St. Louis Park
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Environment & sustainability commission meeting
May 1, 2024
6:30 p.m.

All board members/commissioners will participate in this meeting at St. Louis Park City Hall, Community Room, 5005 Minnetonka Blvd., St. Louis Park, MN 55416.

Agenda

1. Call to order
    a. Roll call
2. Approval of minutes (March 5, 2024)
3. Business (6:40 p.m.)
    a. Final comments on Environmentally Preferred Purchasing policy (EP3) revisions
    b. Next steps for advisory boards & commissions, including:
        i. Current timeline from administration
        ii. ESC elections
        iii. Plan for 2024 work plan creation
    c. Proposed heritage tree preservation policies with Katelyn Champoux, associate planner (7:00 p.m.)
4. Staff updates (8:00 p.m.)
5. Work plan update
    a. Expand our outreach
        i. Events work group update
    b. Share our voice
        i. State policy update
    c. Measure our progress
        i. Staff and volunteer reports (quarterly and as needed)
            1. April 2024 report
6. Environmental Justice and current events open discussion
7. Upcoming/proposed events
8. Adjournment

Future meeting and event dates:

- Arbor Day celebration, May 11 from 9 a.m. until noon at Birchwood Park
- Wheelie Fun Community Bike Ride, May 17 from 4-5 p.m. at Dakota Park
- Ecotacular, June 15 from 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. at Wolfe Park

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DRAFT 4/26/2024

City of St. Louis Park Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy ("EP3")

Introduction

The City of St. Louis Park adopted five strategic priorities in 2018 to guide long-range community planning as well as daily decision-making. One of these priorities is St. Louis Park "is committed to continue to lead in environmental stewardship." Also in 2018, the city adopted a Climate Action Plan, a roadmap to achieving carbon neutrality by 2040. The plan guides residents, businesses and city operations in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. While city operations may account for a small percentage of total citywide emissions, leading by example is one of the city's key tools and can demonstrate how energy, vehicle and solid waste emissions reduction goals can be achieved.

The commitment to carbon neutrality requires that climate considerations are taken into account when purchasing. Choosing environmentally preferred products and practices:

- Conserves natural resources
- Supports recycling, reuse and compost markets
- Reduces the volume of materials that are landfilled or incinerated, which has local air quality and environmental justice implications
- Lowers overall lifecycles costs through choosing products that are durable and reusable
- Minimizes our operational carbon footprint
- Creates a model that encourages other purchasers in our community to adopt similar goals

Requirements

This policy applies to all city departments and employees for all products and services provided to the city. The requirements are ranked according to approximate greenhouse gas emissions impact.

Staff will adopt, practice and promote the following:

1. **Greenhouse gas emissions reduction**
   Fleet vehicles: When a fleet vehicle, including but not limited to passenger vehicles and maintenance vehicles, is due to be replaced or added to the city's fleet, the following rules apply:

   a. Staff will begin by evaluating whether a vehicle replacement is required or whether the fleet can be downsized or the vehicle replaced with an alternative mode of transportation, including a pool car.
   b. Staff will continue to identify vehicles that are over-sized for their purpose and replace them with right-sized, more efficient vehicles.
   c. Staff will continue to purchase battery electric vehicles when feasible. When a battery electric vehicle is unavailable or not cost-effective (defined under "Rules," below), fuel-efficient vehicles and/or Flex Fuel vehicles that use low carbon alternative fuels (E-85) must be purchased.

Electricity: When electricity is not provided by on-site solar, the city will pursue full account enrollment in a Green Power Purchasing Program such as the Renewable*Connect program offered by Xcel Energy.

Heating and cooling: When an all-electric building heating, cooling, or water heating option exists, the city will pursue the all-electric option over any that burn fossil fuels when feasible and cost-effective.

Landscaping equipment: When an all-electric landscaping equipment option exists, the city will pursue the all-electric option over any that burn fossil fuels when feasible and cost-effective.

2. **Waste minimization**

Purchasing practices will begin with an evaluation of whether the product purchase is required or whether an equivalent product can be sourced from within a city facility. Following this, purchasing practices will reduce packaging and other excessive waste as much as is practicable within the city's control. This includes waste related to construction and demolition, electronic waste and hazardous material waste. Preferred practices may include buying in bulk; choosing reusable, recyclable and compostable packaging when suitable; and demonstrating closed loop composting practices.

Where practicable, staff will require the use of recycled or composted materials such as source-separated organic material (SSOM) in engineering projects in bid specifications.

Information technology equipment and devices, such as mobiles phones, computers, monitors and multifunction printer devices and consumables, will be repurposed within the organization, donated or resold in accordance with state statute and city policy, or recycled in an environmentally safe manner whenever practicable. State requirements for destruction of some devices to ensure data privacy may disallow this practice in some cases.

All catering services, mobile use-food establishments and related suppliers providing food and beverages for city-sponsored events will observe the Zero Waste Packaging Ordinance, which requires that all single-use food packaging used by licensed food establishments be recyclable or compostable. All city-sponsored events, including internal events, will use recyclable or compostable single-use food packaging, dinnerware and cutlery and avoid purchasing food in individually-packaged portions.

3. **Energy efficiency**

All appliances and other powered fixtures purchased for installation will meet US EPA Energy Star certification when feasible and cost-effective. When Energy Star certified products are not available, products in the upper 25% of energy efficiency as designated by the Federal Energy Management Program are preferred for purchase. When feasible and cost-effective, "smart" appliances should be purchased that automatically adjust to conserve energy and can be set to operate during times when energy rates are off peak.

4. **Recycled content products**
   Paper products will contain the highest post-consumer recycled content when available and cost-effective. These products should include no less than 30% recycled content (the minimum standard established by the EPA Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines). This applies to in-house printing needs, such as copier paper and external mailings to the community.

   Paper towels and napkins will include post-consumer fiber content. Per EPA Guidelines, these should be no less than 30% for paper towels and napkins. Paper towels and napkins must be commercially compostable.

5. **Water conservation**
   Products purchased will meet EPA WaterSense certification when feasible and cost-effective, including but not limited to toilets, faucets and irrigation systems. When feasible, irrigation systems will use technology such as sensors and central controls to prevent unnecessary watering of landscaped areas.

6. **Green cleaning products**
   Cleaning products will meet Green Seal, EcoLogo, EPA Design for the Environment or equivalent standard when feasible and cost-effective.

Implementation

Each city department will be responsible for the implementation of this policy and ensuring their respective employees are fully aware and supportive of the policy.

Rules

1. Cost effectiveness is defined as an equivalent price or up to a 10% increased net cost for purchasing environmentally preferable products indicated in this policy, a standard that is widely used throughout Minnesota.
2. This policy will not be construed as requiring any department to purchase products that do not perform adequately for their intended use or are not available at a cost-effective price in a reasonable period of time.
3. These guidelines are subject to the requirements and preferences in the Municipal Contracting Law (MN Statute 471.345) and all other applicable laws and ordinances.

Responsibilities

1. The Sustainability Division will assist with the efforts of implementation and report on the chief outcomes of this policy to the city council when requested.
2. Annual meetings may be held with departmental purchasing contacts to understand policy challenges and help source qualifying products as needed.

Executive summary

Title: Tree preservation ordinance

Recommended action: No action is required at this time. The purpose of this report is to share and discuss the proposed amendments to the existing tree protection and preservation regulations in the city's zoning code.

Summary: The tree canopy is diminishing in St. Louis Park due to tree removals resulting from emerald ash borer (EAB) in ash trees, decline in mature oak trees and Dutch Elm disease in elm trees. Tree removal from urban development projects is also a contributing factor, although not to the same extent. St. Louis Park has several policies and programs to support tree planting and preservation. The city supports tree planting on existing commercial and residential properties through multiple cost-share programs including annual Tree Sale, full-service planting program, Shade SLP, Shade SLP+ and Depave SLP. The natural resources division manages public trees funded by the Park Improvement Fund and the tree replacement fees collected by the city.

In 2023, city council directed staff to explore strategies to promote tree preservation in St. Louis Park with a focus on heritage trees. Heritage trees are mature trees that contribute greatly to the city's tree canopy and provide magnified public and environmental health benefits compared to smaller trees. This report provides an overview of the proposed amendments to the existing tree protection policy in the city's zoning code. The recommendations include adding a heritage tree definition, implementing heritage tree replacement requirements, and offering heritage tree preservation credits.

Supporting documents: November 23, 2015 study session agenda, November 23, 2015 study session minutes, March 22, 2022 study session topic proposal, April 25, 2022 study session agenda, April 25, 2022 study session minutes, August 14, 2023 study session agenda, August 28, 2023 study session agenda, August 28, 2023 study session minutes, Attachment A: December 2022 memo to city council from the environment and sustainability commission

Prepared by: Katelyn Champoux, associate planner

Reviewed by: Sean Walther, planning manager/deputy cd director; Emily Ziring, sustainability manager; Michael Bahe, natural resources manager

Discussion

Background

Existing condition of the tree canopy

The tree canopy, which is the percentage of ground that is covered by tree leaves during the growing season, is diminishing in St. Louis Park. This has been caused primarily by tree removals resulting from emerald ash borer (EAB) in ash trees, decline in mature oak trees and Dutch Elm disease in elm trees. Tree removal from urban development projects is also a contributing factor, although not to the same extent. Tree canopy coverage in the city was estimated at 33.6% in September of 2022, a decline from 38.1% estimated in 2015, although this is not consistent across the community. The history of industrialization and redlining in certain neighborhoods has led to an inequitable distribution of tree cover in St. Louis Park. According to the Growing Shade tool, St. Louis Park had an existing tree canopy coverage of 34.6% in 2021 with census block groups ranging from 12% to 54.1% canopy. Despite the city's existing programs and policies to address tree loss, canopy decline is expected to continue for the next two to five years as EAB populations peak in the city.

Existing tree preservation strategies

St. Louis Park recognizes the importance of addressing canopy loss and enhancing the local tree canopy. In past conversations, city council directed staff to establish a long-term tree canopy percentage goal, with the understanding that in the short-to-mid-term the city should expect to see a reduction as EAB infested trees die. This goal will guide proposed improvements to existing tree preservation strategies and ideas for future policies and programs.

St. Louis Park has several policies and programs to support tree planting and preservation. The city supports tree planting on existing commercial and residential properties through multiple cost-share programs including annual Tree Sale, full-service planting program, Shade SLP, Shade SLP+ and Depave SLP. The natural resources division manages public trees funded by the Park Improvement Fund and the tree replacement fees collected by the city. The city also supports tree health by providing free consultations to property owners to assess tree health, subsidies for fungicide injections to preserve elm and oak trees, and bulk rate discounts for emerald ash borer treatments. A new tree injection cost share program is also launching this spring.

Additionally, the zoning and vegetation codes provide specific protections for existing trees on public property (including boulevard trees), commercial properties (including office, industrial, and apartment uses), and new subdivisions. Within the zoning code, the landscaping section sets restrictions for tree removal, standards for replacement, and general minimum landscaping planting requirements and standards that are based on either the dimensions of the parcel or scale of development. It does not apply to trees on lots with existing single-family or two-family dwellings.

The zoning code provisions for tree removal and replacement apply to *significant trees*, which the city defines as: "Any tree, with the exception of Salix (Willow), Boxelder, Siberian Elm and Black Locust, is considered to be significant under the landscaping section of the zoning ordinance if it is at least five caliper inches for deciduous trees and six caliper inches for conifers. Aspen, Cottonwood, or Silver Maple are considered significant if they are at least 12 inches in diameter at 4.5 feet from the ground." Property owners may remove up to 20% of the

total diameter inches of significant trees on the site without being required to replace them. Any removal over 20% requires replacement at a standard rate of 1.5 inches replaced for every one inch removed. Property owners have several options for replacement. They can replace on site, replace off-site in public spaces with city consent, or pay a fee-in-lieu of planting.

Proposed improvements to existing tree preservation policy

In 2023, city council directed staff to explore strategies to promote tree preservation in St. Louis Park with a focus on heritage trees. Heritage trees are mature trees that contribute greatly to the city's tree canopy and provide magnified public and environmental health benefits compared to smaller trees.

The following section outlines proposed amendments to the existing tree protection policy in the city's zoning code. These recommendations were informed by a literature review of tree preservation ordinances and mechanisms for incentivizing tree preservation, along with a review of local tree protection policies in other Twin Cities metropolitan area communities. Staff believe these amendments will demonstrate the value of heritage trees to the city through a balance of penalties for removing and incentives for preserving trees.

Heritage tree definition

Staff recommend adding a heritage tree definition to recognize the importance of mature trees and promote preservation of these community assets. Staff reviewed heritage tree definitions from other cities and find the following definition appropriate for St. Louis Park:

A *heritage tree* is a healthy deciduous tree measuring 30 inches or greater in diameter at standard height (dsh) or a healthy coniferous tree measuring either 25 inches or greater in dsh or measuring 20 feet or greater in height.

Heritage tree replacement requirements

The zoning code includes a formula to determine the replacement tree requirements when significant trees are removed from commercial properties and new subdivisions for development. This formula accounts for the 20% of total significant trees (inches dsh) that property owners can remove without requiring replacement. It also applies the standard replacement rate (1.5) to the inches of significant trees removed above the 20% threshold. Staff recommend keeping this formula for significant trees.

For heritage trees, staff recommend requiring replacement for every inch of heritage trees removed from commercial properties and new subdivisions for development. This differs from the removal restrictions for significant trees to further emphasize the importance of heritage trees to the community. Staff research found that removal restrictions vary from city-to-city, but cities generally set a removal restriction that is equal to or lower than that of significant trees, or other similarly defined trees.

Staff recommend requiring a standard heritage tree replacement rate of two inches replaced for every one inch removed to promote heritage tree preservation and disincentivize heritage tree removal.

Heritage tree preservation credits

Although existing trees factor into the tree replacement calculations, there is not an explicit credit for preserving trees on site. Adding an explicit credit may better communicate and leverage property owners to preserve trees on a site benefiting both the property owner and the city. The property owner would benefit from reduced tree removal costs and replacement requirements, while the city would benefit from preservation of mature trees that greatly contribute to the local tree canopy.

The City of Woodbury incentivizes tree preservation through a specimen (i.e., heritage) tree credit. This credit allows property owners to count the inches of specimen trees preserved on a site toward the total inches (dsh) of trees that require replacement. Property owners receive a credit of one inch for every two inches of specimen trees preserved and the credit cannot exceed 50% of the total tree replacement requirement.

The City of Roseville also has tree preservation credits built into its required tree replacement calculation for three types of trees defined in the city's code: heritage, significant, and common. Roseville allows property owners to apply the standard replacement rate for each type of tree when calculating preservation credits. For example, property owners receive a credit of two inches for every one inch of heritage trees preserved on the site given the city's replacement rate of two for heritage trees.

Staff recommend the city offer credits for preserving heritage trees to reduce the total inches of trees a property owner may be required to replace. Property owners would receive a credit of one inch for every one inch of heritage trees preserved on the site up to 50% of the required replacement total. The intent of providing a 1:1 credit is to further incentivize heritage tree preservation by reducing tree removal costs and replacement requirements.

Next steps

Staff will provide the city council with a report on the city's long-term tree canopy goal on May 28, 2024. This report will also provide an update on recent and ongoing work related to tree planting and preservation. At the June 10, 2024, city council study session, staff will present on and facilitate a discussion about the recommended revisions to the tree protection language in the city code. Following this discussion, staff will address the city council's feedback and bring a proposed ordinance to the planning commission. The planning commission will hold a public hearing on the zoning ordinance and make a formal recommendation to the city council. Staff anticipate council action on the proposed ordinance in the third quarter of 2024.