

**ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY BOARD
CITY OF RAMSEY
ANOKA COUNTY
STATE OF MINNESOTA**

On Monday, June 28, 2021, the Environmental Policy Board (EPB) met in the Council Chambers at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive N.W., Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Chairperson Jane Covart
 Board Member Melissa Fetterley
 Board Member Michael Hiatt
 Board Member Jared Little
 Board Member Laura Moore
 Board Member Michael Valentine

Members Absent: Board Member Reid Bernard

Also Present: City Planner Chris Anderson
 City Council Liaison Chelsee Howell

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Covart called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. CITIZEN INPUT

None.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

Motion by Board Member Little and seconded by Board Member Hiatt to approve the agenda as submitted.

A roll call vote was performed:

Board Member Valentine	aye
Board Member Moore	aye
Board Member Fetterley	aye
Board Member Little	aye
Board Member Hiatt	aye
Chair Covart	aye

Motion carried.

4. APPROVE MINUTES

4.01: Approve Meeting Minutes Dated May 17, 2021

Motion by Board Member Hiatt and seconded by Board Member Little to approve the regular meeting minutes dated May 17, 2021.

A roll call vote was performed:

Board Member Moore	aye
Board Member Valentine	aye
Board Member Little	aye
Board Member Hiatt	aye
Board Member Fetterley	aye
Chair Covart	aye

Motion carried.

5. POLICY BOARD BUSINESS

5.01: Review Lower Rum River Watershed Management Organization's Draft 4th Generation Plan

City Planner Anderson presented the staff report. He stated that the Lower Rum River Watershed Management Organization (LRRWMO) has drafted its 4th Generation Plan (their equivalent to a Comprehensive Plan) and distributed it for comments. The 60-day comment period will end on July 27, 2021. Any requested revisions must be submitted to the LRRWMO before the aforementioned deadline. This will be the EPB's only opportunity to provide advisory comments on the draft 4th Generation Plan. The LRRWMO 4th Generation Plan will also be forwarded to City Council for its consideration and for formal direction to submit any advisory comments to the LRRWMO. He reviewed the comments staff noted within the report.

Board Member Hiatt referenced the classification of the three lakes and asked the previous classification of the lakes.

City Planner Anderson commented that he was unsure. He noted that this question arose several years ago when the City was asked to look at some concerns with what is known as Rogers Lake.

Board Member Hiatt asked if this is an intentional tightening of those classifications and not a random change.

City Planner Anderson commented that he believes it could be an oversight or misclassification.

Motion by Board Member Little and seconded by Board Member Hiatt to forward all comments on the plan to City Council for consideration.

A roll call vote was performed:

Board Member Fetterley	aye
Board Member Valentine	aye
Board Member Moore	aye
Board Member Hiatt	aye

Board Member Little aye
Chair Covart aye

Motion carried.

5.02: Consider Recycling Program Funding for 2022

City Planner Anderson presented the staff report. He stated that the purpose of the case is to get initial feedback from the EPB on potential funding opportunities for the recycling program in 2022. The City's recycling program is funded through the Select Committee On Recycling and the Environment (SCORE) program. Annually, the City must submit a funding request to Anoka County for SCORE funds for the upcoming year. Typically, each community is allocated base funding of \$10,000, plus \$5 per household. In 2021, Ramsey's base funding allocation, along with enhancement funding was \$41,650.

Board Member Fetterley asked if the question is whether the Board would support using those buildings for those purposes.

City Planner Anderson clarified that there is a portion of one of the buildings that was identified for future recycling use and therefore he is seeking feedback on whether to explore how to use a portion of that building for a mini recycling center. He stated that he did not want to start gathering information without input from the Board.

Board Member Fetterley asked if any other cities are pursuing those kinds of opportunities.

City Planner Anderson commented that many cities in Anoka County have a space where residents can drop items off for recycling within their city hall. He noted that some cities in Anoka County have full blown recycling centers, such as Coon Rapids. He noted that Andover and Nowthen also have year-round recycling centers. He stated that the intention would be to have a smaller scale opportunity in Ramsey.

Board Member Fetterley commented that this would be a great opportunity as often people want to do the right thing but do not always have the ability. She believed it would get great use from the community.

Board Member Little agreed.

Board Member Hiatt commented that his family often uses the Andover location. He asked if there would be additional funding resources if the program were expanded in this nature or whether the City would continue to receive the same level of SCORE funds.

City Planner Anderson commented that there is another category of funding that could be made available and provided additional details on the SCORE funds. He noted that it clearly states that the City should not solely rely on this type of funding to support this type of operation and the funds are intended to help implement new programs and ideas.

Board Member Hiatt commented that he believes this would be a great idea but would want to ensure the plan is well thought out and attended to. He noted that one location he has visited is

much better taken care of than a location in another community. He recognized that ongoing maintenance and attention would require ongoing funding and a system in order to move materials out and keep the area clean.

City Planner Anderson commented that staff is proposing baby steps, on a very small scale as this would be an unstaffed area. He recognized that there would be logistics that would need to be worked out in order to determine what would be needed. He stated that they are not contemplating a large-scale recycling center and do not want to get off on the wrong foot and be negatively impacted.

Board Member Hiatt commented that the spring and fall recycling days show that there would be support for this type of activity and the demand could grow with residents making good use of the opportunity. He stated that if the demand is there, there could be more funding dedicated from the City to grow the opportunity.

Chair Covart asked for details on the recycling events and whether the cost for the event is covered by the vendors.

City Planner Anderson commented that the event is not entirely self-sustaining, and the City incurs some costs to host the events.

Board Member Little asked if this is still in the rough draft phase and whether it would come back once further tuned.

City Planner Anderson commented that there could be an opportunity to bring this back to the Board at the July meeting if desired. He stated that he would need to ensure he could bring this to the Council at its second meeting in July to submit the grant application.

Board Member Hiatt asked if there is a timeframe in which some other use could occupy this space in the public works facility if this does not move forward quickly.

City Planner Anderson commented that a small space in the public works facility has been and will continue to be planned for recycling. He stated that the time sensitivity would be related to the deadline for the grant application with Anoka County.

Board Member Fetterley commented that she would support pursuing this opportunity.

Board Member Moore agreed that this is a great idea and supported submitting the application and attempting to move forward in a small-scale opportunity to begin this in the right way.

City Planner Anderson commented that ACE Solid Waste has a micro drop-off for organics and other recycling at its property as well.

Chair Covart confirmed consensus of the Board to support staff submitting the grant application to explore additional opportunities for recycling.

City Planner Anderson welcomed any additional recycling ideas the Board may have.

Chair Covart commented that cardboard recycling was popular and noted that there would seem to be a continued demand for that.

City Planner Anderson commented that the Public Works Committee decided not to explore that opportunity at this time because of the opportunity ACE Solid Waste is offering at its facility. He noted that perhaps that conversation be revisited again in the future.

5.03: Environmental Policy Board Work Plan Update

City Planner Anderson presented the staff report. He stated that the EPB has a draft Work Plan that was prepared as the City Council was initiating its strategic planning noting that the Strategic Plan was adopted by the Council on June 22, 2021. As was noted during the development of the draft Work Plan, once the Council adopted its Strategic Plan, the EPB would need to review that document and their Work Plan to make any necessary adjustments.

Board Member Hiatt stated that he would not be opposed to this but asked what the EPB would be asked to do in order to make this happen.

City Planner Anderson commented that this would be related to research on what other communities have done in terms of open space preservation and by using the natural resources inventory to identify properties that could be considered if there were willing sellers. He noted that this would simply explore mechanisms that could support that possibility.

Board Member Hiatt stated that perhaps this is related to exploring the feasibility of whether there are areas worth protecting and that this would be more related to policy development than action.

City Planner Anderson confirmed that although this is listed as an action item within the Strategic Plan it would be more policy related and information gathering.

Board Member Hiatt stated that he would encourage and support looking into that concept.

Chair Covart asked if this would be land that would be brought to the City or whether the City would be looking for land for this purpose.

City Planner Anderson stated that it is his understanding that this would be to look for ways in which the City could fund acquisition of higher quality areas. He noted that could occur as part of development proposals that come forward or willing seller. He noted that some cities have been successful using a referendum to gather funds that the city then used to acquire properties for open space preservation.

Chair Covart asked if these types of funding sources have already come to the attention of staff or whether that would be expanded.

City Planner Anderson stated that staff has not yet begun to explore this concept but noted that some additional funding sources came to the attention of staff during the Riverstone South planning in order to preserve the wooded area.

Board Member Valentine commented that this seems like a significant task compared to the other items on the EPB Work Plan. He stated that he does not see a clear picture of how the EPB would fit into that task.

City Planner Anderson stated that perhaps the discussion on this is tabled and he can gather additional information from staff members that were part of the strategic planning discussion with the Council in order to bring more information to the Board.

Board Member Fetterley agreed that she would find more information helpful. She stated that she does not understand how this item got on the radar of the Council or why it became a goal.

Councilmember Howell stated that the Riverstone South project initiated the discussion because of the need to find funding for that element. She stated that the information presented is a fairly accurate description as there was not a much broader discussion.

Chair Covart stated that she would prefer to have additional information and asked if this is time sensitive or if it could be postponed.

City Planner Anderson commented that this would simply be researching how the City could fund protection of open space and would not include identification of any certain parcels but how the activity could be funded. He noted that he would be more than happy to gather additional information for the July meeting for the Board to review. He noted that he would propose to carry over the language from the Strategic Plan to the EPB Work Plan.

Board Member Moore commented that she would prefer to leave the language as generic and open as possible to provide flexibility for things that may come up. She stated that she is very interested in adding this to the Work Plan in some form and is also interested in any mechanism that would allow the City to preserve open space areas.

Board Member Fetterley stated that she also supports protection of open spaces but is unsure if she could support the wording. She stated that it would seem that the funding is going to be considered by referendum and would prefer to leave it open to all potential funding mechanisms and not pigeonhole into that one source.

City Planner Anderson stated that when the Work Plan moves forward to the City Council for review there would be an opportunity to expand the discussion with the Council. He confirmed that he would bring this back to the Board in July.

5.04: Review Tree Preservation Plan Request for Trott Brook North

City Planner Anderson presented the staff report. He stated that the purpose of the case is to review a request from the Excelsior Group on the project generally known as Trott Brook North which is the area between Variolite Street and Nowthen Boulevard NW, north of Trott Brook. The application has requested a deviation from the City's standard tree preservation plan.

Board Member Little asked for input as to what would be considered a negative in allowing this plan to move forward.

City Planner Anderson commented that on the surface the concern would be whether the standards are being applied consistently and fairly. He stated that the tree inventory is based on inches rather than total trees and therefore there could be a deviation, although perhaps not significantly. He explained that there will be a lot of plantings with this large development along with areas of tree preservation. He noted that the applicant has stated that there would be more time and cost to provide a review in inches. He asked if the Board feels that this method would provide a fairly accurate depiction of what exists and what would need to be replaced.

Board Member Little commented that he has experience working with trees and he believes that this method would provide accurate information. He stated that in his opinion he believes that this would be an accurate method but agreed the question would be whether the City wants to deviate from policy.

Board Member Hiatt recognized that this was a planted area and therefore the type and size should be similar for the trees as they were planted at the same time. He stated that if this method is going to be allowed it should be noted that this was a planted area and not naturally occurring, in order to prevent precedent from being set.

Board Member Little stated that if this method is approved, he would agree to specify that was allowed because it was an artificially planted area.

Board Member Hiatt asked how staff feels about this method.

City Planner Anderson commented that he agrees it would give a fair representation of what is out there. He agreed that it would be critical to mention that this was allowed because it is unique in that it was a planted area in order to avoid setting precedent. He stated that the hardest challenge would be determining reforestation requirements if the removal threshold is exceeded.

Board Member Fetterley commented that this would be an exception to the normal process, and she would be hesitant although this seems like a fair method proposed. She asked if the Board wants to allow another reason for exceptions. She asked if there are other areas similar to this in Ramsey.

Board Member Valentine commented that this would seem to be a situation that points out a need for the City to have a process to systematically address variances. He stated that perhaps the developer would need to follow a variance request to request this approach for evaluating the site. He stated that there probably would not be a problem with this method but would be hesitant without having a more systematic variance request the developer could follow. He commented that if this approach is going to be allowed there should be a thorough statistical analysis.

Board Member Little asked how many more plots would exist to this.

City Planner Anderson commented that there are other pockets of plantings similar in nature but did not have an estimate. He stated that the group could choose to support this because of the planted setting along with perhaps consideration of a potential ordinance amendment that would dictate that this approach would be acceptable in certain circumstances. He stated that he could speak with the City Attorney to determine if the variance process could be applied in this case. He

stated that a third option would be to state that this method does not meet the Code and the typical process would need to be followed.

Chair Covart commented that she likes efficiency and understands the request from the developer but would prefer to follow City Code.

Board Member Fetterley asked if a sample of accuracy could be provided. She commented that she does not feel that she has enough information to say an exception could be granted.

Board Member Hiatt stated that it might be helpful to know what the developer is looking at in terms of cost savings and energy savings. He stated that if the potential to be reasonably accurate is there and it would cost five times as much to complete the review required by Code, he would see that as a reasonable request. He stated that he wants to work with developers when it makes sense. He noted that City Planner Anderson stated that this method could be fairly accurate, and the statement could be made that this is being allowed because it is unique in that it was a planted area. He believed that the developer should provide that additional information to support their request. He stated that two examples were given of where this method is used, but neither seems really comparable to this situation.

Board Member Valentine commented that it is not that complex to determine whether or not this would be a similar method for calculation and characterization of the area. He stated that it does not appear there is full support for this approach as of yet.

Chair Covart asked that staff bring this back at the next meeting with additional information provided and an invitation for the developer to attend.

City Planner Anderson stated that he agrees from a forestry standpoint this would be accurate, but the question would be related to the deviation from policy. He stated that if this method is found to be acceptable, he would prefer direction to amend the Code to allow an alternative method such as this when certain conditions are met.

Board Member Moore commented that she is unsure that she would feel comfortable changing Code requirements for this type of development. She noted that from the aerial map there are two properties that could fall under the same characterization, along with other areas in Ramsey. She stated that she would not be comfortable changing the requirements for the tree count and vegetation count for this type of development. She stated that the role of the EPB is not to make it easier for developers.

Chair Covart commented that perhaps the developer would not need to attend the July meeting and the information desired could simply be provided by staff.

Board Member Little stated that he would be curious as to the cost of doing the calculation under Code as well as the cost to use the method proposed by the developer. He stated that he would find that information helpful in making a determination on whether it would be appropriate to consider amending the Code.

6. BOARD / STAFF INPUT

No comments.

7. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Board Member Little and seconded by Board Member Fetterley to adjourn the meeting.

A roll call vote was performed:

Board Member Moore	aye
Board Member Valentine	aye
Board Member Hiatt	aye
Board Member Fetterley	aye
Board Member Little	aye
Chair Covart	aye

Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 7:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Anderson
City Planner

ATTEST:

JoAnn Shaw
Community Development Secretary

Drafted by Amanda Staple
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.