

ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY COMMISSION MINUTES

CITY OF INVER GROVE HEIGHTS

City Council Chambers – 8150 Barbara Avenue

Thursday, April 24, 2025 – 7:00 p.m.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Goodman called the Environmental Advisory Commission Meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

2. ROLL CALL

Commissioners Present: Sara Goodman (Chair)
Marjorie Savage
Tracie Killion
Nick Ruiz
Jon Wallerick
Kevin Sethre
Patti Mikulski
Ted Trenzeluk
Nichole Boehmke

Commissioners Absent: None.

Staff Present: Katie Malott, Deputy City Clerk

3. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Minutes of the March 27, 2025, Environmental Advisory Commission Meeting.

Motion by Boehmke, Second by Killion, to Approve Minutes as Submitted.

Ayes: 9

Nays: 0 Motion carried.

4. REGULAR BUSINESS

A. Eagan-Inver Grove Heights Watershed Management Organization Plan Update.

Victoria Ranua, Administrator for Eagan-Inver Grove Heights Watershed Management Organization and Watershed Coordinator for Dakota County Soil & Water Conservation District, presented on the 10-Year Watershed Plan update process.

Inver Grove Heights is upstream in its watershed, so good stewardship is crucial.

Ms. Ranua provided an overview of the recent history of water management in Minnesota. In the 1960s, several large-scale pollution incidents, including a soybean oil spill in Mankato that killed thousands of ducks in Red Wing, led to public outrage. Legislators recognized that stronger pollution regulation was needed, and the existing Water Pollution Control Commission was replaced with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. In the 1980s, recognizing that water doesn't flow along political boundaries, state legislators passed an act that required watershed management organizations in the metro area.

Most Inver Grove Heights residents live in the region of the Lower Mississippi River Watershed Management Organization, but some live within the Eagan-Inver Grove Heights Watershed Management Organization.

The 10-Year Watershed Plan is important because Clean Water Legacy Funds (a special pool of money for watershed districts) can only be used for projects that are part of this plan (e.g. stormwater drain upgrades).

Successes over the past 10 years (current plan 2016-2026) include:

- Educational displays in libraries
- Distribution of salt cups to raise awareness of chloride issues
- Distribution of pet waste bags printed with messaging
- Delisting (from the Impaired Waters MPCA list) of four lakes in Eagan
 - Alum treatments were used to trap nutrients
- Hundreds of stormwater management projects created with support from Landscaping for Clean Water classes

Ms. Ranua requested that the Commissioners think about what projects would be most impactful.

Commissioner Savage inquired about how the Eagan lakes were delisted.

Ms. Ranua stated that lakes are monitored by city staff and volunteers who are trained by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. The lakes became listed as Impaired Waters when nutrient levels exceeded quality thresholds set by the MPCA. The water quality subsequently improved due to alum treatments and the restriction of phosphorus fertilizer use in the early 2000s. When the City of Eagan showed MPCA this data, MPCA removed the lakes from the Impaired Waters list.

Commissioner Sethre inquired about the information provided in the survey.

Ms. Ranua stated that the survey was designed to be informative for members of the public who are not familiar with water management.

Commissioner Killion inquired about aquifers.

Ms. Ranua stated that groundwater is found in various geological formations and at various depths; aquifers are where large amounts of groundwater accumulate.

Commissioner Killion questioned whether there were concerns about the groundwater at a certain level, or more generally.

Ms. Ranua stated that the concern was about providing adequate recharge given current levels of groundwater use. More recharging areas are needed.

Commissioner Sethre stated that there was a dedicated water issue of the Insights newsletter this spring and recommended it. Changing minds about lawns would be a huge task.

Ms. Ranua stated that it was possible for large shifts in public awareness to happen.

Commissioner Ruiz stated that he recently planted fescue and buffalograss, and that he is looking forward to gathering data about water and fertilizer usage to share with neighbors. Personal stories would be more impactful than reports in reaching people and changing minds.

Commissioner Mikulski questioned what a recharge area is.

Ms. Ranua stated that it's an open area where soil allows for enough drainage for water to reach groundwater/aquifers. In some parts of Dakota County, the soils are clayey, which creates a barrier to recharge. Sandy and silty areas are better for recharge, but care must be taken to avoid industrial areas where pollution could be drawn down into a well area.

Commissioner Killion questioned whether recharge is possible in the basin areas of Inver Grove Heights.

Commissioner Sethre stated that there is an area of the city conducive to recharge north of 70th Street and west of Highway 52, but soils in the rest of the city aren't ideal.

Commissioner Killion questioned which water management organization manages most Inver Grove Heights.

Ms. Ranua stated that it is the Lower Mississippi River Watershed Management Organization.

Commissioner Ruiz stated that he had seen pictures of the deep root system of buffalograss, and dandelions and other weeds can't grow through it.

Commissioner Wallerick suggested offering discounts on smart sprinkler controllers as a water conservation alternative for people concerned about switching their lawn grass.

Commissioner Trenzeluk inquired about funding for the Eagan-IGH Watershed Management Organization.

Ms. Ranua stated that the City of Inver Grove Heights and the City of Eagan formed a Joint Powers Organization. The Board sets the budget and calculates contributions based on tax base and land base. Inver Grove Heights has 4% of the land base, so it pays a very small portion of the budget. Ms. Ranua mentioned that she wants to ensure that the Clean Water Legacy Funds also go to Inver Grove Heights projects.

Commissioner Trenzeluk inquired as to whether there was an enforcement component to Watershed Management Organizations.

Ms. Ranua stated that in the 1980s, initially, there was an enforcement component. Under the Stormwater Program for Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4), there are more direct

actions/enforcement components from city governments. The previous plan was more education focused. For this 10-year plan, she wants the focus to be on upstream actions with measurable outcomes.

Commissioner Trenzeluk inquired about rain gardens being funded through street maintenance departments.

Ms. Ranua stated that if language around this was in the 10-year plan, it would be easier to fund it.

Commissioner Boehmke stated that she had been to other cities where storm drains are marked with a note about the body of water that they drain into to raise awareness. This could be a possible project for when street reconstruction happens. She appreciates the salt cups. Boehmke inquired as to the difference between pollinator gardens and rain gardens.

Ms. Ranua stated that all native plants have deeper roots and will hold water longer, which helps in managing runoff. However, many people also enjoy pollinator species and add plants to their garden that will appeal to those species.

Commissioner Boehmke stated that she relies on the University of Minnesota Extension for natural resources information and they also had a good class on turf.

Ms. Ranua stated that in Eagan, there are 23 large lakes with lots of shoreline landowners, so there have been lots of shoreline management classes, but inquired about class suggestions.

Commissioner Boehmke stated that classes on runoff would be appreciated.

Ms. Ranua suggested drain-stenciling parties. Inquired as to if the Commission had heard of Adopt-A-Drain.

Commissioner Ruiz stated that Dakota County's Lawns Reimagined program provides seeds based on square footage. Staff calculated how much seed he would need for his lawn and explained it well.

Chair Goodman stated that she created two rain gardens with support from the Landscaping for Clean Water program, and that even if these gardens don't help with aquifer recharge, they help reduce runoff. Her street is being reconstructed soon and expressed interest in getting the neighborhood association connected with grants for rain gardens.

Commissioner Killion stated that there was a DNR-maintained pond in her area and many trees were recently cut down as part of a project. Killion inquired if Ms. Ranua works with the DNR.

Ms. Ranua stated that she did not know of any DNR-maintained ponds in Eagan.

Ms. Ranua informed the commissioners that their verbal input and survey input would be considered in creating a draft of the 10-year plan for public comment.

Chair Goodman thanked Ms. Ranua for her presentation.

Ms. Ranua closed by noting that “we can’t all live upstream” and that “we can all be better upstream stewards.”

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

6. COMMISSIONER AND STAFF COMMENTS

Commissioner Trenzeluk inquired as to whether a new Environmental Specialist would be hired soon. Deputy City Clerk Malott confirmed this.

Commissioner Trenzeluk asked that an item be added to a future meeting agenda to discuss and take a position on the bills proposed by state legislators about moving more planning/zoning decisions under state control.

Commissioner Killion stated that the bills would probably be considered during the next session, given the budget deliberations underway this session.

Commissioner Trenzeluk stated that local issues are best handled at the local level.

Commissioner Sethre stated that the protocol for discussion of the bills would be a formal request via email to add an item to the agenda.

Chair Goodman stated that this would give commissioners time to become more informed before discussion.

Deputy City Clerk Malott stated that she would look into adding the topic to the May or June agenda.

Commissioner Ruiz inquired about plans to host tables at events.

Deputy City Clerk Malott stated that it would continue to be included in the Environmental Specialist role.

Commissioner Ruiz inquired about more information on how the City’s organics recycling program is going.

Chair Goodman requested a presentation on organics recycling for an upcoming meeting. Inquired about the Sustainable IGH Awards and whether they could be resumed next year.

Commissioner Killion inquired about the street maintenance department’s responsibility for litter collection.

Deputy City Clerk Malott took note of these requests to pass along to other city staff.

Commissioner Mikulski stated that she supported a discussion of maintaining local control of zoning.

7. ADJOURN

Motion by Trenzeluk, Second by Savage, to adjourn the meeting at 8:00 p.m.

Ayes: 9

Nays: 0 Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted by Will Clashes, Recording Secretary