

Inver Grove Heights Environmental Advisory Commission
8150 Barbara Avenue
Thursday, August 25, 2022, at 7:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

1. Call to Order

The Environmental Advisory Commission of Inver Grove Heights met in City Council Chambers on Thursday, August 25, 2022. Chair Boehmke called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Present: Chair Nichole Boehmke, Commissioners; Sarah Brass, Sara Goodman, Nick Ruiz, Ted Trenzeluk, Larry Moehring, Kevin Sethre, Todd Kruse
Absent: Brian Barner (excused)

3. Presentations

A. SolSmart Program Overview

Emma Parkson, Senior Program Associate of Great Plain Institute, presented a powerpoint presentation to the Environmental Advisory Commission on SolSmart. Powerpoint slides were presented as follows:

What is SolSmart

- SolSmart is a national designation and technical assistance program that helps local governments make it faster, easier, and more affordable for residents and businesses to go solar.
- A SolSmart designation:
 - Recognizes communities that have taken key steps to address local barriers to solar energy and foster the growth of mature local solar markets.
 - Demonstrates that a community is “open for solar business,” making it attractive to solar companies and other business development.
 - SolSmart provides targeted, no-cost technical assistance to help communities reduce soft costs and earn SolSmart designation.

SolSmart Actions

- Increase transparency
 - Post a permitting checklist online
 - Develop a solar landing page
- Increase understanding
 - Provide training on solar PV to staff working in permitting and inspection
 - Train planning staff on planning and zoning best practices for solar PV
- Reduce barriers
 - Decrease permit turnaround time
 - Codify that solar PV is a by-right accessory use in the zoning ordinance
- Benefits:
 - Streamline processes + Clear solar guidelines
 - Better submittals to local government departments + Solar training for staff
 - Shorter processing times
 - Time savings for department staff + Budget savings for local governments

The SolSmart Designation Process

- 1) Visit the website solsmart.org
- 2) Read Program Guide
- 3) Complete consultation
- 4) Submit written commitment
- 5) Utilize Technical Assistance
- 6) Submit application
- 7) Publicize successful designation

Technical Assistance

- SolSmart technical assistance providers work with elected officials, local government staff, and community members to help communities update processes using established best practices
- The technical assistance is funded by SolSmart, and there is no cost to the community
 - Communities must commit staff time to working toward SolSmart designation
 - Communities must demonstrate a commitment to achieving designation
- Delivery of technical assistance can be tailored to fit the community needs
 - Online - resource library, email, webinars, templates
 - Phone - conference calls
 - In person - site visits, technical workshops

Designation Structure

- To receive designation, communities must complete the following:
 - Bronze: Complete 3 prerequisites, 20 pts in Permitting & Inspections, 20 pts in Planning & Zoning, 60 pts total.
 - Silver: Bronze requirements, 3 additional prerequisites, 100 pts total.
 - Gold: Silver requirements, 2 additional prerequisites, 200 pts total.

Core Competencies: Criteria and Designation

- 75 unique credits in 5 different categories that promote best practices to help local governments improve their solar markets
- Each credit has a corresponding point value ranging from 5 to 20
- Foundational Categories:
 - Permitting and Inspection
 - Planning and Zoning
- Special Focus Categories:
 - Government Operations
 - Community Engagement
 - Market Development

Designation Criteria

- Permitting and Inspection | 20 Credits | 205 Points
- Planning and Zoning | 23 Credits | 185 Points
- Government Operations | 10 Credits | 160 Points
- Community Engagement | 12 Credits | 70 Points
- Market Development | 10 Credits | 155 Points

Designation Review Process

- Ensure that applicants are evaluated fairly
- Ensure that the SolSmart designation is meaningful, robust, and highly valued
- Provide input regarding possible improvement to solar policies
- Discover particularly noteworthy accomplishments to highlight for press releases
- Steps:
 - 1) Community submits application
 - 2) Two reviewers independently evaluate the claims made in the application
 - 3) Reviewers compare their findings and generate feedback reports
 - 4) Results are sent to the TA provider and Advisor for sharing with community

SolSmart by the Numbers

- National: 474 Designees; 176 gold, 118 silver, 180 bronze
- Minnesota: 43 Designees; 9 gold, 15 silver, 19 bronze

Technical Assistance Guides, Templates, and Resources

- The SolSmart program has an extensive resource library to make the designation process as easy as possible for communities.
 - The updated [program guide](#) walks through each credit of the SolSmart designation criteria. The program guide has links to templates and other resources directly relevant to each credit.
 - More in-depth resources can be found on the [SolSmart Resources](#) page. Here you'll find webinars and issue briefs tagged with the specific criteria they address.
 - Within the resources are several training webinars specific to the SolSmart credits. These are free and available to anyone.

Commissioner Kruse asked what is the highest value carbon management solution for local governments from cost-benefit analysis standpoint. Mrs. Parkson stated she would have to defer the question to their carbon management teams as she works on the communities team.

Commissioner Kruse asked what area GPI serves. Mrs. Parkson noted they have expanded to offer their services through the mid-west and nationally.

Commissioner Kruse noted he had read that 50% of energy produced is wasted along the transmission line and asked what the solution is for this. Mrs. Parkson stated she would have to defer the question to their energy systems teams.

Commissioner Moehring asked what the most common issues are for communities found during the technical assessments. Mrs. Parkson answered most issues are related to the zoning ordinances. Often communities do not mention solar in their zoning ordinance. Many communities work with GPI to update their zoning ordinance and include solar development parameters.

Ally Sutherland, Environmental Specialist, asked how long the technical assessment typically takes. Mrs. Parkson noted it typically takes less than 1 business week.

Commissioner Sethre asked what the cost is for city staff time. Mrs. Parkson stated that will vary based on the community's goals and how much the city wants to achieve. Technical assistance providers take a lot of the leg work off staff. City staff do more of the facilitation between departments.

Commissioner Brass asked how many communities do not make it to the bronze level. Mrs. Parkson stated it's very likely a community will achieve bronze as it's easiest to achieve. The intention of bronze is to document where city processes are currently at. Where, for example, Silver requires more effort, such as changes to zoning ordinance.

Commissioner Trenzeluk asked what percentage of a sustainability staff member is typically needed for this work, for example, what was needed for the city of South St. Paul. Mrs. Parkson estimated about 1/8 of an FTE for the year. This varies by community and the technical assistance provider is there to help with the leg work. Commissioner Boehmke noted that there is no timeline for the program and a community can work at its own pace. Mrs. Parkson stated that is correct however the technical assistance provider will continue to help keep you on track.

Mrs. Sutherland noted city leadership has already requested she to look into potential updates to the city code related to solar development, however it has not yet been determined that a city goal would be to achieve all designation of the SolSmart program. She asked if a city could join with the intent to just achieve gold or silver. Mrs. Parkson responded yes, and technical assistance will continue to be available any time after joining. Mrs. Sutherland noted this work would fall within her environmental planning role and within the bounds of city council and leadership goals.

Commissioner Kruse asked what the city process would be for the city to move forward with SolSmart. Mrs. Sutherland stated that the Environmental Advisory Commission and City Council would review a program proposal, and possibly the Planning Commission if recommended by the City Planner.

4. Approval of Minutes

A. Minutes of Thursday, June 23, 2022, Environmental Advisory Commission Meeting

Motion by Commissioner Sethre, seconded by Commissioner Trenzeluk to approve the minutes from Thursday, June, 23, 2022 as submitted.

Ayes: 8

Nays: 0 Motion carried.

5. Regular Agenda

6. Public Comment

7. Commissioner and Staff Comments

B. Solar Power Hour Update

Mrs. Sutherland shared there were 49 people in attendance at the Grow Solar's Solar Power Hour event on August 4, majority were IGH residents. Maybe people at the event asked questions related to if solar was right for their property and showed interest in the group buy opportunity. Planning staff and Community Development as a response believe the city should look into updating our zoning code to reflect solar development.

The Solar Power Hour workshop included background on home energy efficiency, solar panel basics, if it's right for your property, and differences between roof top and ground mounted options. Grow Solar selected a solar developer who will offer a group buy opportunity to residents and small businesses within the Twin Cities metro. The more buyers who commit to installing solar panels through this program, the lower the cost is per person. The program's goal is to make the solar installation process easier and more accessible through affordability. Registration for a final free virtual workshop is still available at www.growsolar.org/twin-cities.

Commissioner Brass noted she would be supportive of the SolSmart program as it's free and the Solar Power Hour shows there is community interest in solar.

Commissioner Trenzeluk stated this is similar to the GreenStep City program, that provides free technical assistance to cities.

Commissioner Sethre suggested this could be taken to the City Council. Commissioner Trenzeluk suggested the EAC could make a recommendation to the City Council for the City to pursue the SolSmart program. Mrs. Sutherland recommended the EAC make a motion for staff to continue researching the SolSmart program. She would then bring the conversation back to the EAC with a staff recommendation and request the EAC make a recommendation to the City Council.

Motion by Commissioner Sethre, seconded by Commissioner Kruse to request staff continue researching the SolSmart program and bring an update back to the EAC.

Ayes: 8

Nays: 0 Motion carried.

A. Organics Drop Off Update

Mrs. Sutherland shared an update related to the organic drop site program the Commission was interested in including in the 2023 EAC workplan. This is a program offered by Dakota County where residents can dispose of their food waste and compostable paper for free at an organics drop off. City and County staff are looking into feasible locations for this in IGH. Mrs. Sutherland noted city council and staff received emails from three residents expressing interest in locating an organics site in IGH. Municipal and County properties are being considered at this time, and she will bring an update back to the Commission.

B. Meeting Time Survey

Commissioner Sethre requested the Commission consider an earlier meeting time. Mrs. Sutherland stated the two determining factors are 1) Commissioner availability, and 2) Town Square's availability. Town Square could accommodate a 6 pm, 6:30 pm, or continue as at 7pm. Mrs. Sutherland took roll call and because 3 commissioners preferred a 7 pm start time, she advised the 7 pm start time is continued. This can be revisited again after the next round of appointments if the Commission would like.

Commissioner Comments

Commissioner Sethre shared the Commission was invited to a tour of Republic Services Recycling Facility (Material Recovery Facility) and Pine Bend Landfill. He noted the tours were informative and would recommend a tour to all residents.

Commissioner Kruse shared that Soil and Water District (SWCD) is a local environmental agency. He recommends the EAC invite SWCD to speak to the Commission. Commissioner Goodman noted she has gone through SWCD's Landscaping for Clean Water program.

Commissioner Ruiz shared he joined the Master Recycling/Composter Program.

Motion by Commissioner Kruse. Seconded by Chair Boehmke to invite the SWCD to speak at a future EAC meeting.

Ayes: 8

Nays: 0 Motion carried.

8. Adjourn

Commission adjourned at 8:09 p.m.

Ayes: 8

Nays: 0 Motion carried.