

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION 10-20-21 MEETING

MINUTES (APPROVED 11-17-21)

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Date: Wednesday, October 20, 2021

Time: 6:00 pm

Place: Conference Room on 10th floor of City Hall, 161 W Michigan Avenue, Jackson, Michigan

I. Call to Order *Chairperson Kazmier called the meeting to order at 6:01 pm.*

II. Roll Call

Present: *Commissioner Will Forgrave (Sixth Ward Councilperson), Commissioner Kelsey Heck Wood, Commissioner Bethany Hersha, Commissioner Jacob Inosencio, Commissioner Kelli Kazmier (Chairperson), Commissioner Kevin Lund and Commissioner Cole McEldowney*

Absent: *None.*

Staff: *Troy R White, City of Jackson Engineering*

Also Present: *City Manager Jonathan Greene and Ward 2 Councilmember Freddie Dancy*

Chairperson Kazmier called on each commissioner to introduce themselves. After, she explained to the new commissions the process for selecting annual action items and that priorities will be re-evaluated at the beginning of the new year.

III. Adoption of the Agenda

Motion made by Commissioner Heck Wood and seconded by Commissioner Lund to adopt the agenda as presented. Motion approved unanimously.

IV. Approval of 09-15-21 meeting minutes

Motion made by Commissioner Heck Wood and seconded by Commissioner Lund to approve the minutes with typo corrections. Motion approved with six votes in the affirmative and Commissioner Forgrave abstaining.

V. Citizen Comments (3-minute limit)

None

VI. 2021 Action Items

a) Refuse and Recycling Committee Report and Discussion with City Manager

Chairperson Kazmier yielded the floor to City Manager (CM) Greene.

CM related he was directed by City Council at their September 2021 meeting to review options to modify the current system of refuse collection within the City. He related that support to investigate options is not unanimous amongst Councilmembers but a majority have expressed support. CM stated that he is supportive of efforts to modify the existing system whether that be through licensing or a single hauler option as there room to improve services to residents and reduce dumping and refuse pileups.

CM related that previous conversations with a hauler indicate that it may be possible to offer a service bundle that would include refuse, yard waste and recycling pick-up. The current prohibition on the placement of refuse containers at the curb on pick-up days is onerous – it creates inefficiencies and inhibits to use of modern mechanical means of pickup. The current ordinance requires haulers to send a laborer to the back of each property to collect refuse. This is commonly referred to as the “driveway requirement”.

CM suggested that it may be possible through a licensing program to exchange the elimination the driveway requirement for bundled pickup and for fees generated through licensing to be applied to towards improved enforcement.

A licensing program would allow cottage-industry haulers to continue to operate.

Commissioner Inosencio inquired of CM how small haulers would remain in business.

CM responded that they could continue to operate as they historically have. Unfortunately, the practice of some cottage-industry haulers has been to dump on vacant lots which then has to be cleaned up by city staff.

Commissioner Kazmier inquired if a licensing program would allow for multiple haulers.

CM responded in the affirmative – there would be room for multiple haulers. However, it would incentivize efficiencies and the use of technologies which would favor above-board large haulers that have capacity to offer bundled service. CM related that a program that includes increased enforcement would also make cottage-industry haulers less profitable as they will be less likely to get away with dumping on vacant lots and more likely to have to pay the tipping fees that above-board larger haulers have to pay.

CM related that in previous conversations about refuse pickup, City Council has favored options that leave room for small cottage-industry haulers.

CM related that a licensing program that provides for added benefits to residents without a significant price increase may make it difficult of cottage-industry haulers to compete because they may not be able to expand their services beyond what they currently offer. That being said, there may be room for cottage-industry haulers to adapt to provide other services such as property cleanups and large item disposal.

Commissioner Hersha suggested that it may be advantageous for families to have better recycling options.

CM related his surprise that it may be possible to expand services in exchange for the elimination of the current driveway requirement.

Commissioner Heck Wood stated that a system that allows for multiple haulers would not address A) the problem of too many trucks on the streets nor does it address B) the dumping problems related to cottage-industry haulers.

CM suggested that problem A (too many trucks on the streets) could be addressed by limiting when refuse can be collected in different zones within the City.

Commissioner Heck Wood stated this would not address problem B (cottage-industry haulers dumping on vacant lots).

CM responded that problem B could be addressed by stepped up enforcement.

Commissioner Forgrave suggested that efforts at a single hauler system failed last time in part because it tried to do too much at once – that it might be easier to take a bite of the apple rather than try to swallow the apple whole. A system of licensing for bundled service might be a palatable bite. He voiced his support for a change to the existing refuse collection system but that the change needs to be palatable to residents and that will likely require that some choice remain.

Commissioner Lund inquired if there would be an RFP for a single hauler that must comply with the requirements of the RFP.

CM replied in the negative – that haulers would obtain licenses with defined rules.

Commissioner Kazmier expressed concern that a licensing system might not address the problems of multiple trucks on the same street or the problems associated with cottage-industry haulers. She expressed concern that a new system that does not reduce costs may not get public support. Many may not care that there are additional services for the same price – their primary concern is cost. If a new system does not lower costs than there is no reason to change.

Commissioner Kazmier stated that easy access and affordability are what is needed to prevent dumping and pile ups. She asked the group to imagine a system where the city provides and empties garbage cans and all residents have to do is put their garbage in those cans – no signing up and no additional bills.

CM asked who would pay for such a service.

Commissioner Kazmier replied that there has to be a way to provide a service that other cities provide.

Commissioner Lund expressed concern about how licensing would work and how such a system would address insurance requirements and complaints and accountability issues.

Commissioner Inosencio stated that equity must be addressed and the needs of the less fortunate considered.

Commissioner Heck stated that her primary concerns are that there are too many trucks doing to same thing and there is currently no good recycling options. She stated that Battle Creek recently restructured their refuse program and that their experience may be able to provide insight into how to address hardships.

CM stated that the point of these conversations is to explore options whether that be a licensing system for bundled services or a single hauler system. Moving forward, he will be conversing with peer communities and local service providers to understand options within the context of input gathered from Councilmembers and the Environmental Commission. Ultimately, a successful proposal will one that can garner the support of City Council. If there is agreement that the current system is unsatisfactory, we must be open to getting something done rather than nothing at all.

CM also stated that input regarding the proposed Electric Vehicle Ordinance will be requested of the Environmental Commission.

CM also stated that a new planner has started with NEO who may be able lead an effort to incorporate LEED building practices into the zoning ordinance.

CM exited the meeting at 6:58pm.

Commissioner Lund stated that he will prepare a summary of various RFPs that have been issued by other Michigan communities.

Commissioner Hersha stated that consideration must be given to those who live below the poverty line.

Commissioner Kazmier stated that the Environmental Commission needs to recommend a course that is best for the City. She reminded the commissioners that the Environmental Commission serves in an advisory capacity. It is City Council who makes political decisions about what is do-able and practical and then takes action. It is not the role of the Environmental Commission to build popular support.

Commissioner Lund stated that an RFP for a single hauler would provide more control than a licensing system.

Commissioner Kazmier stated that sometimes incremental change is a necessary strategy but that the Environmental Commission should not support a baby step in a direction that is contrary to the ultimate goal.

Commissioner Inosencio stated that it is not good practice to write policy that can be approved by a slim majority.

Councilmember Dancy related that he supported a review of options but that he has not yet determined his position on the issue of refuse pickup. He is interested in understanding if it is possible to have a low cost program that includes yard waste and recycling pickup. He would like for there to be neighborhood meetings on the subject.

Commissioners Heck Wood and Kazmier stated that Environmental Commissioner could attend such meetings.

Commissioner Kazmier stated that a single hauler would address the problem of those who currently do not have pick up service. It would not impact those who currently use cottage-industry haulers as they would continue to have service.

Commissioner Kazmier stated that public meetings may be appropriate but that is the work of Councilmembers to meet with their constituents – not the Environmental Commission. The Environmental Commission can provide support.

Commissioner Kazmier suggested that the work of generating a written document with specific ideas and recommendations commence at the next meeting and that Commissioners should bring their ideas.

VII. Zero Emissions Day

VIII. Electric Vehicle Ordinance

Motion made by Commissioner Kazmier and seconded by Commissioner Inosencio to postpone discussion of items VII and VIII until the next Environmental Commission meeting so that the proposed ordinance can be obtained and reviewed. Motion approved unanimously.

Commissioner Forgrave will provide a copy of the draft ordinance for distribution to the commissioners.

IX. 2021 Action Items.

b) LEED Committee Report and Discussion

Commissioner Hersha presented the five page attachment that was included in the agenda packet regarding the process, requirements, fees and credit categories for LEED certification. She related that an application will require significant effort. Other cities that have made an application have a sustainability manager on staff. An application will be laborious and will require a city-staffer to serve as point person.

Commissioner Kazmier stated climate change will result in massive changes and that Jackson may benefit from having a sustainability manager on staff to help push a transformation to environmentally friendly practices. The City will need to have the capacity to measure the effectiveness of current practices and set goals for improvements.

Commissioner Lund stated that setting benchmarks and goals could lead to an LEED application.

Commissioner Kazmier suggested that the LEED application checklist may serve a purpose beyond an application in that it could provide a path forward in terms of defining categories, measuring current practices and setting goals.

Commissioner Lund stated that the Energy and Sustainability Manager for the City of Royal Oak is not available to meet with the Environmental Commission until December.

Commissioner Heck Wood stated that items on the LEED checklist could be referenced in City contracting practices.

Commissioner Lund suggested that the Environmental Commission generate a memo to City Council to recommend environmentally conscious practices in the contracting.

Commissioners Kazmier and Lund agreed to generate a draft memo for consideration at the next commission meeting.

c) Non-Motorized Committee Report

This action item was tabled at the September 2021 meeting.

X. Commissioner Comments

Commissioner Kazmier requested that an item be added to the agenda for the November meeting to start the process of identifying and highlighting good environmental actions taken by the City over the past year.

Commissioner Kazmier then reminded the commissioners that it has become practice to review the action item list at the beginning of each calendar year. That review will be done again in January of 2022.

Commissioner Kazmier then welcomed new commissioners and thanked them for serving.

Commissioner Inosencio stated that listening sessions in the wards should be done before ordinances are written – not after. And that anything written by the Environmental Commission should have an equity component.

Commissioner Lund stated that the Environmental Commission does not do public meetings. That is done by councilmembers. The Environmental Commission can support in a secondary role.

XI. Next Meeting – Wednesday, November 17, 2021 at 6:00pm

XII. Adjournment

Motion made by Commissioner Lund and seconded by Commissioner Heck Wood to adjourn. Motion approved unanimously. Meeting ended at 7:39 pm.