

**ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY COMMISSION
CITY OF INVER GROVE HEIGHTS
APRIL 23, 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)
Patti Mikulski
Tracie Killion
Jon Wallerick
Ted Trenzeluk
Nichole Boehmke

Commissioners Absent: Marjorie Savage
Kevin Sethre

Staff Present: Elizabeth Kramer, Environmental Specialist

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion by Ruiz, second by Mikulski to approve the agenda as published

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0 Motion carried.

4. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Minutes of the February 26, 2026, Environmental Advisory Commission Meeting

Motion by Boehmke second by Wallerick to approve the minutes as published

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0 Motion carried.

5. PRESENTATIONS

A. Environmental Initiatives Update

Environmental Specialist Kramer provided an update on environmental initiatives, outlining actions being implemented to expand environmental efforts within the community, including what has been completed to date, plans for the remainder of the year, and progress following the first quarter. Recurring events include the Spring Shred event in May 2026, which provides residents an opportunity to shred confidential documents for recycling since curbside programs no longer accept shredded paper, along with the combined Cleanup Day and Fall Shred event scheduled for late September, pumpkin composting in October 2026, an outdoor winter clothing swap in November 2026, and a month-long November food drive available to the public to support community members.

Additional focus was given to recycling and reuse efforts, noting that while many events occur annually, the County has identified new reuse priorities for 2026, including athletic gear and yard signs. Athletic equipment,

such as sports gear and balls, can be difficult to reuse or recycle and often ends up in the trash without a centralized collection system; promoting reuse helps reduce landfill waste while also improving access to activities that can otherwise be costly for families. Yard signs, including wire frames and plastic components, were identified as recyclable materials that require separation and centralized collection, as they are not easily processed through traditional curbside methods; proper collection helps prevent unnecessary waste and encourages recycling of both materials. Timing of collection efforts is also being evaluated to align with seasonal use, including political cycles and other common uses such as graduation displays.

Community engagement efforts will emphasize outreach through events and educational opportunities where residents can ask questions, provide feedback, and learn about environmental programs. Participation in the Healthy Living Fair on April 15, 2026, generated strong public interest, particularly in food scraps and potential curbside organics collection, and planned outreach includes Touch-a-Truck on May 16, food truck festivals, a potential community garden visit, Parks and Recreation summer events such as music and movies in the park, and the IGH Days Business Expo in September. These events are intended to meet residents where they are and tailor information to different audiences.

Community involvement strategies include increasing public education through social media posts and meeting topics, highlighting businesses or residents through the sustainable IGH program, expanding the presence of Sustainable IGH Awards through social media and videos, and utilizing newsletters to broaden outreach. Additional opportunities were identified through Dakota County programs, including Recycling Ambassadors training offered in both spring and fall, the Tour de Trash scheduled for June 2, and Soil and Water Conservation District landscaping for clean water classes, all of which support continued education and engagement.

Commissioner Mikulski noted that yard signs are typically used from April through November and asked whether collection could occur more than once per year, suggesting the possibility of one collection in July and another in November.

Environmental Specialist Kramer stated that the current plan includes one collection event based on preliminary budget estimates through the Dakota County grant, with the potential to evaluate additional collection opportunities as more finalized cost and staffing information becomes available. Consideration was also given to seasonal uses such as graduation parties, summer events, and garage sales, which contribute to the volume of yard signs.

Commissioner Killion asked for clarification regarding athletic gear, confirming that it includes equipment, and raised concern about yard signs being owned by candidates, noting the potential issue if signs are collected before candidates have an opportunity to retrieve and reuse them.

Environmental Specialist Kramer confirmed that athletic gear includes items such as hockey equipment and acknowledged the concern regarding yard sign ownership, noting that the focus has been on reducing waste and addressing signs that ultimately end up in the trash. Education will be emphasized to encourage retrieval and reuse by candidates, while also informing residents of available recycling options.

Commissioner Killion suggested that additional events, such as a community garden tour, could be considered.

Environmental Specialist Kramer explained that Parks and Recreation hosts a seasonal event at the community garden at Salem Hills Park, where participants gather and receive information.

Commissioner Killion expressed interest in visiting individual gardens within the community to gain ideas and see different approaches.

Chair Goodman asked whether recycling ambassadors would continue to assist at the Farmers Market and if that remained part of the plan.

Environmental Specialist Kramer confirmed that participation at the Farmers Market is planned and noted that coordination with recycling ambassadors will be needed to determine volunteer support.

Chair Goodman asked about plans for athletic gear reuse, referencing existing options such as resale businesses and online marketplaces, and inquired whether Dakota County would host a similar program or event.

Environmental Specialist Kramer stated that athletic gear has been identified as a County priority and outlined approaches used by other cities, including long-term collection events that provide donations to organizations that resell items at low cost, as well as direct swap events. A longer-term collection model is currently being considered to maximize participation, while noting that swap events provide more direct community exchange, with both options presenting advantages and limitations.

Commissioner Ruiz shared observations from assisting at the winter gear swap at Thompson Park, noting that items such as camping and biking gear were available and that participation, while smaller than some past events, still showed strong interest. Additional reuse activities at the Dakota County library were mentioned, including a puzzle swap, book sale, and fabric swap, which generated significant community participation. He suggested that at food truck events, a sorting station for recycling, trash, and organics could be provided, along with staff or volunteers to assist attendees with proper sorting.

Chair Goodman noted that this type of effort has historically been supported by Dakota County Recycling Ambassadors, including volunteer-based sorting stations at events where materials are separated, monitored, and weighed to track diversion from the landfill. She added that successful implementation would require advance planning, sufficient volunteers, and coordination.

Environmental Specialist Kramer added that efforts are being made to include local reuse opportunities, such as library events, in the City's e-newsletter to increase awareness and encourage residents to participate in reuse and waste reduction activities.

Commissioner Wallerick noted that sorting compost, recycling, and trash at food truck events can be challenging when materials are mixed and suggested that requiring compostable service items could simplify sorting. Support was expressed for the athletic gear initiative, with a preference for a swap model over collection, citing concerns that donated items may not always be reused.

Commissioner Trenzeluk asked whether updates from the Pine Bend Landfill are provided regularly.

Environmental Specialist Kramer stated that landfill updates are typically provided once per year and will be scheduled accordingly.

Commissioner Trenzeluk asked for clarification on whether yard sign and athletic gear initiatives are City-driven or County-driven efforts.

Environmental Specialist Kramer explained that these are Dakota County priorities tied to grant funding, with flexibility for each City to determine how to implement programs that provide community benefit and reduce landfill waste.

Commissioner Trenzeluk asked whether collaboration with other cities is encouraged or required.

Environmental Specialist Kramer stated that while collaboration is possible, current plans focus on Inver Grove Heights-specific efforts to provide convenient, local opportunities for participation.

Commissioner Trenzeluk expressed support for a regional swap concept and asked whether there are costs associated with recycling yard signs.

Environmental Specialist Kramer stated that while specific costs would need to be confirmed, materials such as metal and plastic may have market value, though recycling often requires coordination with specialized facilities.

Commissioner Boehmke suggested promoting athletic gear reuse through community channels such as the Community Center and youth sports registration platforms, and proposed educational approaches at events, including simple sorting demonstrations with common items to increase awareness without requiring full-scale sorting operations. Additional opportunities for outreach at indoor locations, such as the library during colder months, were also suggested.

Environmental Specialist Kramer agreed and noted that interactive sorting activities are already used at events, particularly for youth engagement, to demonstrate proper waste sorting practices.

Commissioner Killion asked about the amount of the Dakota County grant.

Environmental Specialist Kramer stated that the annual grant is approximately \$50,000, with the 2026 amount at \$56,000, distributed across categories such as reuse, recycling, organics, education, and resident engagement, each with required and suggested actions.

Commissioner Killion suggested the possibility of providing shared recreational equipment at parks for community use, acknowledging potential logistical challenges.

Environmental Specialist Kramer stated that staff will explore whether similar programs exist in other communities and evaluate feasibility.

Chair Goodman suggested that staffed rink facilities could provide an opportunity for shared equipment during winter months and noted that Recycling Ambassadors can be requested to support events through established volunteer coordination channels.

Environmental Specialist Kramer confirmed that Recycling Ambassadors are a key volunteer resource for events such as Cleanup Day and shred events.

Commissioner Ruiz noted that library volunteers are recognized through County appreciation events and highlighted opportunities to utilize library space for outreach, as well as potential coordination with homeowner associations to share information with residents.

Commissioner Trenzeluk suggested that Dakota County consider expanding recycling facility access and services, noting that more comprehensive and convenient options could improve overall recycling participation

6. REGULAR BUSINESS:

A. 2026 EAC Work Plan Progress

Environmental Specialist Kramer introduced the 2026 Environmental Advisory Commission (EAC) Work Plan, outlining key initiatives and priorities intended to guide environmental efforts within the City. The overview emphasized alignment with broader sustainability goals, coordination with partners, and continued engagement with residents, businesses, and community stakeholders.

The work plan includes supporting the City's Energy Action Plan (EAP) and working toward the goals established in the 2026 Xcel Energy Partners in Energy Extension Memorandum of Understanding. Efforts will include business outreach related to building energy audits, electric vehicle charger installation opportunities, renewable energy, and available energy credits and rebates. Additional outreach will be tailored to young people and students, focusing on energy efficiency, renewable energy, and energy-related careers. Residential and multiunit property outreach will also be conducted regarding building energy audits and available

incentives. The Commission will review community energy data updates provided through the Partners in Energy program and complete the annual EAP update.

Support for the Sustainable IGH Awards program remains a priority, despite the program being placed on hold in 2025 due to staffing limitations. The Commission and staff are committed to promoting reinstatement of the program for residents and businesses through information tables at City events, partnerships, social media, and collaboration with community groups. Responsibilities will also include reviewing applications and making recommendations to the City Council for bronze, silver, gold, and special recognition awards. In addition, the Commission will host the Annual Stormwater Pollution Prevention Meeting in partnership with the City's engineering division and support existing environmental programming, including solid waste abatement initiatives related to waste reduction, recycling, and organics, as well as participation in Minnesota GreenStep Cities and SolSmart.

Another focus area includes increasing public and Commission awareness of local environmental issues by inviting internal and external speakers to EAC meetings and expanding promotion of those meetings. Relevant City staff will be invited to present updates on environmental and sustainability topics related to City facilities, natural resources, and other initiatives. Ongoing responsibilities will continue, including processing routine items related to landfills, wetlands, airport noise, and other duties assigned to the Environmental Advisory Commission under City Code 2-4-2. The Commission will also review its existing responsibilities within City Code, research practices in other communities, and provide recommendations for future updates. Participation in the 2026–2028 Comprehensive Plan review process is also included.

Chair Goodman asked whether the Commission wished to make any changes or consider a motion related to the discussion.

Environmental Specialist Kramer explained that a resolution is optional and typically used when the Commission agrees to pursue a specific action, such as inviting a speaker or committing to a topic for a future meeting.

Commissioner Boehmke noted that if SolSmart is no longer used as the program name due to funding changes, the title may need to be updated to reflect the revised initiative.

Environmental Specialist Kramer stated that this can be addressed as part of the 2027 work plan.

Commissioner Killion raised concern regarding a potential data center application and stated that future data center proposals should be reviewed by the Commission due to impacts such as noise, lighting, and energy use, noting a lack of current City Code addressing these issues.

Environmental Specialist Kramer stated that additional information will be gathered from City planning staff regarding regulations, monitoring, and potential approaches used by other communities.

Commissioner Killion also raised concern regarding the absence of a formal tree program and suggested consideration of City Code related to tree replacement, particularly in areas with limited boulevard trees.

Environmental Specialist Kramer stated that further research will be conducted on potential tree program options.

Commissioner Trenzeluk noted that development review processes have historically addressed tree coverage and green space but expressed concern about recent projects lacking sufficient tree canopy and shade.

Chair Goodman expressed support for a future tree replacement program.

Commissioner Killion reiterated concern regarding the data center proposal and stated that projects with potential environmental impacts should be reviewed by the Commission.

Commissioner Mikulski agreed that larger projects should be brought forward for Commission input and asked about the deadline for Sustainable IGH Awards applications,

Environmental Specialist Kramer stated that the application deadline is May 8, noting the application link is available at IGHMN.gov/1554.

Chair Goodman encouraged public participation in upcoming events.

Environmental Specialist Kramer reminded the Commission that current terms conclude in May, with new commissioners joining in June, and provided an update on the planned Recycling Zone Plus facility in Lakeville, noting it will be significantly larger than the existing facility in Eagan, is expected to open in 2027, and will help address increased demand for recycling services.

Commissioner Ruiz asked whether the existing Recycling Zone location will remain open.

Environmental Specialist Kramer added that both facilities are expected to remain in operation, with expanded capacity and continued features such as the reuse "free store."

Commissioner Killion stated that Commission members should be notified of future open houses related to projects such as the proposed data center to allow for participation.

7. PUBLIC COMMENT: None

8. COMMISSION AND STAFF COMMENTS: None

9. ADJOURN:

Motion by Mikulski second by Killion to adjourn the meeting at 8:05 p.m.

Ayes: 6

Nays: 0 Motion carried.

Minutes prepared by City Recording Secretary Tammy Greenlee.