

Inver Grove Heights Environmental Advisory Commission
8150 Barbara Avenue
Thursday, May 16, 2024 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, May 16, 2024. Chair Goodman called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

2. Roll Call

Present: Chair Sara Goodman; Commissioners: Nick Ruiz, Patti Mikulski, Marjorie Savage, Brian Barner
Absent: Nichole Boehmke, Ted Trenzeluk, Kevin Sethre, Vacancy

3. Presentations

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

A. Approval of Minutes from the Thursday, April 25, 2024 Environmental Advisory Commission Meeting

Motion by Commissioner Mikulski, second by Commissioner Ruiz, to approve the minutes from Thursday, April 25, 2024, as submitted.

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0 Motion carried.

5. Regular Agenda

A. Consider Recommendations for Sustainable IGH Awards

Environmental Specialist Ally Sutherland presented a program overview, including the requirements for recognition at the Bronze, Silver, and Gold levels.

Bronze recognition requires the following actions:

1. Practice energy efficiency
2. Practice water conservation
3. Recycle at your home or business following Dakota County's recycling rules
4. Volunteer or donate to benefit the IGH community
5. Support pollinators or plant native vegetation

Silver and Gold recognition require the above actions plus additional actions (five for Silver, ten for Gold) from the following categories:

- Energy actions
- Landscaping and water actions
- Waste actions

- Community actions

Environmental Specialist Ally Sutherland said 18 applications were received, 13 from residents and 5 from businesses. In total, 601 sustainable actions were identified.

Staff recommended the following awards:

- Residents: 2 silver, 11 gold
- Businesses: 5 gold

Environmental Specialist Ally Sutherland highlighted some photos from residents and businesses, including pollinator gardens, a give and take table, and a water bottle filling station.

Environmental Specialist Ally Sutherland said that she followed up with applicants to clarify actions as needed. The applicants' additional comments are included in the packet.

Also, some actions were not accepted for recognition consideration, including business actions included in residential applications, residential actions included in business applications, actions taken outside of Inver Grove Heights and neighboring communities, and actions that did not meet expectations.

Environmental Specialist Ally Sutherland asked the EAC to consider the following questions when selecting a resident and business for the Special Recognition Award:

- Does the application include one or more innovative and/or high-impact actions?
- Do the applicant's achievements have a high potential to inspire other residents or businesses to take action?
- How many actions has the applicant completed in total, and in each category?

Environmental Specialist Ally Sutherland mentioned the following timeline for the award process:

- 6/10/24: City Council Meeting, consideration of approval
- 6/11/24: Applicant notification of award type
- 6/24/24: City Council meeting, award ceremony

Commissioner Barner asked if anyone applied for Bronze. Environmental Specialist Ally Sutherland replied that all applicants completed more than the five actions required; therefore, they all surpassed the Bronze award requirement.

Commissioner Barner asked about the vetting process for actions. Environmental Specialist Ally Sutherland answered that she asked applicants for more information when needed for clarity.

Commissioner Barner asked about the number of actions vetted. Environmental Specialist Ally Sutherland responded that the number was less than 10; some aspects of the application led to confusion about personal versus business actions.

Commissioner Savage asked about whether the recognition is a one-time thing, or if applicants can reapply annually. Environmental Specialist Ally Sutherland answered that the Special Recognition Award would be annual, but that applicants who received Bronze and Silver could reapply to get Gold.

Commissioner Mikulski commended all the applicants for the number of actions completed.

Motion by Commissioner Savage, second by Commissioner Ruiz, to approve the staff recommendation for Bronze, Silver, and Gold awards, as submitted.

Ayes: 5
Nays: 0 Motion carried.

Discussion of Special Recognition - Residential Applicants

Commissioner Mikulski asked whether the consideration for Special Recognition should primarily concern the number of actions completed. She suggested 30 as a threshold for achieving Special Recognition. Chair Goodman clarified that four applicants met that standard.

Commissioner Savage recommended Robert Heidenreich for recognition due to his 40 beehives, his maple syruping, and his helping neighbors. She also recommended Jeff Parsons due to his work preventing bird-window collisions and his efforts to teach seed collection.

Commissioner Barner recommended Robert Heidenreich based on his energy actions and Jeff Parsons for his landscaping actions.

Chair Goodman recommended Karen Asmundson due to her promotion of efficiency and sustainability via starting the local Fix-It Clinic, participating in the Clean Water Program and the Recycling Ambassador Program, creating a rain garden, and working with kids.

Commissioner Ruiz recommended Robert Heidenreich and Jeff Parsons. He commended all the applicants for their efforts.

Motion by Commissioner Mikulski, second by Commissioner Savage, to award the Special Recognition to Jeff Parsons.

Ayes: 3
Nays: N/A (Voting was not completed; motion did not carry.)

Motion by Commissioner Mikulski, second by Commissioner Savage, to withdraw previous motion.

Ayes: 5
Nays: 0 Motion carried.

Commissioners asked to review Jeff Parsons and Robert Heidenreich's applications. Both applications were reviewed by the Commission.

Commissioner Ruiz said that he favored Robert Heidenreich due to the breadth of his actions, but that he liked all three applicants.

Chair Goodman said that she favored Karen Asmundson due to her community outreach efforts.

Commissioner Barner said that he favored Robert Heidenreich. He added that he also valued the community outreach work done by Karen Asmundson.

Commissioner Savage said she would support recognizing either Heidenreich or Asmundson, as Heidenreich has a broad portfolio and Karen Asmundson has had a significant community impact.

Commissioner Mikulski favored Jeff Parsons for potential replicability of his work to other homeowners. She also recognized Karen Asmundson for her community work.

Motion by Commissioner Mikulski to nominate Jeff Parsons for Special Recognition.

Motion by Commissioner Barner, second by Commissioner Ruiz, to nominate Robert Heidenreich for Special Recognition Awardee for Residential Applicants.

Ayes: 3

Nays: 2 Motion carried.

Discussion of Special Recognition - Business Applicants

Commissioner Ruiz commended Gramercy Park Cooperative for the breadth of their work. He was surprised to see Republic Services as an applicant.

Chair Goodman favors Gramercy Park Cooperative and Key Community Bank. She was also impressed by Republic Services.

Commissioner Barner said that he favored the library.

Commissioner Savage echoed Commissioner Barner and said that reuse is foundational to libraries. She commended them for the organics recycling and bluebird houses and said that they are the epitome of conservation.

Commissioner Mikulski also said that she favored the library.

Commissioner Barner asked to look at the applications for Gramercy Park Cooperative and Inver Glen Library again. Both applications were reviewed by the Commission. For Gramercy Park Cooperative, Environmental Specialist Ally Sutherland noted the multifamily recycling, the prairie, and the puzzle sharing collection. For Inver Glen Library, Environmental Specialist Ally Sutherland noted the support for the on-site organics drop site, the puzzle swap, and the food-saving display.

Commissioner Mikulski commended Gramercy Park Cooperative for their day-to-day sustainability work.

Commissioner Savage commented that the library is available to everyone, and she added that Inver Glen is doing more in terms of sustainability than other libraries in the area.

Commissioner Barner said he would support either of the two businesses. Chair Goodman concurred.

Commissioner Ruiz said that library is a community gathering place.

Motion by Commissioner Savage, second by Commissioner Barner, to nominate Inver Glen Library for Special Recognition Awardee for Business Applicants.

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0 Motion carried.

B. Discussion on Energy Action Plan Work Plan

Environmental Specialist Ally Sutherland presented work to date under the Energy Action Plan and staff recommendations for future work towards the goals of energy efficiency, increasing renewable energy, decreasing energy costs, and increasing efficient transportation.

Work to date (2021 – 2024):

- Created an energy page on City website to highlight relevant programs
- Distributed flyers on relevant topics (electric vehicles, energy efficiency programs, renewable energy, etc.), designed and printed in partnership with Xcel Energy
- Started the Environmental E-News (355 subscribers), now expanding onto social media
- Held events and did presentations (in partnership with Home Energy Squad) – engaged at least 1,140 people since 2021
- Renewable Energy Challenge in 2023 and Sustainable IGH Program in 2024
- Giveaways: 90 free/discounted Home Energy Squad visits (lightbulbs, showerheads, weatherstripping), 200 light bulb kits, and 300 light bulbs distributed to increase engagement as well as energy efficiency

Environmental Specialist Ally Sutherland showed the Commission data on progress towards four specific goals – reduced electricity usage (measured in kilowatt-hours) and natural gas usage (measured in therms), increased demand-side management, and increased avoided greenhouse gas emissions, pointing out that while the demand-side management goal has already been met, work remains on the other three.

Therefore, the staff recommendation is to focus on increasing kWh savings, therm savings, and GHG emissions avoided via engaging with small/medium commercial/industrial users and multifamily properties to help them manage their energy usage.

This engagement will involve the following actions:

- Partner with Chamber of Commerce, other business boards
- Connect businesses with free energy audit programs
- Develop materials (flyers, mailers) in partnership with Xcel
- Set up presentations/outreach

Commissioner Barner asked about energy use and cooling degree days in 2023.

Environmental Specialist Ally Sutherland clarified that while cooling degree days (hot days) increased in 2023, energy use was lower than expected.

Commissioner Savage clarified the end date for the plan goal (end of 2025).

Commissioner Mikulski said she supported the staff recommendations.

Chair Goodman said she was also in support, and asked for continued focus on households, including potentially tabling at the upcoming park grand opening events.

Motion by Commissioner Mikulski, second by Commissioner Savage, to support the staff recommendations for 2024 and 2025 work under the Energy Action Plan.

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0 Motion carried.

6. Public Comment

There were none.

7. Commissioner and Staff Comments

Commissioner Ruiz said that the Rich Valley Boulevard gravel excavation is underway. He asked whether Barr Engineering is monitoring the site for threats to the aquifer. Environmental Specialist Ally Sutherland said yes, reports are being completed as required by the CUP.

Commissioner Ruiz mentioned ongoing oak savanna restoration of Terrace Oaks West Park in Burnsville. He expressed interest in identifying potential sites for similar restoration projects in Inver Grove Heights. Commissioner Ruiz added that he signed up for an Environmental Commissioners email listserv and would send on the information. Lastly, Commissioner Ruiz shared information about an upcoming native plants sale.

Chair Goodman mentioned another upcoming plant sale in Whitetail Woods Regional Park through the Dakota County Master Gardeners.

Environmental Specialist Ally Sutherland thanked Commissioners Barner, Mikulski, and Trenzeluk for their service, time, commitment, and participation serving on the EAC. She thanked Commissioners Mikulski and Trenzeluk for reapplying to serve as commissioners. She announced that new commissioners will be appointed by the end of the month.

8. Adjourn

Motion by Commissioner Ruiz, second by Commissioner Barner, to adjourn the meeting at 8:49 p.m.

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0 Motion carried.