

Official minutes
Environment & sustainability commission

Members present: Present: Chair Hendrix, Vice Chair Myhran, Commissioner Helseth, Commissioner Griffin, Commissioner Wagner, Commissioner Oien, Commissioner Kuehl, Commissioner Even, Commissioner Asheim Keller, Commissioner Burrows Reise, Commissioner Shahidi

Members absent: Commissioner Krebs

Staff present: Emily Ziring, sustainability manager

Guests: Council Member Budd; Michael Hennen, resident

1. Call to order

A. Roll call

I. Introduction of new commission members

New commissioners introduced themselves. Commissioner Becca Even is a water resources engineer with a background in environmental engineering. Commissioner Becca Asheim Keller holds a biology degree along with a Master's degree in public health, and works in corporate compliance. Commissioner Derek Burrows Reise is the executive director at STEP in St. Louis Park.

B. Introduction of guests

Resident Michael Hennen introduced himself. He noted he has attended the meeting on multiple prior occasions as an interested community member.

Council Member Budd introduced herself as the newly-assigned council ambassador to the commission.

2. Approval of minutes

It was moved by Commissioner Helseth, seconded by Commissioner Kuehl, to approve the June 3, 2026 meeting minutes. The motion passed with commissioners not present at the June meeting abstaining.

3. Business

A. Presentations

None.

B. New business

I. Discuss Solid Waste Section of Climate Action Plan with Kala Fisher, Deputy Public Works Director

Ms. Ziring introduced Ms. Fisher, Deputy Public Works Director, to lead a discussion on the solid waste section of the Climate Action Plan (CAP). Ms. Ziring noted that solid waste is the

final CAP section to be examined by the commission, following earlier reviews of buildings, renewable energy, transportation and advanced strategies.

Ms. Fisher explained that the current CAP midterm goal calls for a 50% reduction in solid waste greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to a business-as-usual forecast. She identified several challenges with this goal. The existing tracking methodology relies on Regional Indicators Initiative data that is derived from county-level figures divided by city population, which does not reflect actual city-specific tonnage data nor does it account for workers and visitors. Additionally, the city has direct programmatic control only over curbside collection for single-family homes, which now serves fewer than 50% of residents due to growth in multifamily housing. Commercial, multifamily and institutional waste is collected by private haulers who report to the state, but that data collection is still being refined. Solid waste represents approximately 2% of citywide greenhouse gas emissions as measured by Regional Indicators.

Ms. Fisher presented three options for the commission to consider:

Option 1 would retain the existing 2030 midterm goal. Ms. Fisher expressed concern that this goal is difficult to measure accurately and that the city lacks sufficient control over the waste streams needed to meet it by 2030.

Option 2 would omit the 2030 midterm goal and instead focus entirely on achieving zero waste by 2040, aligning with the CAP's overall net-zero target. Ms. Fisher noted that significant policy changes currently underway at the state and county levels support this longer timeframe, including the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) law for paper products and packaging taking effect in 2032, the planned closure of the Hennepin Energy Recovery Center between 2028 and 2040 and anticipated county directives requiring organized commercial collection.

Option 3 would replace the existing midterm goal with a new goal focused specifically on increasing organics recycling participation. Ms. Fisher noted that organics currently make up approximately 25% of material going to disposal, the county prioritizes organics funding to cities and the curbside organics program currently has 43% participation with county and city aspirational targets of 60–65% by 2028. She indicated that growing organics participation could lay groundwork for further program changes such as shifting to every-other-week garbage collection.

Commission discussion noted that Options 2 and 3 are not mutually exclusive, as both retain the 2040 goal while Option 3 adds a measurable midterm benchmark. Several commissioners raised the challenge of measuring progress under any option given the limitations of the Regional Indicators methodology. Commissioners also discussed the broader equity implications of waste incineration at the HERC. The commission discussed whether a fourth option—removing solid waste from the CAP entirely—might be appropriate given the 2% emissions share, but Ms. Fisher and Ms. Ziring noted value in retaining it given St. Louis Park's leadership role in solid waste programming. A commission poll indicated support for Option 3. Ms. Ziring indicated that Ms. Fisher and sustainability staff would continue developing the midterm goal language.

C. Unfinished business

I. Vehicle Efficiency Historical Data Analysis Update

Commissioner Oien presented an analysis examining whether St. Louis Park registered vehicles can be measured against Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards. He assembled three datasets: federal CAFE standard targets by year; federal fuel economy data for all makes, models and trims; and state-provided vehicle registration data for St. Louis Park. After significant data processing, Commissioner Oien found that approximately 85% of registrations could be matched with high confidence to fuel economy data.

Key findings included: approximately 42,000 vehicles are registered in St. Louis Park as of 2025; roughly 60% meet the CAFE target for their model year; fully electric vehicles represent 2% of the fleet, up tenfold since 2018; overall fleet miles-per-gallon is improving slightly over time; and the share of light-duty trucks and SUVs in the fleet has grown substantially, with SUVs now dominating the top registered models. Commissioner Oien noted that CAFE compliance rates for passenger cars are declining because federal targets rise faster than vehicle efficiency is improving, and that the Trump administration set the penalty for manufacturers failing to meet CAFE standards to zero in July 2025.

The commission discussed whether the CAFE standard remains the appropriate metric for the CAP and agreed to table further consideration for a future meeting. Commissioner Oien offered to share the full dataset with the commission.

4. Staff updates

Ms. Ziring reported on current staff activities including:

- administrative updates to the green building policy addressing embodied carbon and construction material reuse;
- operating budget preparations and the climate investment fund budget proposal;
- work on Xcel Energy and CenterPoint Energy triennial Energy Conservation and Optimization (ECO) plan filings before the Public Utilities Commission;
- collaboration with Ms. Fisher on a demolition waste reduction work group;
- EPA climate resilience survey underway in the Aquila and Texa-Tonka neighborhoods.

Ms. Ziring also noted that climate investment funds are fully allocated for the current year with a waitlist open for 2027.

5. Work plan update

Ms. Ziring briefly reviewed the work plan. The CAP update remains ongoing. Two items await council direction. The Walk in the Park event was noted as a success. Commissioner Kuehl reported on the sustainability volunteer resource and plans for greater school outreach in the coming school year. The food forest buckthorn removal event was recognized for the significant work accomplished. Ms. Ziring noted that phase two of buckthorn removal is in the planning phase and new fruit tree and shrub planting is anticipated for early October.

6. Sustainability issues

A. Group share-out

No items were shared.

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B. Kudos

The commission recognized Commissioner Oien for his data analysis work on vehicle efficiency.

7. Items to Discuss at a Future Meeting

None.

8. Upcoming/Proposed Events

The commission noted the upcoming St. Louis Park Art Fair, with volunteer shifts available. One volunteer is signed up for the mid-shift and one for the afternoon shift. A morning shift volunteer from the commission is still needed.

These minutes were created with the assistance of a generative AI transcript service, then edited and finalized by a staff person.

Emily Ziring, liaison

Jessie Hendrix, chair member