



NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes December 7, 2022
Duluth City Hall, Conference Room 330

I. Call to Order

Chair Lindgren called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Commissioners Present: Lori Dando, Judy Gibbs, John Lindgren, Mike Schrage, Nancy Schuldt, Tiffany Sprague

Absent: Sophia Green, Allison Ray

Staff Present: Allison Brooks, Clark Christenson, Jim Filby Williams, Kate Kubiak

III. Approval of the Agenda

Vice Chair Schuldt made a motion to approve the agenda; seconded by Commissioner Schrage. Unanimously approved.

IV. Approval of the November 2, 2022 Meeting Minutes

The roll call will be updated to reflect that Commissioner Sprague was in attendance. **Commissioner Dando made a motion to approve the November 2, 2022 meeting minutes with revision; seconded by Commissioner Sprague. Unanimously approved.**

V. Old Business

A.) EAB Management Plan Revisions [Clark Christenson]

Christenson provided a summary of the proposed revisions to the Emerald Ash Borer Management Plan with reference to the previous discussion at the November 2 meeting. Williams commented that the City is not looking to provide a substantial revision to the plan, but rather revising to provide necessary course corrections on the needed procedures described within the plan.

Commissioner Dando asked for clarification on the total number of trees that still need to be removed. Christenson responded that roughly 3,200 boulevard ash trees remain and that there is a goal to treat 37%, which would be 1,184 trees treated and 2,016 trees removed. Chair Lindgren commented that the Plan provides latitude for the City to retain ash trees long-term through consistent treatment, and asked if there is a goal value for the number of trees to be retained. Christenson responded that the goal remains to be determined, but a reasonable expectation would be approximately 100 trees scattered throughout Duluth. Up to three dozen trees have been identified for consistent treatment currently. The determination of whether a tree will be retained is influenced by many factors, such as previous treatments, size, canopy cover in the surrounding area, and available resources to support the tree through time.

Williams contextualized the priority for the urban forest as a whole. The City has fewer staff and resources than when the plan was initially developed. There are significant portions of the community with insufficient tree cover and the priority is to plant new trees in these identified gaps. With this priority, it is important to recognize that there is a limit to what can be accomplished with available resources. Chair Lindgren expressed a preference for the City to preserve as many large, old growth trees as is possible with the



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available resources. Chair Lindgren asked if verbiage could be incorporated into the plan to express this desire. Williams responded that it is possible to include language on the matter, and reiterated that there will continue to be very limited capacity in the future to allocate resources for this purpose.

Commissioner Dando identified a few grammatical and clarification edits.

Commissioner Schrage made a motion to approve the proposed revisions to the Emerald Ash Borer Management Plan with inclusion of edits identified in discussion; seconded by Commissioner Schuldt. Unanimously approved.

B.) Headwaters Partnership MOU

The Lake Superior Headwaters Sustainability Partnership was presented at the November 2 meeting. Williams provided an update on the progress of interdepartmental conversations relating to the Partnership. Planning and Economic Development and the Chief Sustainability Officer have reviewed the proposed MOU. There is strong cross-departmental support for the intent of the Partnership. The MOU does not contain any prohibitive language or considerations that would hinder adoption or implementation of the Partnership. Commissioner Schuldt commented that the Reservation Business Committee of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa has approved execution of the MOU.

Commissioner Sprague commented excitement at the opportunities for the Partnership and asked what the City will first pursue within the Partnership. Kubiak responded that the first priority will be cultivating the proposed collaborative avenues and establishing stability for the Partnership.

Commissioner Sprague made a motion to support the adoption of the Lake Superior Headwaters Sustainability Partnership Memorandum of Understanding by the City of Duluth. Commissioner Schuldt seconded. Unanimously approved.

C.) Natural Resources Funding Update [Jim Filby Williams]

Williams provided an update that the proposed Park Fund referendum did not pass, which will further constrain the available resources for parks and natural resources. There are no changes to staffing in 2023. Williams and staff are pursuing a multi-pronged approach to find alternative strategies for increasing funding and reducing costs. The NRC will continue to receive updates, as more information is determined.

Commissioner Schuldt asked about the funding source for the extensive Lakewalk repairs. Williams responded that there is roughly \$20,000,000 of Lakewalk work to be completed, and of that, nearly \$18,000,000 has been state and federally funded. The remaining work to be completed will be funded through general fund bonding. The outsized economic importance of the Lakewalk and waterfront provide some level of justification for that level of investment.

VI. New Business

No new business.

VII. Staff Reports



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A.) Natural Resources Coordinator Report [Kate Kubiak]

Kubiak provided a report on recent projects and activities. Kubiak highlighted a success that Park Maintenance has reduced salt application on the City sidewalks and trails they maintain by 80% in the past two years. Staff have transitioned to applying more grit and physical ice removal to reduce salt application.

Commissioner Sprague asked about the evaluation of the ongoing partnership with the Community Action Duluth (CAD) Stream Corps. Kubiak responded that should CAD decide to move away from stream corps and invasive plant removal work, then we would likely move forward with opportunities for partnership with the Conservation Corps.

Staff are exploring the possibility of conducting prescribed burns at pollinator plantings to control invasive competition and stimulate native plants. The work would be contracted with a burn plan and approval from the Fire Marshal. Chair Lindgren recommended the native planting at Chambers Grove for consideration.

B.) Forester's Report [Clark Christenson]

Christenson provided a report on recent activities and highlighted that no bids were received for the recent forest thinning request for proposals. Christenson will continue to evaluate options to increase interest as the project would be very beneficial for forest health.

C.) Director's Report [Jim Filby Williams]

Williams provided an update that there will be a new level of emphasis to integrating meaningful environmental justice investments with natural resources improvement projects through potential state and federal funding opportunities. Potential opportunities could include the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the Environmental Protection Agency, which would seek to connect communities with the river following the extensive progress relating to the Area of Concern. It is increasingly likely that the City will be able to work with partner organizations to provide and improve access. Chair Lindgren asked if there is going to be an effort to quantify the environmental justice work that has been completed. Williams responded that there may be opportunities to quantify and demonstrate improvements.

VIII. Announcements

No announcements.

IX. Public Comment

Louise Levy provided public comment on natural resources funding and the EAB plan revisions.

X. Adjournment

Commissioner Schuldt made a motion to adjourn; second by Commissioner Schrage. Unanimously approved.

Meeting adjourned at 7:07 p.m.

Next Meeting - Wednesday, February 1 at 6:00 p.m. in Duluth City Hall, Conference Room 330.