

CITY OF DUBUQUE - COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

GOVERNMENTAL BODY: Resilient Community Advisory Commission (RCAC)

DATE: March 2, 2023

TIME: 5:00 pm

LOCATION: Jule Operations and Training Center (JOTC) Circle Conference Room, 949 Kerper Blvd.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Dean Boles, Josh Chamberland, Sandra Evans, Jake Kohlhaas, Robin Kennicker, Katharine Connolly

MEMBERS ABSENT: Lalith Jayawickrama, Adam Hoffman, Steven Drahozal

STAFF PRESENT: Gina Bell, Amanda Lewis

Chair Kohlhaas called the meeting to order at 5:03 pm.

TEST AGENDA

MINUTES APPROVAL: Boles motioned to approve the January minutes (with the addition of names to blank portion of Minutes Approval). Evans seconded. Motion carried. Connolly and Kennicker abstained.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Fred Miller – President of North End Association

- STEM project in early stages for engaging youth around environmental issues. Core values of NENA (North End Neighborhood Association) are to fight and promote clean, quiet, and safe neighborhoods.
- Goal to introduce self and seek ideas from Commission – connect with City departments and Dream Center

NEW BUSINESS

a) Ben Pothoff- Housing Department – Enforcement Policy Discussion

- o Grass, weeds, nuisance policies discussion

City follows international property maintenance code, but 8-inch grass/weed height is a City policy. 8 inches was determined because it was a 'middle of the road' number. Registered No Mow May participants (and other lawn complaints) receive a courtesy notice if a complaint is made before a violation notice. City sends an inspector by to make sure it is generally in compliance with the ordinance (no visibility or health concerns) and with the No Mow May program. Inspectors will work with owners to get lawns back into shape by June because lawns that are too out of control can block access to some pollinators. Gina Bell showed Sustainable Dubuque website with No Mow May information.

Codes get updated every three years. To make changes to policy, get a notice to Ben Pothoff and building code official. Ben will then send to City Manager. Given No Mow May proclamation, want to make sure City Manager is aware of potential changes to policy. All building codes are regulated and interpreted by a building official. Grass, weeds, and garbage are biggest complaints. Don't receive courtesy notice with garbage complaint. Can't leave cans in front of house, but it's not really enforced. Building Codes and Advisory meeting to review amendments mid-March.

Question: How long does a person have to take care of a courtesy notice?

Answer: It gives 5 days to assess the situation and remedy the situation. Inspector will come out to determine if more action is needed. If more action needed, receive a legal notice with additional 5 days.

- 263 complaints last May – mowed 1 lawn. ~800 complaints per year

Question: Why was only 1 lawn mowed?

Answer: Majority of lawns start growing rapidly in May. Many owners had lawns maintained before June.

Question: How is a citizen supposed to know about the 8-inch rule until you get a complaint?

Answer: If 8-inch rule is put out as policy, people will think it is an ordinance. This is documented in an annotation report and lives within Housing Department.

Question: How are policies that are internal policies understood?

Answer: Overall guidance is I-codes and building officials are responsible for interpretation and policy is up to their discretion.

Question: How do inspectors determine a weed versus a plant?

Answer: Use state definition for noxious weeds, if they don't know they can take a photo and do research.

Question: Can policies be distributed to Commissioners each year?

Answer: Anyone can email Housing Department to get policies.

Question: Where do you decide where lawn ends, and brush takes over?

Answer: Undeveloped land versus developed land is an unwritten policy. Inspectors would take photos to determine if it is an issue or just a complaint. Generally speaking, adding to undeveloped/wooded areas grows into the owner's yard and it not an issue.

Question: City seems to be of the perspective that grass is the ideal standard, can this be changed?

Answer: Leaving discretion in ordinance helps. Many complaints are resolved by getting the correct information and talking to neighbors first.

Question: How are complaints filed?

Answer: People are encouraged to submit complaints online. Maybe there is a way to encourage people submitting complaints online to talk to neighbors before filing complaint (either a pop-up box or additional directions). A courtesy notice is cheaper to send (50 cents) and gives more time to allow neighbors to remedy the situation amongst themselves.

Question: Do you address nonnative species planting or chemical spraying near someone's home?

Answer: Inspectors will take photos and do research, but they are not horticulturalists, so they try to be reasonable.

Discussion: Next meeting to discuss topics of weeds/noxious weeds, overspray, etc.

b) Sustainable Dubuque Grant Review Subcommittee:

- o Gina will send applications on March 16th. Gina will compile scores. Subcommittee will make recommendation to larger commission at next meeting to be approved to send to City Council. Kennicker, Chamberland, and Connolly volunteered to be on subcommittee to review applications.

OLD BUSINESS

Budget support Discussion

- Parks – Boles mentioned there is nothing about trees listed in Parks Budget.
 - o Requested additional pollinator areas in parks systems – unsupported by City Manager.
 - o Not sending a letter of support at this point
- Public Works
 - o Requested additional metering devices and glass recycling containers – recommended by City Manager
- City Clerk – To attend Growing Sustainable Communities Conference to pay for food for commissioners rather than making it free for all commissioners to attend.

- Issues with tight budget made it not recommended by City Manager. Some departments have funding for commissioners to attend in budgets – put it as reminder for next year.

Policy/Ordinance Review as related to Climate Action Plan (CAP) by RCAC

Invite Health and Zoning to upcoming meetings.

Location based services via phone


Apps gathering location data and aggregator companies that produce information, GDDC and County of Dubuque don't buy data. Travel Dubuque collects some data. Information available via companies for how people are returning or not returning to the office. Potential to use this kind of data to see where people are riding bikes.

HOW DID I SHOW UP? COMMISSIONER REPORTS:

- Kohlhaas – Used GPS heat maps and highlighted most common bike routes and highlighted areas where there are not bike trails. Downtown has nothing that is more biked than anything else. Valentine community garden is now open to reserve a space.
- Boles – Free tax preparation training is ongoing. Cannot do a free prep if they get a clean energy credit and solar is included in that. Gina can give update on Renew DBQ at future meeting.
- Chamberland – Sustainability Colleges Coalition – April 18th Loras Campus 5-8pm. 5-7pm is local vendors, music, and food. Emphasis is on sustainability and local agriculture. Speaker from 7-8pm. Additionally, Dubuque County Food Policy Council is still active and has strategic plan. Housed under County Health. Budget concerns for implementation because they need funding.
- Staff member Bell reminded commission that City is not requiring businesses to benchmark buildings as a part of the Sustainability budget request.

NEXT MEETING: The next commission meeting will occur on April 6, 2023, at 5 pm at the Jule Operations and Training Center (JOTC) in the Circle Conference Room, 949 Kerper Blvd.

ADJOURNMENT: The Commission adjourned at 6:15 pm.

Minutes approved by: 
Jacob Kohlhaas, Commission Chair

Prepared by: 
Gina Bell, Sustainable Community Coordinator

