

**Memorandum**

TO: Sustainable Environmental Advisory Commissioners

FROM: \_\_\_\_\_  
Andrew D. DeCanniere, Commissioner, Sustainable Environmental Advisory Commission

DATE: August 11, 2022

**SUBJECT: July 26, 2022 Sustainable Environmental Advisory Commission (SEAC)  
Meeting Minutes**

Meeting was called to order at 7:04 PM in the Council Chambers at Skokie Village Hall

Present: Chairman Jennifer Grossman, Commissioners Christopher Buccola, Andrew DeCanniere, Michael Gershbein, Lisa Gotkin, Trustee Liaison Ralph Klein, Alma Likic, Olivia Mahoney, Jim McNelis, Emily Okallau, Robert Render, Director of Public Works / Staff Liaison Max Slankard, Assistant to the Director of Public Works / Staff Liaison Elizabeth Zimmerman, Village of Skokie Solid Waste / Recycling Intern Josie Neville

Absent: Commissioners Rick Moskovitz and Charles Saxe

I. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the June 29, 2022 meeting of the Sustainable Environmental Advisory Commission were unanimously approved.

II. Old Business

a. Environmental Sustainability Plan Survey (ESP) Team Update

i. Survey

Staff Liaison Zimmerman stated that they are currently working on setting the date of the next Listening Session. Precise date to be determined in consultation with Ted Redmond, Co-Founder of paleBLUEdot, LLC.

Commissioners are now determining Action Items. At the next ESP team meeting, they will be working to prioritize those items, as well as on which items to pursue and when.

Commissioner Mahoney did note that she feels that the “Action Finder” is a great tool that the ESP Team has been using. It lets you sort by size of city, which she found to be very useful. She said that she used cities close to Skokie’s size, in order to see what they are doing, as an initial way to evaluate some ideas and suggestions. She said that she was struck that there is a lot of overlap. It seems that many people are thinking along the same lines. The process has been good,

and she has been impressed with how they have organized it. Their online tools are very effective.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman talked about how examples of actions are provided. There might be more of an emphasis on leading by example, or enforcement, or education-related. So, you can search by those items as well. She said that, as an example, one of the ideas within the Waste section that would fall under “Lead by example” would be that for any event that may be hosted by the Village in the future, we can choose for it to be a zero-waste event. She also noted that the other thing she needs to work on this week, along with Mr. Redmond, is that they need to set the date of the final Listening Session.

There will be one more Listening Session in late fall or in early October. She said that they want to be sure that there isn’t any conflict between the date of the Listening Session and any upcoming holidays. They will work around those. That Listening Session will essentially be a Draft Plan review. The public will be able to make comments on that Draft Environmental Sustainability Plan.

Commissioner Okallau asked whether, during this part of the process, they also discuss the advantages of moving in one direction or the other, or whether it is just entirely up to the Village to decide. So, for instance, whether something becomes an Ordinance or whether something is a policy, and things of that nature.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that the next step is where the subcommittees will all come together, and there will be too many Action Items. There is no way that the Village could ever do that many. Therefore, there will be a process during the next ESP Team meeting to really prioritize the most important Action Items of the Team. Then, of course, that Listening Session, at which the public will be able to provide input, will be important as well.

Commissioner Okallau then went on to inquire as to whether they have received feedback from others communities as well, in terms of things that have been implemented (e.g. how it played out in other communities).

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that she thinks Mr. Redmond has a good handle on what has worked and what hasn’t. She said that, at this point, he doesn’t want to squash any brainstorming that is taking place.

Commissioner Mahoney said that Mr. Redmond asked those on the ESP Team to select a list of criteria. For example, what can we evaluate these suggestions against? Is it practical? Is it something that the Village would endorse? Is it affordable? Those kinds of things. She said that they all voted online as to what these criteria should be. One that stood out to her was “Is it a game-changer?” That, actually, did make the list because, as many of us believe, we should be changing the game. That is to say that we should be adopting some actions that will make a difference. They don’t have to be extreme but, at this point, she feels

that whatever is ultimately adopted will be a game-changer. She was glad to see that make the list of criteria. When they get together the next time, they will look at all of these ideas that people voted for, and they will begin to evaluate them. She went on to say that she does wonder about how these ideas are working in other communities. However, so many of these plans are so new that she isn't sure that there's much data that has been collected, in terms of how these ideas and plans are working.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman said that communities also vary considerably as well. So, the political environment in one community might be completely different from the political environment in another community. Just as a result of Mr. Redmond doing so many of these kinds of plans, she is aware that he keeps in touch with a lot of his clients. When we get further along in the process, he'll be a good source for that information.

Commissioner Okallau stated that it sounds like a great process overall.

Commissioner Mahoney said that she thinks that it will lead in a really good direction. Some of it gets very technical. She's on the Buildings sub-team, and there are some very technical aspects of this that she feels need a lot more research, and which will need to be explained to Skokie residents, in terms of exactly what is meant. Some of the technical language of it all can be a little complicated and challenging, where it may not be quite so technical or complicated for others.

Staff Liaison Zimmerman stated that she would agree. She went on to note that she picked the topics that she was most familiar with. She's very comfortable with Waste and Open Space, but then she selected Public Health as well, and that has been more challenging.

Commissioner Mahoney said she picked Waste, for which she could come up with ten ideas very quickly. She also chose Buildings, which has been more challenging. And, finally, she chose the Sustainable Economy, which has been really challenging for the ESP Team, when it meets, and then also in picking what actions could really result in helping the economy. That said, she thought it was so important, so she volunteered for it. It needs a lot of thought, and we have to come up with something to say "This is economically viable, and it may help our economy in some way." One suggestion that has emerged is that we really do need to connect with the Skokie Chamber of Commerce on this. We do not have all of the answers on this, and we need to start talking to other people about the economic impact and economic potential of all of this.

Commissioner DeCanniere stated that he does think that it is so incredibly important to include a Sustainable Economy section. It is such a good thing that this has been included even though, as Commissioner Mahoney just said, it can be challenging — especially if that is not the sphere one is coming

from. That said, it is such an important thing to consider and to factor in, particularly as has been discussed before, so many have historically presented it as if we have to choose one or the other. There has been no shortage, nationally and internationally, of those who have made it seem as if we have to choose to prioritize the economy, or we have to choose to prioritize the health of the planet — and, consequently, the human health. That kind of thinking is neither accurate nor factual. That kind of thinking has also led us, as a nation, to where we are today environmentally. Therefore, he does think it is a good thing that we are starting to think about these things more, and that others are starting to think about this more as well. The truth is that you don't need to choose between the health of the environment and the economy. You can operate in an environmentally sustainable manner and still have a healthy, thriving economy.

Staff Liaison stated that the last Survey update she received was earlier this week, and we reached 820 responses. She noted that when, in the past, the Village has done a flooding survey, and they ended up with somewhere around 300 responses. This, to her, shows the value of SEAC and the ESP Team getting out there, and in everybody sharing it. We almost tripled our normal survey numbers. She said that she thinks that this same level of involvement will be required to continue to get the message out there. This has been a good springboard.

b. Mack Truck Demo

Staff Liaison Slankard stated that, as the Commissioners are aware, the Village did have the all-electric refuse truck from Mack for a time for a demo. Unfortunately, it spent much of the time in the garage, given that a prior user had changed the charging cord. There were some supply chain issues when it came to Mack being able to provide the correct adapter, so that the unit could actually be charged. Therefore, despite the fact that it was with the Village for more than a week, they did not get that much operating time with it.

They did have a bit of an operating issue with it that had nothing to do with the propulsion unit of the vehicle, and nothing to do with the fact that it is an electric vehicle. It had to do with the the height of the truck, due to the particular packer body that was on the vehicle. He went on to note that if the Village were to purchase a unit from Mack, they would use a different packer body — not the one that happened to be on the demo unit. More importantly, as to the chassis itself and its electric operation, the biggest thing everyone is interested in is the range experience and the operating experience. From an operator standpoint, the truck is exceptional in terms of its performance, and has a massive amount of torque. It is exceptionally quiet. Operators are able to drive down the road and actually talk to each other and hear each other. There is no noise. So, it is a very responsive unit with an immense amount of power.

He noted that the range experience was a little bit mixed. When they put it out on the route, the day that they got good utilization out of it. It left the Public Works

facility with about an 85 percent charge level, did about four hours of route time, and didn't pull that much of a load— which, again, had to do with the limitations of the Village's ability to use it on the route — and it was a good weather day for that truck. The battery will struggle more in winter operating conditions. They took the truck out to the transfer station to deliver its load, after which it came back to the garage (after operating for about six hours) with about 25 percent charge level. So, it went through about 60 percent of its charge, not pulling an exceptionally heavy load.

He noted that the unit that they tested was a Version 1 battery. The ones in production today are Version 2. According to the manufacturer's representations, the Version 2 batteries should have 20 percent more capacity. We are aware of how the nature of battery technology changes. So, it was a little bit hard to form a solid impression. They would have liked to have had more time with it. The only thing he would say is that when you're evaluating battery life in real-world operating conditions, they are aware that one thing that is important when operating an electric unit like that, is having the time to have operators become familiar with how the unit operates. Operators need to learn how to operate the vehicle to maximize its charge life. The vehicle generates or maintains a certain amount of its charge based on how operators accelerate and decelerate the vehicle. There is some training or experience that comes with that, which will help to extend the battery's life, and they are aware of that.

In summary, the unit performed very well. They need to do more follow-up with the entities that are out there, using this — particularly the Department of Sanitation in New York (DSNY). They have had some contact with them, and they are very willing to share information with the Village. They have shared information with us in the past, and the Village will continue to gather additional information from them. They are continuing to purchase additional units. They also intend to try to plow snow with the newest units that they are acquiring from Mack. Based upon what he has seen, he has no doubt that these vehicles have the power to plow snow. That is beyond question. The issue is that plowing snow is a cold-weather operation. So, for how long are they able to plow snow? They will continue to be in contact with DSNY. There is additional follow-up that is needed, and some additional follow-up with Madison, Wisconsin as well, in terms of their demo experience. They have two units that are on order from Mack as well, and the Village also has a very good relationship with the City of Madison. All of this said, he noted that he feels that the chassis is a very good unit, and he thinks it is really promising.

Additional discussion ensued.

### III. New Business

#### a. National Night Out — Recycling / Compost Booth

Staff Liaison noted that National Night Out will be coming up on August 2nd, and is to be held at Oakton Park. During our last meeting, we talked about opportunities for community outreach. The Village's Solid Waste/Recycling Intern, Josie Neville, will be working with the Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County (SWANCC), as well as with Collective Resource, to provide information regarding recycling and composting.

#### b. Waste Program Review Update

Ms. Neville presented the findings of the Refuse Set-Out & Capacity Usage Study, which was conducted from July 12 - 22, 2022. It was found that the vast majority of households would have no capacity issues if the second refuse pick-up were eliminated (more than 80% of households would not require a second collection). That said, it was also noted that if you increase the amount of recycling, you don't automatically decrease waste. Additional efforts must also be made to reduce the total amount of waste generated. A Q&A session followed her presentation.

### IV. Public Comments

Staff Liaison Zimmerman noted that she's having technical issues checking on whether there are any public comments. However, if there are any, she will provide those to all Commissioners.

### V. Other Business

Staff Liaison Slankard said that, as we are aware, for the last few years of the Backlot Bash, we have worked with Erlene Howard of Collective Resource to try and make it a zero-waste event. They are planning on doing some of the same things this year. However, there are a few alterations as to how they want to try and manage the event. They've met with Ms. Howard and have another planning meeting coming up tomorrow. He said that he thinks that Ms. Howard is going to try and change the way that volunteers are deployed, so that they spend less time going through the already commingled food waste, along with other waste. Instead, they will try to deploy volunteers to catch the waste as it is being deposited, and guide people so that the waste is deposited into the correct receptacles from the outset. He'd say that is to be the principal change for the event. There have been active conversations with both Ms. Howard and the Skokie Park District as to the staging of those areas, and how those areas are going to operate, and hours of operation. There also have been discussions about the Rotary Pancake Breakfast event, and how to try and do a better job of making that a zero-waste event.

Staff Liaison Slankard stated that the Park District is also working with vendors at Backlot Bash to be more sustainable. They expect to hear more about that tomorrow, as they have a Backlot Bash Planning Committee meeting.

Commissioner McNelis asked how they are recruiting volunteers for the Backlot Bash. Staff Liaison Zimmerman stated that there is a Sign-up Genius form, and that a link to that form is to be pushed out on social media and via *SkokieNews*. She said its pretty much all done, except they need to redo the opening paragraph so that it is clear to would-be volunteers that people will not have to get into the food waste this year. The one challenge with the monitoring system is that many more volunteers are needed. She said she thinks it requires triple the amount of volunteers they normally have, so they will see how it goes. She stated that she thinks that if people do not need to sort food, there will be more interest. Commissioner Gotkin suggested that District 219 could be one place to reach out to, if volunteers are needed.

Staff Liaison Slankard stated that one other item, from the Waste Committee discussion, is that the Waste Report that was generated ultimately came through the full Commission. There was interest in Village staff studying options for food scraps. To that end, he stated that he and John Lockerby (Village Manager) met with Lakeshore Recycling Systems earlier today to talk about that subject, and to discuss options and obtain additional information. Staff Liaison Slankard went on to note that Lakeshore had hoped to provide him with some additional information before the meeting today. He wasn't able to obtain that, but he said that they had a good meeting, and talked about the existing composting programs and how they function in Deerfield, Highland Park and River Forest. As some Commissioners may know, amongst the companies that Lakeshore has acquired was Roy Strom Disposal. The company was a Maywood-based waste hauling company that operated in that area for many years. As a result, the son of the founder of that company, George Strom, is very involved in their operations now. The reason he mentioned Strom is that they had operated an opt-in type of food scrap program in the Village of River Forest for seven years or so, and so he has had some experience with food scrap compost efforts in that community. They talked about a number of different program options, including work that Lakeshore is doing with the City of Chicago and Oak Park, in establishing community drop-off sites for food scrap composting. It is in that regard that he wanted to make subcommittee members aware that he will be emailing them. He wants to set up a meeting with them to discuss these matters further, and to get them more involved in those discussions, in the next couple of weeks.

Commissioner Render stated that, first, he is more than happy to review proposals, as he has experience doing this professionally. He also said he is wondering whether it would be possible for us, here in Skokie, to have a drop-off program for plastic film. He just recently saw a video about a town in New Jersey that has a plastic film collection system that looks very much like the composting system we currently use, but they are having trouble getting people to use that, and grocery store collection is overwhelmed. It is kind of an odd thing that people do not seem to want to do one more thing at their house, but they are willing to take the bags to the grocery store. He went on to say that he just didn't know whether this is something that we could discuss with Lakeshore, or to do anything else like that, where we might be a beta site for some programs that are in development.

Staff Liaison Slankard asked if Commissioner Render has information on a program that he could send him.

Commissioner Render said that he can try to find information on that particular program. However, he is just wondering about the idea of having drop-off locations for plastic film, or for something else that we want to emphasize, which would augment our curbside program. He was wondering whether Lakeshore has anything in development that they have been thinking about that we might sign up to try, or we could ask them how we might think about doing a plastic film program in the community.

Commissioner McNelis asked for clarification as to the type of film Commissioner Render is referring to.

Commissioner Render clarified that he is referring to grocery bags, the plastic wrap that magazines can come in, plastic film that is used by dry cleaners. He went on to say any kind of film that is not specifically food packaging.

Staff Liaison Slankard indicated that he will discuss this with the Waste subcommittee.

Commissioner Gershbein addressed the issue of bags from Amazon and how they are intended to be recycled. Additional discussion ensued.

Commissioner DeCanniere stated that, on that note, he feels it would be good if Amazon were to have some sort of packaging recycling program where, as Amazon drivers are making deliveries, they would also pick up and properly recycle the used / discarded packaging from previous deliveries — particularly as the company seems to be such a source of this sort of waste. That said, one concern he has is whether the company would be transparent about what becomes of the materials that were picked up. It is important to know that the materials were properly recycled.

## VI. Next Meeting

Based upon the expected availability of Commission members, the next meeting will be held on Tuesday, August 23, 2022.

## VII. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 8:36 PM.