

**ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY COMMISSION  
CITY OF INVER GROVE HEIGHTS  
JANUARY 22, 2026 – 8150 BARBARA AVENUE**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

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

The Pledge of Allegiance was cited.

**2. ROLL CALL**

Commissioners Present: Sara Goodman (Chair)  
Nick Ruiz (Vice Chair)  
Ted Trenzeluk  
Nichole Boehmke  
Jon Wallerick  
Tracie Killion

Commissioners Absent: Marjorie Savage  
Kevin Sethre  
Patti Mikulski

Staff Present: Liz Kramer, Environmental Specialist

**3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Motion by Ruiz, second by Killion to Approve the Agenda as Published

**Ayes: 6**

**Nays: 0      Motion carried.**

**4. CONSENT AGENDA**

**A. Minutes of the November 20, 2025, Environmental Advisory Commission Meeting**

Motion by Boehmke second by Wallerick to Approve the Minutes as Published

**Ayes: 6**

**Nays: 0      Motion carried.**

**5. PRESENTATIONS**

**A. Plastic Bag Ordinances and Recycling in Minnesota**

Environmental Specialist Kramer summarized the state of plastic bag recycling in Minnesota and Inver Grove Heights in response to public and commissioner interest. Americans use approximately 100 billion plastic bags annually, with Minnesotans discarding over 500 tons of plastic bags and packaging each day. Recycling rates remain below 8%, and cleanup and landfill costs average about \$0.17 per bag. Plastic bags contribute to environmental harm, persist as microplastics, and are a significant source of pollution, including an estimated 22 million pounds entering the Great Lakes each year. They also cause operational disruptions at recycling facilities by tangling processing equipment.

Nationally, many jurisdictions address plastic bag waste through bans or bag fees, which have reduced plastic bag litter by 25% to 47% in studied areas. Minnesota law currently prohibits cities from banning plastic bags, though some communities, including Minneapolis, Edina, and Duluth, have implemented \$0.05 per bag fees that have successfully reduced usage.

In Inver Grove Heights, there is no local ordinance on plastic bags, and they are not accepted in curbside recycling due to processing limitations. Recycling options exist through select retailers but require consumer initiative.

Commissioner Killion asked whether shifting from plastic back to paper bags carries environmental drawbacks, noting that plastic was originally adopted to reduce tree use. She also questioned whether the oil industry influenced the widespread adoption of plastic bags and inquired whether research identifies negative impacts associated with paper alternatives.

Environmental Specialist Kramer stated she did not research industry influence and noted that paper versus plastic involves tradeoffs. She explained that paper is more recyclable under current systems, while increased awareness of microplastics and plastic degradation would likely change how the issue is viewed today.

Chair Goodman asked whether the estimated 22 million pounds of plastic entering the Great Lakes annually includes microplastics from sources such as stormwater runoff and laundry. She noted her familiarity with microplastic pollution through her work in the clothing industry.

Environmental Specialist Kramer noted that the data reflects only plastics collected by weight, meaning it does not account for microplastics that may be shedding or dispersing into the environment.

Chair Goodman said she understands there is currently no curbside recycling option for plastic bags. She asked whether this could become an option in the future, such as through a separate bin or designated container, noting that plastic bags cannot go to the regular recycling facility.

Environmental Specialist Kramer said she is not aware of any curbside or separate home collection programs for plastic bags but will investigate whether any providers offer this service.

Commissioner Ruiz speculated whether a private company such as “Rid It” [Ridwell is the company accepting hard-to-recycle items]] might offer recycling services for items not accepted elsewhere.

Chair Goodman asked whether Recycling Zone could serve as a drop off location.

Environmental Specialist Kramer stated that Dakota County guidance recommends taking plastic bags to retail drop off locations, and if that is not feasible, disposing of them in the trash. She noted uncertainty about Recycling Zone acceptance.

Commissioner Ruiz asked whether compostable green bags used for organics differ from plastic in terms of microplastic byproducts, and whether repeated composting could still generate microplastics.

Commissioner Boehmke stated that compostable bags are made from corn-based materials and are designed to fully break down into organic matter, unlike conventional plastic bags, which do not decompose in the same way.

Commissioner Ruiz asked whether any other cities in Dakota County offer recycling programs for the material discussed.

Environmental Specialist Kramer stated that plastic bag recycling is generally limited to retail store drop off programs. She noted that Columbia Heights City Hall has collection bins but questioned whether that option is more convenient than grocery store drop-off locations.

Commissioner Ruiz shared a concern about whether plastic bags placed in collection bins are ultimately recycled or sent to landfills and asked what the next step is after collection.

Environmental Specialist Kramer said she does not currently have that information but will follow up with Dakota County regarding the lifecycle of plastic bags collected at retail drop off locations.

Commissioner Trenzeluk noted that the oil required to produce plastics was a key consideration and suggested emphasizing oil savings in outreach. He referenced past use of corn-based bags and raised durability concerns. He added that any related regulation should occur at the state level rather than locally.

Environmental Specialist Kramer said she has not conducted a comprehensive review but noted that many alternatives to traditional plastic bags tend to be less durable and do not last as long.

Commissioner Boehmke noted that the Duluth ordinance includes both plastic and paper bags and asked whether the intent is to encourage greater consumer use of reusable bags.

Environmental Specialist Kramer said the intent of bag ordinances in Minneapolis and Edina appears to be encouraging reusable bags through a \$0.05 fee on all carryout bags, including paper, rather than shifting consumers between single-use bag types.

Commissioner Boehmke noted that recycling plastic bags often requires extra sorting steps, which can be burdensome for households. She encouraged broader regional solutions for plastic bag recycling and shared that her workplace successfully recycles plastic film and bags when materials are kept clean, dry, and separated.

Environmental Specialist Kramer noted that Minnesota is launching a boat-wrap recycling program, creating new opportunities for producers and consumers to recycle large volumes of plastic film.

Commissioner Trenzeluk stated that recycling facilities have difficulty processing plastic bags, noting that during a prior tour of a recycler in IGH, the sorting line shut down twice due to plastic bags.

Environmental Specialist Kramer said she expects recycling facilities are exploring ways to more effectively recycle plastic bags to reduce operational impacts.

Commissioner Killion suggested encouraging Farmers Market vendors to offer paper bags or other alternatives to plastic and promoting education on reducing single-use plastic bags. While the City cannot ban plastic bags or require bag fees, supporting alternative options at local stores could help decrease plastic bag use.

Environmental Specialist Kramer expressed support for launching public education in the Insights newsletter during Farmers Market season to encourage the use of reusable bags.

Chair Goodman emphasized the importance of engaging both vendors and customers on bag reduction efforts.

Commissioner Ruiz recalled that Minnesota generates approximately 550 tons of waste per day.

Commissioner Kramer stated that Minnesota generates approximately 500 tons of waste per day.

Commissioner Wallerick emphasized the need for a City-led educational effort to address improper recycling of plastic bags, noting that many residents mistakenly assume they are recyclable. He stated that plastic bags create challenges for the recycling system and supported focusing on both problem awareness and solutions. He added that unless the State bans plastic bags, responsibility will remain with individuals and concluded that the City can play an important role in educating residents to make more informed choices.

Commissioner Trenzeluk stated that the City should focus on education and improving recycling rates. He said this is not a City level solution and should be addressed at a higher level for consistency, noting potential impacts on local shopping behavior. He expressed support for an education focused approach.

Commissioner Boehmke stated that education is an appropriate first step and acknowledged potential public pushback on measures that increase costs. She suggested exploring low-cost educational opportunities, such as providing reusable grocery bags with informational messaging, like past City giveaways like the smart salter cups, to help share information with the community.

Commissioner Ruiz commented on the overabundance of reusable tote bags and the challenge of finding meaningful ways to reuse them, noting they could be repurposed for community uses such as library book sales. He added that while totes were once seen as a good idea, they have become oversaturated and are often used as low value promotional items.

#### **B. Review of 2026 Environmental Advisory Commission Calendar**

Environmental Specialist Kramer outlined the 2026 Environmental Advisory Commission Calendar and Topics, including January items on plastic bag recycling in Minnesota, 2026 calendar review, and Sustainable IGH Awards criteria; April Partners in Energy 2025 Update; May Sustainable IGH nominations and Partners in Energy progress updates; June Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan and New Commissioner Introductions; August Pine Bend Landfill Annual Update and Partners in Energy Progress Update; September MAC NOC Update; October Xcel Partners in Energy MoU Extension and 2027 Work Plan; November continued 2027 Work Plan; and December year end planning. Suggested educational topics include Radon, Native Pollinators, Water Softening, Emerald Ash Borer, Dakota County Recycling, Light Pollution, and a potential additional work session.

Commissioner Trenzeluk requested updates on the Smart and Green Step Cities program and reiterated his interest in keeping the Commission engaged in development project reviews. He also suggested adding an educational topic on the environmental and infrastructure impacts of flushing wipes, noting this could be a useful presentation from the City's sewer staff.

Environmental Specialist Kramer noted that flushable wipes are a widespread issue and supported adding the topic for future education.

Commissioner Boehmke suggested exploring a future presentation on electric vehicle charging availability, noting it could align with existing efforts such as the Xcel Energy MOU or Green Step Cities initiatives.

Commissioner Wallerick suggested adding a spring educational topic on green landscaping, potentially connected to native pollinators, to align with seasonal interest in yards and gardening.

Commissioner Ruiz expressed support for the proposed topics and noted interest in including a presentation from the Soil and Water Conservation District.

Environmental Specialist Kramer noted that a watershed representative is confirmed to present on the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan and added that the Soil and Water Conservation District has presented in prior years, most recently in 2024.

Chair Goodman noted that the Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District offer spring landscaping for clean water workshops and suggested promoting those opportunities. She also recommended a future educational topic on the environmental impacts of electric vehicles, including battery and lithium mining, for consideration in a later year.

Commissioner Killion raised concerns about the condition and management of local watersheds, ponds, and lakes. She suggested evaluating whether these water bodies are being adequately maintained and whether additional actions are needed, like past efforts at Seidl Lake.

Environmental Specialist Kramer thanked the Commission and noted that a strong list of topics has been developed for the year, supporting the goal of increasing educational opportunities for both the Commission and the public.

## **6. REGULAR BUSINESS**

### **A. Sustainable IGH Awards Criteria and Applications**

Environmental Specialist Kramer outlined proposed updates to the Sustainable IGH Award Criteria, including separating the Energy section into distinct guidance for Residents and Businesses.

Recommended actions for residents include using LED light bulbs, weatherizing homes, completing a home energy audit within the past 10 years, participating in Xcel Energy and Home Energy Squad programs, using EnergyStar products, and encouraging landlords to implement energy efficiency improvements. Recommended actions for businesses include similar energy efficiency practices, completing business energy audits, participating in MN Chamber Energy Smart or Xcel Energy business assessment programs based on business size, using EnergyStar products, and encouraging property owners to support energy-saving upgrades. Additional proposed actions include adding links to energy resources and programs, as well as incorporating Commission-suggested actions such as planting or replacing a tree and adopting an IGH park or roadway.

Chair Goodman and all Commissioners expressed support for approving the Sustainable IGH Awards criteria.

Motion by Ruiz second by Killion to Approve the Sustainable IGH Awards Criteria.

## **7. PUBLIC COMMENT:**

## **8. COMMISSION AND STAFF COMMENTS**

Commissioner Ruiz noted that a craft fair is scheduled at the VMCC on March 7 and referenced prior discussion about having the Commission host a table at the event. He added that this would be an opportunity to increase the Commission's visibility and engagement with the public.

Environmental Specialist Kramer stated she will contact event organizers to explore participation in the craft fair and noted that the upcoming Healthy Living Fair in early April may provide an additional opportunity for outreach.

## **9. ADJOURN**

Motion by Ruiz second by Wallerick to Adjourn the Meeting at 7:48 p.m.

**Ayes: 6**

**Nays: 0      Motion carried.**

Minutes prepared by City Recording Secretary Tammy Greenlee.