

Lowell Sustainability Council Meeting Minutes 6.25.26

Attendance

Mikaela Hondros-McCarthy, Wiliana Aquino, Ryan Oates, Brian Muldoon, Syed Dong, AnaCristina, Jay Mason
Cynthia Hagan, Jess Wilson

Minutes for Approval

Ryan move to approve minutes
AC second
Motion passed.

Continued business

Guest presenter - Jess Wilson

Jess Wilson - design planner. Oversees development of Parks and public spaces in the City. Open Space and Recreation Plan is a document that must be updated every 10 years in order to be eligible for state grants.

Sets priorities for the next 10 years of open space

Lowell has 90+ parks

700 acres of open space

92% of residents live within a 10 minute walk of a park

8+ miles of trails

The issue is the quality of parks.

Park space per person in each neighborhood is inequitably spread. Belvedere and Pawtucketville have the most open space per person.

Opening a new quarter acre pocket park in downtown Lowell this summer on Jackson Street. This meeting will help to share the Community Vision. Our voices will go toward defining what the city wants.

After the Action plan is put out, there is a public comment period.

Jess overviewed the goals from the previous Open Space and Recreation Plan OSRP.

Made the joke that "Man plans and God laughs" because the plan needs to be able to adapt as conditions change.

Jess showed some previous project highlights

Durkin Street Park repurposed an underutilized parking lot as a traffic garden for young kids to learn how to safely ride bikes and scooters.

They have had a lot of positive feedback on this park.

Roberto Clemente Park in the Upper Highlands

New volleyball courts and basketball courts.

Circular event space.

Space was set up based on the local needs.

Upcoming: Saint Louis Sponge Park

Lowell Forward plan helped to inform the OSRP
To get involved, email hotline. openspace@lowellma.gov
This time, they have a \$150,000 budget. In the past they have had no money.
They have contracted BSC Group as a consultant for the ORSP
Played a park budget card game to help the public understand the tradeoffs the DPD has to make

Debrief on LPS Student Presentation

Jay
Student Climate Change Competition happened.
We had a 13 submissions - more than a few years ago, when they had 4.
There is a resource guide - a 17 page document - that goes along with the competition.
Jay would like for us to update it.
There is currently no mention of data centers.
There is currently nothing in there about battery storage or nuclear.
These ideas should be added to the resource guide for there to be more current and useful projects.
Jay would like a subcommittee to add or remove content to/from the guide to keep it updated.
Suggested bringing on a UMass Lowell intern to help with this.
Mikaela: Should we do this now or when we get closer to the competition?
Jay: There's no reason to wait. We can do it now.
We could set up a subcommittee meeting in August or September and release the new guide before the event starts in February.
Mikaela: Is there anyone who would definitely want to work on this?
AC, Wiliana, and Mikaela volunteered to do it.
The subcommittee will meet before October.
Mikaela added this to the October meeting to follow up on how the subcommittee meeting went.

Mass Save LSC Support Letter

Mary: The senate bill is better than what came from the house.
It doesn't have cuts to Mass Save, but it has provisions that may impact moderate income customers negatively.
Working on an amendment to ask that self attestation be considered as a method of income verification
Another major issue - the bill is targeting GSEP - the "Gas System Enhancement Program"
Of the \$342,000,000 in rate base increase they were asking for, \$119,000,00 was from GSEP.
If this bill were law, national grid's ability to recover \$342,000,000 would be more difficult
The bill opens a path for exploring municipal owned thermal energy networks. Through a working group.
2-3 years ago National Grid had a geothermal project. It was aborted. The potential is still there.
There was a sense that National Grid was not interested in geothermal happening. Conflict of interest.
Mary and others would like to revive the geothermal program through different ownership.

The bill does not currently have a data center provision. People have worked on an amendment that will likely be filed by a representative in Lowell.

One of the amendments they are looking for is “inclusive utility investments” to have Low and Moderate Income consumers excluded from something

Amendments on solar storage and renewables.

When the bill is not final we don’t get too excited.

Brian: Is it possible that if we only have clean energy that costs will go up?

Mary: This bill will encourage renewables. It will change some of the rules that govern the regulation of utility companies - gas or electric. What is changing is that gas companies will not be involved in electrification because they have a conflict of interest.

The primary driver of electric bill costs is infrastructure spending by gas companies. This bill tries to address this.

Cynthia: we forwarded the letter to the City Manager and asked him to forward it to our delegation.

Mikaela: has he let us know if he did send it on?

Cynthia: He doesn’t usually let us know what he does. Wait for him to release it publicly if he plans to do that. He has not yet done that as we know of.

Mikaela: Can we ask whether he did it?

Cynthia: I can ask him.

Sustainability Division Updates

Cynthia; Tree Committee Ordinance will be on the City Council Agenda for the upcoming Tuesday. You can see the same time the Council gets it.

Mikaela: Have they chosen members yet?

Cynthia: They will do that once the Committee had been created. HR will handle that.

Cynthia: There is a public forum related to Data Centers on Monday, June 29th at the Butler Middle School at 6pm. The planning department is holding that.

Mikaela: Has Markley been doing its quarterly meetings with the sustainability division.

Cynthia: They have not. They had one.

Brian: Are you mad about that?

Cynthia: We can be angry, but that doesn’t get results.

Cynthia: No updates on specialized stretch code.

Update Future Proposed Presenters

Cynthia; we have a confirmation for Liz from the traffic department to speak in October.

Upcoming Events and Announcements

Monday: Data Centers at 6pm

Monday: Summer Send Off at the St Louis Sponge Park.

Ryan: Motion to adjourn

AC second

Motion [passed at 8:03pm]