaf blowers, allowing electric leaf blowers, and also allowing for a period of time to make that transition. It's a thoughtful set of recommendations.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said Staff will start reviewing the leaf blower ordinance. She also said that this report is a thoughtful document. There was a diverse group of people involved — different municipalities, landscapers, naturalists. There is a lot to go over. Additional discussion ensued.

IV. Public Comments

No public comments were received.

V. Next Meeting

Based on the expected availability of Commission members, the next meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 25, 2023.

VI. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 8:45 PM.