

Energy Plan Commission

Meeting Minutes July 20, 2022

Regular Meeting - City Hall Room 155

Attendance: Commissioners: Alison Hoxie, Gary Olson, Cassandra Theisen, Robert Reichert, Scott Wishart, Brian Hinderliter, & Tari Rayala.

City Staff: Mindy Granley, Sustainability Officer; Mike LeBeau, Construction Project Supervisor; Jim Filby Williams, Director – Property, Parks, & Libraries; Jennifer Ondrik, Administrative Specialist; Julia Forberg, AmeriCorps VISTA member serving as Energy and Sustainability Assistant. **Absent:** Alex Jackson, Energy Coordinator.

Call to Order:

The meeting started at 4:05 pm.

Old Business:

New Commissioner, Tari Rayala introduced herself to the Commission and spoke regarding her interests and background.

New Business:

EV Charging in Duluth – Julia Forberg, Energy and Sustainability Assistant presented “Who’s in charge of Charging?” and explained the roles and responsibilities of the three main players (Federal, State, & Municipal Government) and provided examples from other cities on creative EV charging infrastructure solutions and funding strategies. She highlighted ways in which the Commissioners could provide support and community input.

American Lung Association / Electric Vehicles – Jon Hunter and Lisa Thurstin spoke on ways the American Lung Association has been working to demonstrate ways to transition away from combustion and toward non-pollution technologies and explained how this can yield major benefits to lung health, air quality and the climate. The group discussed current EV projects throughout Minnesota and highlighted an existing nonprofit carsharing program ([HOURCAR](#)) available in the Twin Cities. The group discussed some upcoming grant opportunities related to EV buses in Duluth.

Geo Grid Concept – Commissioner Olson gave a brief overview of a new concept of providing heating and cooling to communities and commercial buildings by use of an underground geothermal grid. This concept would theoretically distribute 45-55 °F liquid using ground source heat pumps. The Commission viewed a [short video highlighting this innovative solution](#). The EPC is requesting that the City of Duluth research the feasibility of this concept and seek grant funding for a potential pilot project in the future.

Energy Coordinator Update – Mike LeBeau updated the Commission on the City Hall HVAC Renovation Project. This project is scheduled to commence mid-September, and will be ongoing until late 2024. This project includes the addition of fresh air ventilation, upgrades to heating, cooling, and dehumidification systems, and the renewal of electrical and building controls. The Facilities staff are excited to start this project and to bring these long overdue upgrades for air quality, ventilation and occupant comfort to the City’s flagship facility.

Sustainability Update – Mindy Granley provided an extensive report of the work she and her staff have been focused on over the last two months including an update on recent grant awards and opportunities (see attached report).

Future Meeting Topics / Announcements:

Comfort Systems representatives will join our meeting in September to discuss their plan for expanded services and clean energy alternatives to natural gas.

Commissioner Reichert would like to have microphones available at our next meeting.

Public Comment:

Lora Wedge spoke in support of the Commission inviting Comfort Systems to the September meeting and provided a listing of opportunities and questions to consider (see attached report).

Adjournment:

There was a motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:49 PM, M/S/C.

Comments for Comfort Systems from Lora Wedge

Excited Comfort Systems will be at your next meeting.

I'm a member of Duluth Climate and Energy Network - not speaking for the group but want to share some of the conversations we've been having.

We're supportive of the mayor's statement from the State of the City Address for Comfort Systems to offer expanded services and clean energy alternatives to natural gas.

We see many opportunities in doing so:

- o Opportunity to meet our city's climate and emissions goals as methane is one of Duluth's highest areas of GHG emissions.
- o Opportunity for Duluth residents and businesses to save money as the cost of gas and demand rises and technology allows people to shift to other energy sources.
- o Opportunity to reduce the energy burden of our low-income residents, those who are least able to afford switching to other sources of heating will be left paying for gas. The potential problem is that with fewer customers, prices could increase, raising prices for those who can least afford it.
- o Opportunity to improve community health from better indoor air quality when not using methane appliances.
- o Opportunity for expanded business opportunities. As community members move away from fossil fuels and technology like Cold Climate Air Source Heat Pumps are increasingly able to replace much of the methane Comfort Systems provides, there is an opportunity to be thoughtful about new models that will not leave us with stranded assets of gas infrastructure and investments and instead have new services available.

Questions:

- o What is Comfort Systems thinking in terms of expanded services?
- o How might Comfort Systems CIP funds be best utilized to help meet the city's climate action goals and the needs of low-income residents?
- o How is Comfort Systems thinking about putting more resources into energy transition?