

**Official minutes**  
**Environment & sustainability commission**

Members present: Chair Jessie Hendrix, Vice Chair Bennett Myhran, Shaina Ashare, Marisa Bayer, Ryan Griffin, Tatiana Giraldo, Kati Helseth, Ethan Kehrberg, Avery Kuehl, Avital Krebs, Adam Oien

Members absent: Sasha Shahidi, Natalie Wagner

Staff present: Emily Ziring, sustainability manager

Guests: Michael Hennen, St. Louis Park resident

1. Call to order
  - a. Roll call
  - b. Introduction of guests

2. Approval of minutes

It was moved by Commissioner Bayer, seconded by Commissioner Ashare, to approve the January meeting minutes. The motion passed with two abstentions.

3. Business
  - a. Presentations

- i. Gary Morrison, zoning administrator, to present on Zoning Code Update phase 2

Mr. Morrison, Zoning Administrator for the city, presented about phase 2 of the zoning code update. He provided a history of the update process, noting phase 1 was completed in spring 2025 and focused on residential districts while reformatting the code into more readable tables and charts.

Mr. Morrison explained that phase 2 encompasses all remaining parts of the zoning ordinance: commercial districts, office, industrial, performance standards (including parking), permits and definitions. The primary objectives are to reformat the code, consolidate zoning districts, amend the zoning map, expand the use of density and height bonuses, and reduce parking minimums in some areas.

He reviewed the consolidated zoning districts, showing how existing districts would be combined into new mixed-use (MU) designations. For example, MU-1 would incorporate the current MX-2 (Walker Lake area) and C-1 (neighborhood commercial) districts. He noted that industrial districts would remain largely unchanged except for renaming.

Mr. Morrison displayed examples of the reformatted code using tables to show permitted uses across different zones. He then explained that density and height bonuses, previously limited to the MX-1 district, would be expanded and offered to all mixed-use districts and the B-1 district, but would require developments to meet both the Inclusionary Housing Policy and Green Building Policy in order to receive bonuses.

Regarding parking, Mr. Morrison provided a historical overview of the city's approach since 1959, showing how requirements increased until 1992, when they began to decrease. He highlighted the 2019 changes in the Walker Lake area that essentially eliminated parking minimums for existing buildings. The phase 2 proposal would extend the Walker Lake parking standards to all mixed-use districts citywide, allowing businesses like restaurants to occupy existing buildings regardless of available on-site parking. In Walker Lake specifically, all parking minimums would be removed entirely.

Mr. Morrison acknowledged this creates potential challenges, including conflicts between businesses over limited parking, increased pressure on street parking and implications for street design and maintenance. He explained the city is taking a measured approach by not eliminating all parking minimums citywide yet, suggesting that the upcoming comprehensive plan process would be a better venue for broader community discussion about parking.

Commissioners asked questions about definitions of density, travel demand management, considerations for tree cover, handicap parking requirements and the potential for pedestrianized streets in areas like Walker Lake. Mr. Morrison noted that ADA-compliant handicap spaces would still be required through building codes, and that the Walker Lake area was designed with the potential for street closures for events, though this hasn't been fully utilized yet.

**b. New business**

The commission discussed whether to submit a comment letter on the parking regulation amendments. They agreed a letter of support would be valuable to maintain visibility with the council. Commissioner Bayer volunteered to draft a letter emphasizing how reducing parking minimums benefits the environment and climate, while also encouraging council to consider further reductions through the upcoming comprehensive planning process. The draft would be circulated before the March meeting for review and approval.

**c. Unfinished business**

**i. 2026 ESC workplan refinement**

Chair Hendrix presented the consolidated ideas from previous brainstorming sessions for the 2026 workplan. The commission discussed retaining the Climate Action Plan update as a continuing workplan item and decided on five additional items:

- One open item reserved for council to direct the commission to provide feedback to them on a project or policy, potentially related to transportation
- One open item reserved for council to direct the commission to research a topic, potentially related to planning, zoning or transportation policy, and draft a report to council
- Sustainability-focused "Walk the Park" event, potentially incorporating litter pickup
- Youth volunteering opportunity, with Commissioners Kuehl and Commissioner Krebs helping to connect with school programs like National Honor Society
- Assisting with maintenance of the food forest at Ainsworth Park, potentially connecting this with youth volunteering

Ms. Ziring offered to draft a workplan document based on these decisions for review and adoption at the March meeting.

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4. Staff reports

Ms. Ziring provided updates on the sustainability division's activities:

- Launch of a new demolition waste reduction work group to address construction and demolition waste
- Submission of a questionnaire to CenterPoint Energy for their networked geothermal pilot program
- Planning for the annual contractor breakfast with neighboring cities on March 3
- Progress on the EPA-funded Thriving Communities project in Aquila and Texa-Tonka
- Work on an electric vehicle strategic roadmap
- Submission of a grant application for LED parking lot lighting retrofit at the Municipal Service Center

5. Work plan update

No updates were provided as the 2026 workplan is still being developed.

6. Sustainability issues

a. Group share-out

Commissioner Griffin recommended the documentary "Oceans" as an impactful resource on sustainability issues.

7. Items to discuss at a future meeting

No specific items were identified for future meetings.

8. Upcoming/proposed events

Minnehaha Creek spring clean-up on April 25 from 9 a.m. to noon at two locations: Municipal Service Center and the Creekside area near Knollwood Mall

Arbor Day celebration on Thursday, May 14 from 5-8 p.m. at Carpenter Park, noting the date was moved to a Thursday evening to be more accommodating to the Jewish community.

The commission also discussed attendance for the April 1 meeting, with at least three commissioners noting they would be absent due to spring break and Passover.

9. Adjournment

Chair Hendrix adjourned the meeting.

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

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Emily Ziring, liaison

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Jessie Hendrix, chair member