

6:00 p.m. Study session - Community Room

Discussion items

1.	Tree preservation policy changes
2.	Environmental Stewardship dashboard presentation

Written reports

3.	Revised Environmentally Preferred Purchasing Policy (EP3)
4.	Connected infrastructure system wrap-up
5.	Preliminary site plan concept for Economic Development Authority's Minnetonka Boulevard properties – Ward 1

Members of the public can attend St. Louis Park Economic Development Authority and city council meetings in person. Official minutes of meetings are available on the city website once approved.

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City council study sessions are not broadcast.

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Executive summary

Title: Tree preservation policy changes

Recommended action: The purpose of this report is to provide information to aid in council's discussion of the proposed amendments to the existing tree protection and preservation regulations in the city's zoning code.

Policy consideration: Does the city council support the proposed amendments to the tree protection policy in city code?

Summary: The tree canopy is diminishing in St. Louis Park as tree removals continue in response to 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 also contributes to canopy loss, although not to the same extent. Staff last met with city council to discuss this topic in August 2023, when staff presented on the city's existing policies and programs for tree planting and preservation, proposed potential improvements to these strategies and recommended establishing a long-term goal for maintaining and growing the city's tree canopy. Following this discussion, city council directed staff to continue exploring strategies to promote tree preservation, specifically looking at adding a heritage tree definition and removal restrictions for heritage trees.

In May 2024, staff presented to the planning commission (PC) and environment and sustainability commission (ESC) on the proposed amendments to the existing tree protection policy in the city's zoning code. The proposed amendments include adding a heritage tree definition, implementing heritage tree replacement requirements, and offering heritage tree preservation credits. Both the PC and the ESC indicated support for the proposed amendments.

Financial or budget considerations: See the resources for implementation section in this report. Staff will need to return later to address any additional requests beyond the scope of this report.

Strategic priority consideration: St. Louis Park is committed to continue to lead in environmental stewardship.

Supporting documents: Draft ordinance, [August 28, 2023 study session agenda](#), [August 28, 2023 study session minutes](#), draft May 1, 2024 planning commission study session minutes, draft May 1, 2024 environment and sustainability commission minutes, [May 28, 2024 tree canopy percentage goal report](#)

Prepared by: Katelyn Champoux, associate planner
Sean Walther, planning manager / deputy community development director
Michael Bahe, natural resources manager
Emily Ziring, sustainability manager

Reviewed by: Karen Barton, community development director

Approved by: Cindy Walsh, deputy city 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 decrease 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 refinements 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 the 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.

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 rate of 1.5 caliper inches replaced for every one diameter 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.

Long-term tree canopy goals

On May 28, 2024, staff provided city council with a report establishing long-term tree canopy goals of 30% tree canopy coverage in the city by the end of 2035 and 35% tree canopy coverage by the end of 2045. These goals were developed using multiple indicators including the current tree canopy percentage, the maximum potential canopy percentage and findings from research of similar goals in adjacent communities. Staff also considered other dynamic and more unpredictable factors such as the number of remaining private property ash trees that will succumb to emerald ash borer, future developments and road projects, weather, tree removals from natural decline in mature trees and pressure from invasive pests.

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 increased 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. They are also reflected in the draft tree preservation ordinance at the end of this report. 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 believes these improvements will demonstrate the value of heritage trees to the city through a balance of penalties for removing and incentives for preserving trees.

In May 2024, staff presented to the planning commission (PC) and environment and sustainability commission (ESC) on the proposed amendments to the existing tree protection policy in the city’s zoning code. Both the PC and the ESC indicated support for the proposed amendments.

Heritage tree definition

Staff recommends 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 25 inches or greater in dsh.

*Diameter at standard height, or dsh, is a common method used for measuring trees. It refers to a tree's diameter measured at 4.5 feet (54 inches) above the ground.

Heritage tree replacement requirements

As mentioned above, the zoning code allows property owners to remove 20% of the diameter inches of significant trees on a site without requiring replacement. It also requires replacement of significant trees at a rate of 1.5 caliper inches replaced for every one diameter inch removed. Staff recommend keeping this formula for significant trees.

For heritage trees, staff recommends requiring replacement for every diameter inch of heritage trees removed from commercial properties and new subdivisions for development. Requiring replacement for any heritage tree removal would 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 heritage tree removal allowance that is equal to or lower than that of significant trees, or other similarly defined trees.

Table 1 Proposed tree replacement requirements

	% tree removal allowed without replacement	Replacement rate
Significant tree	20%	1.5
Heritage tree	0%	2.0

Staff recommends requiring a standard heritage tree replacement rate of two caliper inches replaced for every one diameter 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 incentivize property owners to preserve trees on a site. 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 diameter inches of specimen trees preserved on a site toward the total caliper inches they are required to replace. Property owners receive a credit of one caliper inch for every two diameter 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 recommends 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 caliper inch for every one diameter 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.

Tree protection permit

Staff recommends requiring commercial properties and new subdivisions to receive approval for a tree protection permit prior to receiving other permit approvals or initiating any site work. The purpose of the tree protection permit is to support tree preservation during development by ensuring proper installation of tree protection measures. Approval for the tree protection permit will be evaluated as part of the tree protection plan review process. Applicants will need to identify the trees on site planned for preservation and describe the protective measures that will be used. After installation of the tree protection measures, city staff will inspect the site for proper installation and approve the permit.

Resources for implementation

Additional resources will be required to effectively inspect and enforce existing tree protection codes and the additional code improvements outlined in this report.

As outlined in the 2023 study session, additional staff resources would be needed to implement this draft ordinance. If council desires to move forward with the ordinance, staff will include this staffing need as part of the 2025 budget process.

Next steps

Following this discussion, staff will address city council's feedback on the policy changes and bring proposed ordinances amending the zoning and vegetation codes to the planning commission for review. The planning commission will hold a public hearing on the ordinance and make a formal recommendation to the city council. Any related changes to the vegetation chapter of city code would be brought to city council directly. Staff anticipates council action on the proposed ordinances in the third quarter of 2024.

Ordinance No. ____-24

Amending section 36-364(j). Restrictions for tree removal; standards for replacement

The City of St. Louis Park does ordain:

Whereas, the planning commission conducted a public hearing on _____, 2024 on the ordinance; and

Whereas, the city council has considered the advice and recommendation of the planning commission (case no. XX-XX-XX),

Now, therefore be it resolved that the following amendments shall be made to Chapter 36 of the city code pertaining to zoning:

Section 1. Definitions. Chapter 36-4 of the St. Louis Park City Code is hereby amended to delete the struck-out language and to add the following underlined text.

Diameter at ~~breast~~ standard height (DBH) (dsh) means the diameter of a tree measured at a height of 4 1/2 feet from the ground level.

Heritage tree means a healthy deciduous tree measuring 30 inches or greater in diameter at standard height (dsh) or a healthy coniferous tree measuring 25 inches or greater in dsh.

Significant tree means any healthy 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, box elder, cottonwood, or silver maple are considered significant if they are at least 12 inches in diameter at 4.5 feet from the ground.

Section 2. Restrictions for tree removal; standards for replacement. Chapter 36-364(j)(2) of the St. Louis Park City Code is hereby amended to delete the struck-out language and to add the following underlined text.

- ~~a. No significant tree shall be cut down, destroyed, or removed from any property unless it is authorized by a permit issued by the city in a manner provided by this section.~~
- ~~b. No land shall be altered which will result in the removal or destruction of any significant tree unless the destruction is authorized by a permit issued by the city. The application for such permit shall include the following:~~
 - ~~1. The name, address, and phone number of the person applying for the permit.~~
 - ~~2. The name and address of the property owner.~~

- ~~3. A tree inventory of the site certified by a registered land surveyor, landscape architect, or forester which identifies the size, species, condition, and locations on the land of all existing significant trees on the property. In addition, this inventory shall identify all significant trees which will be cut down, removed, or lost due to grading or other damage. The tree inventory shall be verified by the city forester.~~
 - ~~4. Where the tree removal involves land alteration, a grading plan which identifies the following:
 - ~~i. A minimum scale of one inch equals 50 feet.~~
 - ~~ii. All existing and proposed contours at two (2) foot intervals.~~
 - ~~iii. Location of all existing and proposed structures.~~
 - ~~iv. Any grade change or land alteration, whether temporary or permanent, of greater than one foot measured vertically, affecting 30 percent (as measured on a horizontal plane) or more of a tree's root zone.~~
 - ~~v. Utility construction which may result in the cutting of 30 percent or more of a tree's roots within the root zone.~~
 - ~~vi. Any areas where soil compaction is planned to a depth of six inches or more, or of 30 percent or more of the surface of the soil within a root zone.~~~~
 - ~~5. A plan for the protection of trees intended to be saved.~~
 - ~~6. A statement of the proposed use of the land including a description of the type of building or structure existing or proposed to be constructed on the site.~~
 - ~~7. The number, type and size of trees required to be replaced by this section.~~
 - ~~8. The proposed locations of the replacement trees.~~
- a. Allowable tree removal.
1. Up to twenty (20) percent of the diameter inches of significant trees on any parcel may be removed without replacement requirements. Replacement according to the tree replacement schedule is required when removal exceeds more than twenty (20) percent of the total significant tree diameter inches.
 2. Replacement according to the tree replacement schedule is required for removal of all heritage tree diameter inches.
 3. Diseased, dead, or structurally unsound trees are exempt from the provision of this section. The City Forester is responsible for determining whether a tree is diseased, dead or structurally unsound.
- b. Tree replacement schedule. Tree removals over the allowable tree removal limit on the parcel shall be replaced according to the following schedule:

1. Significant trees shall be replaced with new trees at a rate of one and one half (1.5) caliper inch replaced for every one (1) diameter inch removed.
 2. Heritage trees shall be replaced with new trees at a rate of two (2) caliper inches replaced for every one (1) diameter inch removed.
- c. Heritage tree preservation credits.
1. A credit may be applied to the required tree replacement if a healthy, heritage tree is preserved on a site. The tree must be approved by the city as a quality tree worth saving. The credit will be applied at a rate of one (1) caliper inch for every one (1) heritage tree diameter inch preserved, up to fifty percent (50%) of the required replacement. If a heritage tree for which credit is provided does not survive one year after construction, the developer will be required to pay the fee-in-lieu.
- d. Approval of a permit for the removal of any significant or heritage tree or approval of a permit for land alteration which results in tree destruction shall be subject to and conditioned upon the owner or developer replacing the loss or reasonably anticipated loss of all live significant and heritage trees. The amount of trees to be provided in replacement shall be determined by the following formula:
1. Significant trees
$$((A/B)-0.20) \times \underline{1.5} \times A = \underline{D} \ C$$

A = Total diameter inches of significant trees lost as a result of land alteration or removal.

B = Total diameter inches of significant trees situated on the land.

~~C = Tree replacement constant (1.5).~~

~~D~~ C = Replacement trees (number of caliper inches).
 2. Heritage trees
$$(A \times 2) - (B - A) = C$$

A = Total diameter inches of heritage trees lost as a result of land alteration or removal.

B = Total diameter inches of heritage trees situated on the land.

C = Replacement trees (number of caliper inches)
- g. Protected tree replacement fee. If a significant or heritage tree that was identified for preservation and received replacement credit or zoning ordinance consideration is removed or damaged during construction, the developer will be required to pay to the city a cash mitigation. The fee is based on the diameter inches of the tree(s) damaged or removed. The fee per diameter inch is set forth in the city's fee schedule as the cash in lieu of replacement trees fee.

Section 3. This ordinance shall take effect on _____, 2025.

First reading	(date)
Second reading	(date)
Date of publication	(date)
Date ordinance takes effect	(date)

Reviewed for administration:

Adopted by the city council (insert date)

Kim Keller, city manager

Nadia Mohamed, mayor

Attest:

Approved as to form and execution:

Melissa Kennedy, city clerk

Soren Mattick, city attorney

Planning commission
DRAFT Minutes – May 1, 2024
Study Session

Members present: Jim Beneke, Mia Divecha, Matt Eckholm, Katie Merten, Tom Weber, Jan Youngquist

Members absent: none

Staff present: Sean Walther, Laura Chamberlain, Katelyn Champoux and Michael Bahe

Ms. Champoux and Mr. Bahe introduced themselves and their roles on city staff and planning.

Mr. Walther stated the application process for planning commissioner has now ended and 9 applications were received. He noted that the decision should be made in around one month. He added that several commissioners are serving beyond the original term and under the bylaws, they can continue to do so until they are reappointed, or another person is appointed. He noted that city staff and the city council greatly appreciate the continued service of all the planning commissioners and the commission's patience while the city studies the boards and commissions program, recruitment and selection processes. The city values its volunteer board members and commissioners and the thoughtful consideration and recommendations they provide to the city.

1. Tree preservation ordinance

Ms. Champoux and Mr. Bahe presented the staff report and spoke about the proposed amendments to the city's tree preservation ordinance.

Chair Divecha asked when someone pays the tree replacement fee, where does that money go. Mr. Walther stated it goes into a fund for the city's tree planting programs for public trees on public land.

Commissioner Weber noted he has a large tree in his backyard and asked if it were to be struck by lightning, would the city replace it. Mr. Bahe stated no because it is on private property. Mr. Walther stated if it is a significant or heritage tree, the ordinance requires the tree be healthy to be subject to the code. He added an exception would be for commercial or multi-family residential properties with approved landscape plans. They would just need to replant one tree in place of the tree removed in that situation.

Chair Divecha asked if this ordinance covers only commercial properties. Mr. Bahe stated commercial and multifamily and new subdivisions are covered.

Commissioner Merten asked about what other cities do for tree ordinances. Ms. Champoux stated it is mixed as to what other cities do.

Mr. Walther stated after this discussion, the findings will be brought to city council for further discussion before the city starts the formal public hearing process.

Commissioner Youngquist asked how the proposed ordinance will define commercial properties. Mr. Walther stated we are using the term broadly in this conversation, meaning commercial of all types, retail, office, industrial, and multifamily residential.

Commissioner Youngquist asked if there has been any consideration on how this might affect city goals such as affordable housing and noted the costs of developing affordable housing and tree requirements. Mr. Walther stated staff is aware a balance will need to be struck but added they have not quantified these implications. He added in part the impact on a neighborhood is similar whether it is market rate or affordable development, and we would want to see trees preserved and/or replaced.

Mr. Bahe added many tree programming projects and increased city incentives are happening in traditionally lower income areas of the city and restoring the tree canopy in those areas.

Commissioner Weber asked where credits go for heritage tree preservation. Ms. Champoux said it would happen when you have a development contract with the city. Mr. Walther stated some trees may be removed for a particular development, but when heritage trees are preserved, the credit would reduce the replacement requirements for the trees removed and potentially lowering the fees that need to be paid to the city when there is a shortfall of new plantings to cover the replacement requirement.

Commissioner Youngquist asked how many heritage trees there are and where they are in St. Louis Park. Mr. Bahe stated on public property staff knows where they are, but not on private property.

Mr. Walther commented that staff has really emphasized preserving trees in new development applications near environmentally sensitive areas, such as next to a creek or wetland area, at the edges of lots where they provide screening and are generally out of the way of new buildings, and when very large and more remarkable mature trees exist. He added the heritage tree definition and canopy goals are new tools to advocate for tree preservation.

Commissioner Weber asked how much of an effect there is on the tree canopy with ash tree removals and replacements. Mr. Bahe stated eventually that gap will be filled again but it might take some years for the canopy to be replaced.

Commissioner Weber asked if there may be an incentive program for residents to remove a tree where they might receive assistance from the city for replacement of the removed tree if they promise to replace it within a certain amount of time.

Commissioner Merten added an education program for residents related to tree removal and replacement may be helpful.

Mr. Bahe stated the city would not have the funding for a program like that, and it might be counter to our goals to assist residents unless it were an epidemic. He added city efforts are for tree preservation.

Commissioner Merten asked if there is an education program for residents on removal of diseased ash trees. Mr. Bahe stated yes and noted the city received a grant from the DNR for removal and replanting and subsidies for residents for this.

Commissioner Beneke asked about replanting. Mr. Bahe stated if someone removes a 30-inch diameter tree, they need to replant 30 inches of new trees, or approximately 10-15 new 2-inch to 2.5-inch trees for each large tree removed.

Commissioner Weber noted the Three Rivers trail plan and preferred route on Dakota Avenue. He added the city council should add language to the Three Rivers plan that says you must replace the no tree loss option as a parameter of municipal consent, to save trees over parking. Mr. Walther stated this may come down to a legal question and there may be a limit on conditions, but noted there are negotiations that can happen. He added the city's strategic priorities cover trees and environment, as well as the Living Streets Policy, so things are in place already along with the tree preservation ordinance.

Chair Divecha asked about the 20% penalty and the credits and asked why there was not just a set penalty for removing a heritage tree. Ms. Champoux stated they worked to find a balance hoping by offering incentives it will be more appealing to folks to preserve heritage trees. Mr. Walther added the 20% is likely a practical allowance to give some flexibility without penalty.

Chair Divecha asked how developers typically react to the tree preservation ordinance and has it ever been a barrier or a non-issue. Mr. Walther stated he is not aware of the penalty causing a developer to walk away from a project.

Commissioner Weber asked what happens if a replacement tree dies, and if the owner is responsible for replacement again. Mr. Walther stated there is a 1-year warranty period and inspection and a replacement tree would need to be planted while under warranty. He also noted that while it is not monitored regularly but staff does review approved landscaping plans when new requests are submitted and if the landscaping has not been maintained, the city can require it to be back brought back into compliance.

Mr. Walther stated this will go to city council now for discussion and decisions along with budget considerations.

2. Arrive & Thrive update

Ms. Chamberlain presented the report.

Commissioner Beneke asked if there are any issues with ground contamination. Ms. Chamberlain stated there is not as much ground contamination in this area, but because it is historically an industrial area with the railroad there, it is an area of concern, especially near Bass Lake and flooding potential.

Chair Divecha asked how the smaller building size is enforced. Mr. Chamberlain stated that will be the next step they look at with maximum building widths and guidelines with a zoning district or overlay.

Commissioner Youngquist asked about the commercial space that is butted against a trail and also going through a residential area, noting it does not seem it would be successful with only access coming from the west. Ms. Chamberlain stated she will ask the consultant on that, and added the connection would be only for the neighborhood and residential uses.

Chair Divecha asked about the pedestrian connections along Beltline Boulevard and asked if the apartments there are occupied now. She noted there is a crosswalk, but not a stop and asked if that is being looked at. Ms. Chamberlain stated that is not being looked at right now, but stated Beltline Boulevard width with the redesign and construction has gone from 4 to 3 lane, and the crossing location is intentional, while there were limits on where to put traffic lights. She stated there may be mitigations to look at now that the apartments are now occupied there.

Commissioner Eckholm stated he prefers the 15-18 story building in the Burlington location.

Commissioner Weber asked what the future use planned in this location. Ms. Weber stated the future use there is mostly office commercial space but noted in the Phase 2 there was a lot of feedback from residents on how they love the Micro Center store. She noted the city would like to help them find an alternate location as they are a great draw.

Commissioner Youngquist asked about a bike ped connection over Hwy. 100. Ms. Chamberlain stated that is not in the plan as this time, but staff is hoping this plan can act as a catalyst for more conversations on this.

Commissioner Eckholm asked if there is any way to get a bridge to better connect Wooddale and the Walker Lake area better, such as a bridge extended and turfed to help it feel more like a street to pedestrians with trees. Ms. Chamberlain stated this is being looked at in the long term.

Commissioner Youngquist asked if the maroon buildings south of the station are approved but have not been constructed. Ms. Chamberlain stated no, they are similar, but this is more of a general development being shown. She noted EDA still controls the Nash Finch site and a new developer is being researched.

Commissioner Youngquist asked since this development will be starting over, why the highest density is not next to the station. Commissioner Eckholm agreed. Ms. Chamberlain stated that is great feedback.

Commissioner Eckholm added the Johnny Pops site could also be used. Ms. Chamberlain stated staff is looking at that as well, for higher density and mixed-use development which works well in this area.

Commissioner Eckholm asked about Methodist Hospital expansion in the future. Ms. Chamberlain stated Methodist has realized they will not be able to expand in this area due to the railroad spur there.

Commissioner Youngquist asked if the large white box north of Methodist is the former Sam's club. Ms. Chamberlain stated yes.

Commissioner Youngquist asked about redevelopment of the parking lot there and if the building was involved in that as well. Ms. Chamberlain stated the city did a study in 2018, and there was a moratorium on development there. She stated the direction for that site was general commercial and then it was reassessed, and the current parking could be used for mixed use and structured parking. She noted that Loffler Corporation moved into the space, invested a lot, and brought 500 employees to the area, right next to the light rail station. She stated as of now, the entire site will not be shown for redevelopment with only the southern portion shown for redevelopment.

Commissioner Eckholm added this area -- because of soil issues -- has a cap of no more than 6 stories that can be built on that site, as well as how much parking can be there. Ms. Chamberlain stated this area is also very hard to redevelop because of soil conditions.

Commissioner Weber stated he is hopeful about the proposals for Excelsior Boulevard and if half of this can be completed, that is a win for the community. Ms. Chamberlain agreed and added it is just a question of when this can happen within the 20-year plan.

Ms. Chamberlain stated there will be an open house related to Arrive & Thrive on May 14 that commissioners are invited to attend and an online survey to launch this round of the community engagement process.

3. Adjournment – 8:00 p.m.

Sean Walther, liaison

Mia Divecha, chair member

Environmental & sustainability commission

DRAFT Minutes – May 1, 2024

1. Call to order – 6:30 p.m.

1a. Roll call

Members present: Chair Shaina Ashare, Vice Chair Tatiana Giraldo, Marisa Bayer, Ryan Griffin, Andrew Willette, Dave Wilsey, Paul Zeigle

Absent: Ramil Goonetilleke, Abigail Oppegaard, Sasha Shahidi, Eric Zweber

Guests: Nancy Rose, resident; Council Member Sue Budd

Staff present: Emily Ziring, sustainability manager; Katelyn Champoux, associate planner; Sean Walther, planning manager/deputy cd director; Michael Bahe, natural resources manager

2. Approval of minutes – March 5, 2024 – The minutes were approved as presented with 3 abstentions.

3. Business.

3a. Final comments on Environmentally Preferred Purchasing Policy (EP3) revisions

Ms. Ziring noted the revisions she made to the document and reviewed those with the commission in detail.

Commissioner Willette asked if there should be an annual review of the state of the market for sustainable products purchased. Ms. Ziring stated that is the goal, but she is not sure they need to get into that much detail for the policy.

Commissioner Willette asked if refurbished products should be included for preferred purchasing. Ms. Ziring stated that would depend on the product type, and some are repurposed within the organization. She added she can look into this further with the city's IT manager.

Ms. Ziring stated the policy will go to the city council in 4 weeks for further review.

3b. Next steps for advisory boards and commissions

The commission discussed the council's decision that all advisory commissions will get work direction from council and the many unknowns remaining for how that will work and what it will mean for staff's role.

Commissioner Griffin added there is a good opportunity now for ESC to lean into challenges identified for boards & commissions right now, as well as brainstorming and putting forward a set of ESC recommendations and tangible actions that would address core issues and bring forward ideas.

Ms. Ziring stated this is good feedback, and she will take this back to the city administration. She stated meeting frequency can be reviewed as well as meeting formality.

Mr. Ziring added the workplan is still in question, especially with council directing the work of the ESC now, and what role will the council have in developing the workplan. She noted continuing the existing 2023 workplan is best and then the commission can discuss it again in June after the May 20 council discussion. She added elections will also need to be addressed in June.

Ms. Ziring also noted there are commissioner terms expiring and administration will reach out to those commission members.

Commissioner Bayer added she liked the idea of crowd sourcing solutions. Ms. Ziring stated if anyone has immediate ideas please forward them to the director of administrative services.

4. Presentation from city staff

Staff members Katelyn Champoux, associate planner; Sean Walther, planning manager/deputy cd director; and Michael Bahe, natural resources manager, introduced themselves and spoke about the proposed amendments to the city's existing heritage tree preservation policy in the zoning code.

Commissioner Willette asked if the replacement tree is a 1-inch tree. Mr. Walther stated the minimum is 1.5 caliper inches for new understory ornamental trees and 2.5 caliper inches for new overstory trees, and clarified that the replacement is based on the size when the new tree is planted, not the diameter at standard height it expected to reach at maturity.

Commissioner Bayer asked if the fee in lieu will be higher for a heritage tree. Ms. Champoux stated it will not be a higher fee, but because of the higher replacement rate, it would effectively cost more.

Commissioner Zeigle asked about how many preservation credits are available. Ms. Champoux stated they would only get credits for heritage trees and not for a significant tree, and it would reduce the replacement requirement up to 50%.

Commissioner Wilsey asked if there are any trees that do not reach a large diameter but might be old and worthy of consideration as a heritage tree. Mr. Bahe stated, yes, that there are smaller stature trees that may not reach the large diameter threshold and staff can consider this at a later date.

Commissioner Griffin asked about replacement trees and if staff have considered the cons of not choosing a smaller diameter threshold (such as 24 inches) for heritage trees.

Mr. Bahe stated staff did discuss this and this is where they landed based on their research.

Commissioner Griffin asked if there is any thought given to leaving dead trees standing to support wildlife. Mr. Bahe stated once these trees get to 30 inches in diameter they do start to have issues, and while staff does take into consideration wildlife habitat, human safety is the number one concern. However, he added this is a valid question, and they do want to preserve these trees.

Commissioner Griffin also asked whether Mr. Bahe knows of any cities in the US that have set a canopy goal and reached it given the problem of EAB, and how they did. Mr. Bahe was not aware of any cities that have set a goal and reached it.

Commissioner Willette asked on the preservation credit, how long into the future do they have to preserve the tree. Mr. Walther stated staff monitors the trees closely during construction and one year post-construction to be sure trees survive; after that time, if there is an approved site plan on file the trees must be planted and maintained in perpetuity. If there are changes, the property must either bring the site into compliance with previously approved plans or meet current codes depending on the circumstances.

Council Member Budd asked if this applies only to commercial property. Mr. Walther stated currently single-family homes and duplexes on existing lots are exempt, and anything larger from triplex to multi-family to commercial properties would fall under the ordinance. He noted also single-family and duplex lots would only be included if a parcel is being subdivided.

Commissioner Zeigle asked if there is a canopy goal in place. Mr. Bahe stated they are still working on this but there will be a midterm goal for 2035 and long term goal for 2045.

Commissioner Giraldo asked if there is a public education program in place. Mr. Bahe stated there will be new information on the website, including symptoms of declining trees by tree species.

Commissioner Bayer asked if a property were sold and demoed and clear cut of trees, would these policies protect that type of impact in the city. Mr. Walther stated no, the ordinance would not apply, but the city does require the owner/contractor to notify neighbors if this is happening through a construction management plan process. He added Edina typically does 100 tear downs in a year, while St. Louis Park only sees 5-10 per year. He added that not all tear downs and major additions result in tree removals.

Commissioner Griffin added he also has concerns about this and noted in his neighborhood a very beautiful large tree was removed for a home construction outside of the footprint of the house. Mr. Walther noted that even if a tree is outside of the footprint of construction, it may be damaged by construction equipment and grading. He asked how the city informs property owners undergoing construction about heritage trees on their property. He added he would like to know the percentage of heritage trees in the city and how many are on single-family lots. Mr. Walther stated that the city does not have an inventory of private trees, only public trees. The city has done some

sampling of private tree information to get a better understanding of the types of tree species that are most prevalent. Mr. Bahe noted that he would speak with the city's aerial photography vendor, NearMap, about the availability of this data.

Commissioner Giraldo asked about contests or incentives for preserving trees by creating relationships with heritage trees through storytelling and personal connections.

Commissioner Wilsey suggested doing a champion tree program. Mr. Bahe talked about a program where volunteers name trees in a park.

Ms. Ziring stated this discussion will go to city council on June 10.

5. Staff updates

Ms. Ziring updated the commission on the following items:

- Submitting final application for a grant to install fast speed garage doors at the municipal service center using EECBG funds from the Department of Energy
- Climate Champions program for industrial and large commercial properties
- APA national conference
- Two applications for Climate Champions for Multifamily in the works
- Second annual Wheelie Fun bike ride – Dakota Park to Aquila Park, May 17, 4-5 p.m.
- First Depave application in the works – an apartment building off Hwy 100 near the Wat Prom temple building

6. Work plan update

6a. Expand our outreach – Events work group update

- Upcoming events were noted

6b. Share our voice – State policy update

Ms. Ziring said the session will come to a close in a few weeks. She stated the commissioners can go to the MyBills link for updates. She added the building performance standards bill was pulled back and will be worked on again next year.

6c. Measure our progress – Staff and volunteer reports – April 2024 report

Ms. Ziring presented the report and noted details.

7. Environmental justice and current events open discussion

Ms. Ziring pointed out a recent article in Vox about failed government policies that led to car bloat and why there are so many larger vehicles on the road today. She noted a lot is profit driven as well as spurred by changes in federal emission standards.

Feedback about removing barriers to commissions participation or commissions in general:

Commissioner Giraldo stated having relaxed meeting rules and allowing more people to attend would help. She added there should be more informal meetings for gathering ideas.

Commissioner Griffin agreed and added he would also like meetings virtual for more community participation. He also liked the idea of meeting off-site rather than at city hall.

Commissioner Wilsey added the sequencing of topics and giving input and engagement might be better done through a public series with sharing and community conversations conducted.

Chair Ashare noted childcare on site would be difficult, but possibly a voucher for a babysitter would be better.

Ms. Rose stated that city code allows the commission to expense costs for reimbursement. Mr. Ziring stated she would have to check on that.

Commissioner Bayer noted having more virtual meetings would be helpful, especially when there are only presentations and no voting.

Ms. Ziring stated open meeting laws are in state statute so difficult to change. She added the city attorney is working on this with city administrative staff.

8. Upcoming/proposed events

- Arbor Day celebration, May 11, 9 a.m. – 12 noon, Birchwood Park
- Wheelie Fun Community Bike Ride, May 17, 4-5 p.m., Dakota Park
- Ecotacular, June 15, 11 a.m. – 3 p.m., Wolfe Park

9. Adjournment - 8:12 p.m.

Emily Ziring, liaison

Shaina Ashare, chair member

Executive summary

Title: Environmental Stewardship dashboard presentation

Recommended action: None at this time.

Policy consideration: None at this time.

Summary: The Environmental Stewardship dashboard was created through collaboration across multiple divisions including sustainability, solid waste, natural resources and engineering. Its primary purpose is to demonstrate progress towards the city's Climate Action Plan goals and broad environmental stewardship goals. The dashboard serves to track and publicly monitor data in line with the city's strategic priorities, as well as foster transparency between the city and the community.

Ellie Rabine, one of the city's sustainability specialists, will present an overview of the dashboard and answer council questions.

Financial or budget considerations: Not applicable.

Strategic priority considerations:

St. Louis Park is committed to continue to lead in environmental stewardship.

St. Louis Park is committed to creating opportunities to build social capital through community engagement.

Supporting documents: Discussion
[Dashboard](#)

Prepared by: Ellie Rabine, sustainability specialist

Reviewed by: Emily Ziring, sustainability manager
Brian Hoffman, building & energy director

Approved by: Kim Keller, city manager

Discussion

Background:

The concept of a climate action dashboard was first proposed by the Community Technology Advisory Commission (CTAC) in March 2021 during a presentation to council on smart city initiatives. Public dashboards for each of the city's strategic priorities communicate efforts and track progress towards city goals, as well as foster and facilitate transparency between the community and the city. Currently, the city has public dashboards for [multifamily housing, developments](#) and [police response to resistance](#). In early 2022, council directed staff to create an Environmental Stewardship dashboard and work began shortly after.

Present considerations:

Environmental Stewardship dashboard overview

The Environmental Stewardship dashboard is a collaboration between many departments and divisions including sustainability, solid waste, natural resources and engineering. It follows the structure of the city's Climate Action Plan (CAP), with most data sets corresponding to one of the CAP's seven mid-term goals. Dashboard tabs include energy, waste reduction and reuse, travel, water and trees, with each tab outlining corresponding CAP goals, potential barriers and opportunities, and other pertinent information. A full summary of the dashboard tabs, CAP goals and corresponding data can be found in the table below.

Dashboard tab	Corresponding CAP goal	Data presented
Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce energy consumption in large commercial and industrial (C/I) buildings by 30% by 2030, as compared to business-as-usual forecast Reduce energy consumption in small to mid-size commercial buildings by 30% by 2030, as compared to business-as-usual forecast Reduce energy consumption in residential buildings by 35% by 2030, as compared to the business-as-usual forecast Achieve 100% renewable electricity by 2030 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commercial building energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions Residential building energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions Progress towards all businesses and households purchasing 100% of their electricity from green power
Waste reduction and reuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieve a 50% reduction in waste by 2030 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Results from clothing, garden and media swaps, in pounds Number of households participating in organics programs Tons of residential waste, by category
Travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce vehicle emissions by 25% by 2030, as compared to the business-as-usual forecast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vehicle miles traveled annually
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conserve natural resources, including water* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program participation data in the WaterSense rebates program and the Rainwater Rewards program
Trees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conserve natural resources, such as trees, water, native plants and pollinators that benefit the residents and environment of St. Louis Park* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of boulevard and park trees planted Number of trees planted annually Total number of public trees in St. Louis Park Number of trees injected for emerald ash borer

**Although not included as one of the Climate Action Plan’s seven mid-term goals, these topics were identified as valuable sustainability metrics to track.*

The Environmental Stewardship dashboard can be accessed from the [Environmental Stewardship landing page](#), found on the sustainability division’s [Climate Action Plan webpage](#). This page was created as a launching pad for community members to explore a range of user-friendly tools related to sustainability initiatives, including the Regional Indicators initiative, solar production dashboards for municipal solar, a public electric vehicle charging map and more.

Next Steps:

Sustainability staff will be responsible for updating the Environmental Stewardship dashboard annually or as new data become available.

Staff plans to continually update and improve the existing dashboard to display progress towards meeting Climate Action Plan goals. Potential future additions to the map include highlighting pollinator and native plant initiatives, interactive bus route and bike trail maps, and participation in programs such as Climate Champions and Depave SLP.

Executive summary

Title: Revised Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy (EP3)

Recommended action: None at this time. The purpose of this report is to advise council of revisions made administratively to the EP3.

Policy consideration: None at this time.

Summary: Council adopted the city's Environmentally Preferred Purchasing Policy (EP3) in 2015. In the subsequent nine years, significant advancements have taken place in both the city's support of environmental stewardship and in the availability and types of low-carbon and environmentally friendly products. Staff have elected to revise the existing EP3 to ensure that it reflects current city policies (predominantly the Climate Action Plan) and to simplify many of the original provisions that were deemed too complex or infeasible for staff to comply with. The revised version has been adopted administratively.

Financial or budget considerations: Not applicable.

Strategic priority considerations:

St. Louis Park is committed to continue to lead in environmental stewardship.

Supporting documents: Discussion
Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy (EP3) (revised May 2024)

Prepared by: Emily Ziring, sustainability manager

Approved by: Kim Keller, city manager

Discussion

Background:

In April 2015, council [adopted](#) the city's Environmentally Preferred Purchasing Policy (referred to as EP3). The policy was the outcome of a workgroup of the environment and sustainability commission (ESC), formed with the goal of looking at key areas in the city's purchasing practices to determine if the city was making the most sustainable choices.

Since its adoption nine years ago, administration of the policy has become more and more challenging. Solid waste staff, for instance, spent many hours researching green office supplies and creating a curated list of acceptable supplies for purchase only for supply availability and vendors to change. The annual implementation summary required under the policy has not been created in many years due to other environmental stewardship priorities (such as the creation of the sustainability division and creation of Climate Action Plan programs) taking priority. Further, some in leadership have posed concerns about policy aspects such as:

- Legality (e.g., does purchasing carbon offsets meet public purpose?),
- Equity (e.g., how should we balance supporting local suppliers while meeting tight budget constraints if local prices are slightly higher?),
- Complexity (e.g., does staff in each department need to verify that hand sanitizers meet UL 2783?) and
- Feasibility (e.g., in a decentralized system, can staff meet source reduction goals without needing to consult all other departments prior to purchasing sticky notes, rubber bands, etc.?).

With the identified barriers in mind, staff worked internally to revise the EP3 to limit it to only elements that are feasible; beneficial to the environment, the community and staff; and aligned with Climate Action Plan goals.

Staff consulted the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's sustainable purchasing policy guidelines to ensure alignment with best practices. Staff also met with colleagues in the City of Roseville, who adopted an environmentally preferable purchasing policy in 2019. Roseville's policy has been viewed as the model for Minnesota cities to follow.

Present considerations:

The revised EP3 is attached to this report. Staff's concerns have been allayed with the following changes:

- Policy has been modernized to include mention of the Climate Action Plan, Zero Waste Packaging ordinance, equipment and building electrification, end uses of finished compost, and preference for utilizing source reduction and reuse before recycling
- Program brand names (e.g., Windsource, Green Balance) have been replaced with descriptions to avoid obsolescence
- Complexity has been removed, with technical product spec numbers replaced with third-party ecolabels
- Sections that are duplicative of other city policies (e.g., Living Streets) have been removed

- Requirements that cost significant staff time for little carbon benefit (e.g., identifying responsible manufacturers of all products, tracking usage of all cleaning chemicals used, creating a repository of green office supplies) have been removed
- Requirements were added for fleet vehicle procurement
- Definition of “cost effectiveness” was added to better accommodate locally-sourced but higher-priced products

The environment and sustainability commission reviewed drafts of the revised EP3 at their March 2024 and May 2024 meetings. Commissioners’ suggestions have been incorporated and the commission has approved the final revised version.

The revised EP3 has been posted to the Policies section of the city intranet and shared with human resources staff to present to new hires during onboarding.

Next Steps:

Sustainability staff will meet annually with department directors to remind them of the policy. Sustainability staff also plan to start an office supply task force to promote waste minimization and source reduction (i.e., sharing and use of current office supply inventory prior to purchasing new).



City of St. Louis Park Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy (“EP3”) *Revised May 2024*

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 mobile 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" and automated emissions reduction (AER)-enabled

appliances should be purchased that automatically adjust to conserve energy and load shift to operate during times when the energy grid is cleanest.

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: Connected Infrastructure system wrap-up

Recommended action: None

Policy consideration: The purpose of this report is to summarize the outcomes of the recent discussions within the connected infrastructure system study sessions.

Summary: On June 3, the council completed a series of discussions focused on advancing the city's strategic priority related to connected infrastructure. These discussions primarily focused on public policy and construction, operations, and maintenance of connected infrastructure. The study session system started on March 18, 2024. Since then, staff has provided the council with information, and there have been several policy discussions on topics related to connected infrastructure. This report serves as a summary of all the discussions and includes the council direction provided.

Financial or budget considerations: Funds are budgeted in the CIP for connected infrastructure projects. The additional funds to implement the changes discussed during this system will be brought forward to council as a part of the 2025 budget discussions.

Strategic priority consideration: St. Louis Park is committed to providing a variety of options for people to make their way around the city comfortably, safely and reliably.

Supporting documents: Discussion

Prepared by: Debra Heiser, engineering director

Reviewed by: Jack Sullivan, engineering project manager
Jay Hall, public works director

Approved by: Cindy Walsh, deputy city manager

Discussion

Background: This system included study sessions covering a range of topics relating to connected infrastructure. Topics were grouped, and each meeting built on the previous discussion and had self-contained outcomes based on various policy and practice questions. Reports on these topics were considered and discussed by the city council, and where appropriate, direction on future expectations and outcomes was provided to staff for implementation. A summary of the topics covered in this system includes:

Report: Connected infrastructure system introduction

Date: 3/18/2024

Overview: Staff introduced the system, including an overview of the connected infrastructure capital planning process and guiding documents. The proposed topics included in the system all center on connected infrastructure policy and provide opportunities to consider how connected infrastructure is planned for, constructed and maintained in the city. The topics examined current programs and offered opportunities, identified by both council and staff, for expansion or adjustment where applicable.

Outcomes: The council generally approved of the topics included in the system.

Discussion: Infrastructure project development process

Date: 4/15/2024

Overview: This discussion focused on the projects in the 10-year CIP that engineering is responsible for implementing. Staff provided an in-depth overview of the existing 10-year CIP, how it was developed, what is included and who it serves.

Outcomes of the discussion: The council generally approved of the topics included in the system.

Report: Basket weave stop signs

Date: 4/15/2024

Overview: The report provided the council information regarding staff's intention to implement basket weave stop signs in response to stop sign requests when the existing intersection control does not meet the criteria of the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control.

Studies and public feedback indicate that stop signs that do not meet the criteria of the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices are not meeting the expectations of any roadway users. As a result, staff recommend the implementation of a basket weave pattern to provide a more consistent application of intersection control.

The goal of revising the traffic control in these neighborhoods is to:

- Make intersection control more predictable for all users of the road.
- Increase compliance at stop sign locations.
- Reduce unnecessary vehicle stopping, noise and carbon emissions.
- Create similar expectations for road users as they move throughout the city.

This basket weave pattern will have an alternating stop control pattern for streets – stop signs at every other intersection.

Outcomes: Council generally supported staff's approach to addressing stop sign requests by implementing a basket weave pattern to provide a more consistent application of intersection control.

The engagement level when this occurs will be to inform the community of the changes we are making and why they are being done through direct mailing. Staff will then bring the recommended traffic control changes to council for approval.

The next neighborhoods where this approach will be pursued are Browndale and Minikahda Vista.

Staff will work on the following steps to implement this recommendation:

1. Later this year, information will be shared with the neighborhood residents, informing them of the changes to traffic control and why they are being done, as well as letting people know that they can reach out to engineering with questions.
2. Staff will then bring the recommended traffic control changes to the council. This report will include resolutions modifying the traffic controls and the costs of implementing the sign modifications. It will also include information regarding the questions that staff received from the neighborhood.

Report: Speed limit evaluation

Date: 4/15/2024

Overview: Two years ago, the city implemented citywide speed limit changes. As a follow-up to these changes, staff completed a study that reviewed the outcomes.

This report shared key findings from the review now that the lowered speed limits have been in place for two years:

- Vehicles are traveling about one mile per hour less than prior to the changes in speed limits.
 - A one-mile-per-hour reduction in vehicle speed reduces the risk of severe injury or death by three percentage points.
 - The majority of drivers are currently driving within five (5) mph of the posted speed limit, which reinforces the appropriateness of the updated speed limits.
- There has been an overall reduction in crashes in the city after the reduction in speed limits.
 - 25% reduction of all crashes in the city.
 - 2.4% reduction of any injury type crash within the city.
 - Pedestrian and bicycle crashes have stayed relatively constant, but the injury crashes have decreased.

Outcomes: Staff will continue to monitor traffic conditions throughout the city and reevaluate speed limits as a part of planned construction projects and transit route changes.

Discussion: Three Rivers Canadian Pacific (CP) regional rail trail update

Date: 4/24/2024

Overview: Three Rivers Park District staff members provided an in-depth presentation reviewing the history and recent activities related to the Canadian Pacific (CP) rail regional trail planning that included:

- long-range planning efforts since 2000
- public engagement and planning process that occurred in 2023
- their findings from their planning efforts and their recommended route (SLP4, referred to as the Dakota Avenue route)

The presentation was provided by Danny McCullough and Stephen Shurson, with support from Kelly Grissman and Jonathan Vlaming. The policy questions asked in the study session report and by Three Rivers staff were:

- Does the city support a north-south route through St. Louis Park?
- Does the city support the route recommended by Three Rivers?
- If not, what other information is needed to help the council make these decisions?

Outcomes of the discussion: All council members confirmed their support for a north–south regional trail through St. Louis Park, and the majority of council supported route SLP4 (Dakota Avenue).

Discussion: Engineering projects not in the 10-year capital plan

Date: 4/24/2024

Overview: Staff introduced several potential engineering projects and project types that are not currently budgeted in our 10-year capital plan. These are:

Partnership infrastructure projects

- *MCWD: Minnehaha Greenway – Cedar Lake regional trail connection*
- *MnDOT signal replacements*
- *Hennepin County: Minnetonka Boulevard reconstruction (Phase 2 and 3)*

City infrastructure projects

- *Louisiana Avenue reconstruction (BNSF railroad to Walker Street)*
- *Delamination mitigation*
- *Dakota Park Pedestrian Bridge (adjacent to the dog park)*

Discussion included:

- The role that road condition, outside funding, existing projects, available funding, potential needed additional funding and staff workload capacity play in CIP development.
- How outside funding (grants/state appropriations) are applied for and what is needed to put together a competitive, comprehensive application.
- The importance of improving bicycle and pedestrian safety along Louisiana Avenue.
- Questions about what delamination is and what role it plays in pavement condition. Delamination does not significantly impact the pavement structure but can marginally accelerate pavement deterioration. Staff shared that the timing of this mitigation is not critical, so it would be possible to spread the work over several years.
- A desire for pedestrian and bicycle safety to be a consideration for including projects in the CIP.

Outcomes of the discussion: The majority of the council indicated that they wanted staff to work on incorporating the following projects into engineering's 10-year CIP planning process:

- *MCWD: Minnehaha Greenway – Cedar Lake regional trail connection*
- *MnDOT signal replacements*

- *Hennepin County: Minnetonka Boulevard reconstruction (Phase 2 and 3)*
- *Delamination mitigation*

Discussion: Stormwater 101

Date: 5/28/2024

Overview: This discussion was informational with the intent to provide the council with an overview of stormwater management and regulation in St. Louis Park.

The presentation provided a history of St. Louis Park drainage, which began in a "drain everything" era, adapted to an urban environment, responded to a major storm event in 1987 and has been retrofitting the system with redevelopment. Staff covered basic stormwater management concepts and the evolution of stormwater management practices and regulations.

Other topics included the physical characteristics of water bodies in the city and the drainage characteristics, including landlocked basins, pipe networks and significant water bodies within the city. The presentation also focused on the work of the last ten years, including modeling advances, capital improvement projects, technology advances and possible changes to the program.

Outcomes of the discussion:

- Everything has been disturbed.
- During intense rainfall events, it is normal for water to pond in intersections and in backyards.
- Through flood storage investments, system upgrades, and redevelopment regulations, St. Louis Park's storm sewer system has evolved into a well-functioning system.
- Staff continues to look for opportunities to decrease flood risk and improve water quality.

Discussion: Future infrastructure project planning

Date: 6/03/2024

Overview: Staff introduced a set of criteria that will be tested for the 2027-2036 CIP process and considered as part of the decision-making process. Staff thinks these criteria capture what council has shared as being important in selecting capital projects:

1. Legal mandate
2. Equity
3. Asset condition
4. Environmental impact
5. Safety
6. Return on investment

Outcomes of the discussion: The majority of the council indicated that they supported the criteria presented. Suggestions were made to include the following considerations:

- Environmental impact:
 - Will the project impact the city's tree canopy?

- Will the project reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT)?
- Return on investment:
 - Will the project take advantage of a partnership with another agency to meet the goals of the city?
 - Will the project increase city operation and maintenance cost?

Over the coming year, staff plan to use these criteria to work on updating the 10-year CIP for the 2027-2036 CIP.

Incorporating this information into the engineering department CIP will require an extensive review of available funding, potential needed additional funding and staff workload to determine how it can be delivered.

Executive summary

Title: Proposed redevelopment of the Economic Development Authority's Minnetonka Boulevard properties – Ward 1

Recommended action: None at this time.

Policy consideration: Do the city council and EDA generally support Greater Metropolitan Housing Corporation's proposed preliminary redevelopment of the Minnetonka Boulevard redevelopment site?

Summary: On July 6, 2021, the EDA entered into a preliminary development agreement (PDA) with Greater Metropolitan Housing Corporation (GMHC) to pursue development of owner-occupied affordable housing on four, EDA-owned, single-family properties located at 5639, 5643, 5647 and 5707 Minnetonka Boulevard.

GMHC hired Bennett Community Consulting to project manage the redevelopment, and is working with Lunning Wende Associates, Inc as the architect. GMHC is also partnering with [Homes within Reach Community Land Trust](#) which will establish a land trust on the properties prior to selling them to low-income qualified home buyers with the goal to provide several of the units to first-generation home buyers.

GMHC proposes to develop four twin homes on the site providing eight affordable home ownership opportunities. The units would be affordable to households earning up to 60 to 80 percent of the area median income. The new twin homes would be constructed as zero lot line structures with one shared wall. Each lot would include an owner-occupied dwelling unit, an enclosed garage stall, and greenspace. The proposed site plan seeks to preserve existing, healthy, non-invasive trees, and maximize the site's existing topography. GMHC plans to utilize design assistance programs to predict the homes' energy usage as well as energy saving strategies to meet the city's green building policy.

Financial or budget considerations: The proposed purchase price of the EDA parcels and the amount of financial assistance necessary to move the proposed Minnetonka Boulevard redevelopment forward will be determined once the project components are more fully defined. City staff anticipate the proposed redevelopment will require some form of financial assistance from the city and/or the EDA.

Strategic priority consideration: St. Louis Park is committed to providing a broad range of housing and neighborhood oriented development.

Supporting documents: Discussion

Prepared by: Jennifer Monson, redevelopment administrator

Reviewed by: Greg Hunt, economic development manager

Karen Barton, community development director, EDA executive director

Approved by: Cindy Walsh, deputy city manager

Discussion

Background: Between May 2018 and spring 2020, the EDA purchased four sub-standard single-family houses at 5639, 5643, 5647 and 5707 Minnetonka Boulevard (see map below). The properties are located on the south side of Minnetonka Boulevard between a 60-unit apartment building to the east and a church to the west. Better Futures Minnesota deconstructed the houses to recycle and reuse as much of the building materials as possible and completed demolition. All four properties are zoned R-4 multi-family residential and guided RM-Medium Density Residential, which allows up to 30 housing units per acre.

On July 6, 2021, the EDA entered a preliminary development agreement (PDA) with Greater Metropolitan Housing Corporation (GMHC) to pursue development of owner-occupied affordable housing on the EDA's properties. The EDA approved a second amendment to the PDA on May 6, 2024 extending the deadlines. The PDA allows both parties to work cooperatively together toward a mutually acceptable medium density development plan as well as a purchase and redevelopment contract for the site. The PDA provides GMHC with formal permission to access the site to conduct its due diligence and provides guidance on applying for land use and zoning changes as well as financial assistance. The PDA also gives GMHC exclusive rights to negotiate acquisition of the subject properties from the EDA.

Site information:



Site area (acres): 0.6 acres

Current use: residential lots

Surrounding land uses:

North: single-family homes

East: 60 unit apartment building

South: parking lot for apartment

West: religious institution

Current 2040 land use guidance

RM - medium density residential

Current zoning

R-4 multiple-family residence

Proposed 2040 land use guidance

RM - medium density residential

Proposed zoning

PUD planned unit development

Present considerations:

GMHC proposes to develop four twin homes on the site providing eight affordable home ownership opportunities as depicted in the rendering below. The homes would front along Minnetonka Blvd. The new twin homes would be constructed as zero lot line structures with one shared wall. Each lot would include an owner-occupied dwelling unit, an enclosed garage stall, and greenspace. The proposed site plan seeks to preserve existing, healthy, non-invasive trees, and maximize the site's existing topography. The units would be primarily accessed off the rear alley to the south leading to Lake Street to the east.

Preliminary concept rendering

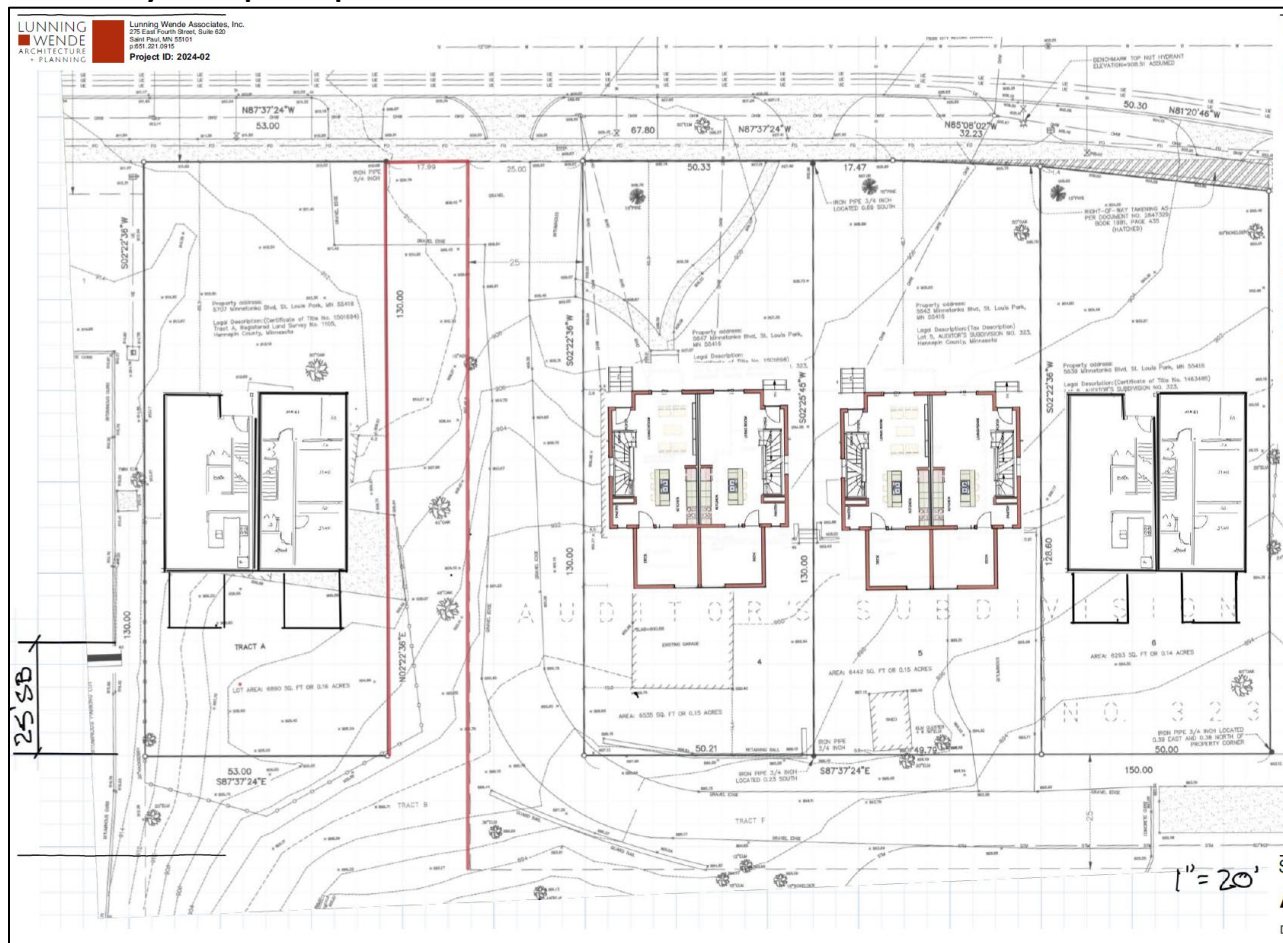


GMHC plans to utilize design assistance programs to predict the homes' energy usage as well as energy saving strategies to meet the city's green building policy.

The eight properties will be for sale in partnership with [Homes Within Reach Community Land Trust](#). According to its website, Homes Within Reach has operated in suburban Hennepin County for more than 20 years and has helped more than 207 qualified applicants purchase homes in more than 14 communities across the county, including St. Louis Park.

The units would be sold to households earning up to 60 to 80 percent of area median income. For several units, the goal would be to provide them to first-generation home buyers. Prospective homeowners would apply to Homes Within Reach and qualified applicants would have the opportunity to purchase one-half of a twin home at a reduced cost. Since the underlying land would be held by the land trust for 99 years, the homes sales would become more affordable by removing the cost of the land from the unit’s purchase price and would remain affordable to future homeowners in perpetuity.

Preliminary concept site plan



Strategic priorities:

The eight new affordable home ownership opportunities would further several of the city’s strategic priorities including:

St. Louis Park is committed to providing a broad range of housing and neighborhood oriented development.

- The proposal would create eight new home ownership opportunities in the city.

- The proposed homes would be constructed as zero-lot line twin homes, creating a type of housing that does not yet exist in St. Louis Park. This type of housing is proposed in the city's zoning ordinance update going to city council later in 2024 and would be a model for future "missing middle" housing types that could be constructed.
- The proposed development would provide long-term affordability for owner-occupied housing units, as the homes would be sold to households with incomes up to 60 to 80 percent area median income and the land would be held in a land trust for 99 years allowing long term affordability to the first and future owners.

St. Louis Park is committed to being a leader in racial equity and inclusion in order to create a more just and inclusive community for all.

- The development would construct eight affordable homes for qualified low-income home buyers, with the goal of seeking qualified first-generation home buyers.
- The development would create wealth-building opportunities for underserved households, while ensuring the properties remain affordable in perpetuity (99 years).
- The units would be designed to accommodate families with all of the units being three and four-bedroom dwellings.

St. Louis Park is committed to continue to lead in environmental stewardship.

- The homes would meet the city's Green Building Policy and would utilize Xcel Energy's design assistance program to predict energy usage and to guide energy saving strategies, ultimately reducing utility costs and carbon emissions.
- The proposed redevelopment would intensify land use to create additional density, utilize existing city infrastructure, and provide ownership opportunities that include greenspace.
- The homes would be designed to take advantage of the existing slope on-site
- The design seeks to preserve non-invasive, healthy trees already located on-site.
- Due to the project's size, stormwater is not required to be treated, however best management practices would be incorporated.

St. Louis Park is committed to creating opportunities to build social capital through community engagement.

- The development process would include several opportunities to build social capital through neighborhood meetings and the public process.
- Social capital would be built through the land trust model. Homeowners and the city would maintain long-term relationships with the land trust, ensuring the homes remain affordable and maintained in perpetuity.

Additional units: Staff and GMHC explored the possibility of vacating the alley located between the sites to provide additional developable land to create more units. However, the alley was originally obtained via easement in the 1960s, and the property owner of the land is unwilling to sell it as they prefer to maintain the current alley access to Minnetonka Blvd.

Twin homes vs town homes: Staff and GMHC originally discussed development concepts utilizing a town home model rather than twin homes on the site. However, Homes Within Reach advised that twin homes are the more conducive legal mechanism for selling properties under a land trust arrangement. They also better position the homeowners for both short and

long-term financial success. In a twin home model, each owner is responsible for their unit and the property on which it sits. Homes within Reach remains a long-term land partner on the project, allowing them to ensure that long-term maintenance is coordinated and accounted for in the homeowner's budget and to ensure a cohesive project without the added monthly cost of association fees.

Town home developments, in most cases, require a homeowner association to handle common area improvements such as exterior building maintenance and yard work. While this is an attractive option for many homeowners, there is an added monthly cost that must be included within the homeowners' monthly payments as well as additional oversight. In their experience, Homes within Reach finds that homeowners association fees can be a barrier for lower income buyers.

Next steps: A neighborhood meeting will be held in the coming weeks to gather comments on the proposed development.

GMHC will submit planning entitlement applications to the city for the planning commission and city council's consideration.

The proposed purchase price of the EDA parcels and the amount of financial assistance necessary to move the proposed Minnetonka Boulevard redevelopment forward will be determined once the project components are more fully defined. City staff anticipate the proposed redevelopment will require some form of financial assistance from the city and/or the EDA.