

SAPCC Environment Committee Meeting April 28, 2021

Members present: Michael Russelle (co-chair), Karlyn Eckman, Rennie Gaither, Manu Junemann, Betty Wheeler, Steven Yetter. Later arrival: Stephen Mastey, (co-chair).

Guests present: Valerie Cervenka (Forest Entomologist with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.), Ben Shardlow (Urban Planner and Director of Urban Design at the Minneapolis Downtown Council and Downtown Improvement District). Later arrival: Aaron Hinz (Graduate Student in the Natural Resources Sciences and Management—NRS—program).

Yetter moved to accept the minutes of the last meeting; Gaither seconded them. They were approved unanimously.

Tree Planting in South SAP

Gaither invited our guest Ben Shardlow, board member of the Creative Enterprise Zone (CEZ), to discuss the “100 Trees” initiative in SSAP. A “Good Neighbor” grant was applied for with great help from Shardlow, and with Kathryn Murray, Executive Director of SAPCC. The project is a partnership between St. Anthony Park Community Council and the CEZ.

Most of Shardlow’s work is with Minneapolis, but some has been with St. Paul. He has been on the CEZ Board for a year now. It is unknown how the infrastructure development in SSAP will be, going forward. So some advance work for tree planting is warranted.

The concept of this project is to obtain small bare root trees in the spring. (Bare root trees are individually much cheaper than balled-and-burlap trees.) The trees are initially planted into gravel beds for the first growing season, to allow them to fill out their root system. Then they will be planted at their final site in the late fall of the same year.

A Capitol Region Watershed District grant, applied for in December, was not successful, because CRWD says they are not specifically so interested in growing trees and have an abundance of water-related grant applications. Shardlow suggested that perhaps this committee should cultivate a closer relationship with them to move them to consider widening their focus on a more robust view of how climate change will affect the entire environment, given the effects of the Urban Heat Island Effect and the low ecological value of urban areas with few trees and minimal green space. There are relatively few trees in SSAP, and it is one of the areas which shows the hottest temperatures on the Metropolitan Council’s “Extreme Heat Map”. (The map is part of the regional Climate Vulnerability Assessment project for the Twin Cities metro area.)

The only way to get our project to happen is to find partners. Some sites are already secured. Bang Brewery says they will probably take 33 trees for a gravel bed; they are only yet working on how to get irrigation set up. Shardlow also has two more probable sites for the gravel beds.

Who and how will the trees be cared for and provide other labor? The theory for the final planting sites is that the property owners will want the trees, so they will take care of them. The trees will be planted on the property owners’ land, not the boulevards so they will own them. The local company Davey Tree Service has people who are volunteering to help plant the trees

in the fall. The St. Paul Forester (Zach Jorgensen) will inform what species mix to use. We should expect to need some additional volunteers for helping to plant trees. The nursery is ready to donate the trees. But we will need to find volunteers to water the trees after fall planting, for any sites where the landowners will not water them.

What else will be needed? There will be 100 sites needed in SSAP. The spots will be chosen where trees are needed.

St. Paul needs a lot more trees throughout the city. So this will be a pilot project for this year, to prove that the concept works. The trees need to be planted in the gravel beds in May; that is, very soon. We want to be able to show the trees already planted at Bang Brewery by time the ChromaZone Festival (May 22/23) occurs, which will include mural paintings again this year. The ChromaZone project will have a bigger mural event in the fall. We are hoping to connect that with the fall tree plantings. It will be great to show how well the CEZ and businesses work with SAPCC. Any member of the Committee is invited to individually talk to Shardlow, especially to obtain volunteers.

Gaither stated that Executive Director Kathryn Murray sent the Good Neighbor Fund application on April 15. The proposal requests an \$8,000 grant to be matched with \$14,000 of funding, volunteer labor, and in-kind donations. Landbridge Ecological will provide technical expertise. The CEZ will manage the tree sites and other such logistics. The efforts we need to put forth for the grant is for us to recruit volunteers to plant trees. Planting by volunteers will provide some of the in-kind labor for our part of the match. The labor for watering will also qualify as some more of the in-kind match.

Timing? The spring tree planting in the gravel beds must be done in May. But the grant announcement won't be made until June. According to the terms of the grant, the fall tree planting must be done by October 1, 2021. So the beds will need to be dug and the trees planted before we know if we will get the grant. Apparently, however, tree projects do very well with Good Neighbor Fund grants. Murray thinks we have a good chance to get the grant. If we don't get the grant, we will need to raise the money.

Actually, according to Shardlow, some fundraising will be needed even if we get the grant. We will need additional money for other things, such as 'demolishing' the gravel beds at the end of the season, if the property owners don't want the gravel beds left. Maybe we will need to ask for a \$50 donation for each tree from the landowners who get the trees. Maybe we could sell the pea gravel at the end of the year. Or we will need to somehow move it to another place. We will also need water (if there is no outdoor water available from the gravel bed landowners). It would be best to grow more partnerships for this project.

Junemann mentioned that Mike Gunderson (from WestRock) may be willing to contribute some money for this project. They are already doing some things on their property (including replacing a cooling tower with an improved tower that should eliminate current air quality issues, costing them \$450,000. (More on that later.)

Eckman said that 25 years ago, this Committee partnered with Tree Trust. There were more than 1,000 trees planted in SAP with them in one year. It turned out that maintaining the trees was the biggest issue, watering particularly, but also pruning and teaching people to be careful

about mowing around them (not damaging the bark). Who will do this work? Is there a budget for maintenance?

Shardlow says that the city of Minneapolis makes sure that every street tree planted gets water every week for the first 2 years after planting. The number one maintenance issue is watering. Tree bags do help with watering, but someone must fill each bag once per week. The market rate for each tree bag is \$8.50. We need to get the trees at the sites to be adopted by the landowner. The watering problem will be a bigger issue after the fall planting, when all the trees are scattered out across 100 sites. So that is why the landowners need to be willing to water them, but we expect they will.

The St. Paul Forestry Unit is under-resourced and is barely able to keep up with the Emerald ash borer tree problems. This project is hoping to get media attention by planting 100 trees this year, and then use that attention to ask for additional help. We need allies to do the work. There are significant challenges, but we cannot wait for the city.

Cervenka said the citizen pruning program from years ago didn't last.

Yetter said that Tree Trust is located in SAP on Energy Park Drive. Could they be contacted to be involved? Perhaps they could get youth involved to help on labor for the trees. Shardlow said he has worked with them before, but previously they were not able to take on more work. Maybe, though, they could become partners, in order to provide some youth employment.

Yetter said that Tree Trust is a 501(c)(3) organization. Could they act as the fiduciary agent? They would need to earmark our funds and commit to using our money for the labor on this project in SSAP. SAPCC is also a 501(c)(3) organization, but we do need partners. Only neighborhoods like SAPCC can apply for a Good Neighbor Grant, so Tree Trust could not.

Russelle said that he hopes Shardlow will keep this Committee informed on the "100 Trees" initiative, especially during May. Junemann said WestRock might be willing to plant trees on their property.

Because the grant has already been applied for, there was no motion to approve or take other action on this project from the Committee.

Kasota Ponds

Russelle said he saw the basking logs still floating, which this Committee put out during the winter. He wasn't sure, but thought he might have seen a couple of turtles on the middle log on the East Pond. There is lots of litter on the north side of that pond, and he has picked up some of it. Also, buckthorn regrowth is already 1 foot to 1-1/2 feet tall. Should we keep removing it?

Eckman said there is a lot of detritus where the buckthorn was cut, and it is difficult to walk on. We agreed to see if Stephen Mastey can join this discussion maybe later in this meeting.

Air Quality

Junemann discussed what she has learned about the bad odors that appear to come from WestRock. They have a heat exchanger inside the water tower. Water travels along the route of

the exchanger, which builds up bacterial growth and absorbs odors from the inside of the plant. So they feel that the odors are mostly from that, and not coming from the tall stacks. They are planning to completely enclose the water system so that the water will have no contact with odors; thus, it will not emit any odors either.

She is not sure if they are working with MNTAP on this project. She hasn't talked to Mike Gunderson (plant manager) recently. But he is coming to speak to this Committee at our May meeting.

Russelle said that Steve Ray had requested and Gunderson agreed to schedule a tour of the plant for a small group from the community. They couldn't do it last year because of CoVID-19. It will be good for the interested neighbors to see what they are doing.

Junemann said she is waiting to work on air quality issues, to see what difference the upgrade at WestRock will have on the odors. She is not sure if they are already working on it, but she perceives there has been less strong odors recently, and she isn't sure why.

Russelle said the wind direction and inversions are the two biggest drivers to local odors from WestRock.

Russelle also wants to research (hyper-local) portable monitoring units for air quality measurements. Wood smoke from fire pits will still be a big issue, even after WestRock's upgrades are made. It would be good to set up portable air quality units on nearby homes around a fire pit. Wood fires produce PAHs, organic compounds (some of which are carcinogenic), small particulates (the PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀ sizes are hazardous to health) and other contaminants. So it is important to get small particulate monitors. It would be good to measure sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides, as well. These both have human health impacts and increase particulates and ozone. If one or more hazardous species can be measured by our units at the homes of neighbors at unhealthy levels, then we can demonstrate this to the MPCA. It could begin a process to limit or restrict local burning to improve urban health, where homes are so close together.

There is a grant due in September that we might apply for, to get monitors. There is also an MPCA air quality grant due at the end of the year.

We need to do research to find high quality instruments that are portable and affordable for monitoring. We would need to be able to purchase at least several to do a study around a source like a fire pit.

Wheeler stated she briefly began investigating such monitoring units. The monitors must be accurate and precise, and be able to be calibrated or validated with accepted standards. Finding appropriate units will also require what software can be paired with it for mapping. The AirBeams (brand name) that we used several years ago have now been replaced by the AirBeam2 units. They worked well with the software, HabitatMap (brand name), for mapping results.

Wheeler also found online a recent study which used PurpleAir (brand name) monitoring units. It appears that the PurpleAir brand has been evaluated and found to have acceptable accuracy and precision, in comparison with professional quality monitors (the kinds used by government

agencies). However, the professional units (such as those used by MPCA, which can be defensible in legal actions) are much too expensive for us to buy. [* References below provide information on a study across the US involving over 6,000 PurpleAir monitors, as well as a study comparing PurpleAir monitors with Federal Equivalent Methods (FEM) instruments.]

Junemann thinks air quality around high-traffic highways may be our worst urban air. The MPCA's stationary monitor at Urban Growler should be tracking whatever is coming from the nearby tire company which smells very bad. That monitor has been continuously monitoring for two years, and will continue through the end of this year. But we need more data, and especially our own data so that we can evaluate levels of pollutants from sources close to where many people live.

Wheeler mentioned that the PCA's stationary monitor measured air quality for a year at the Community Garden several years ago. We requested placement there because we thought it might be close enough to many sources to show significant effects: very near the railroad, close to Highway 280, and not far from the industrial area. However, there were only a few items (particularly, lead and cadmium) that were noted above health limits, and those were only temporary, occasional spikes. Other items were detected on occasion but below health limits. So those results were surprisingly (to us) low.

Russelle said it is in our interest to not specifically call out one particular business or site, but to use monitors to learn about a particular practice. For example, many items in wood smoke are hazardous to health, but we will need to determine how far away from the source the health effects can be determined.

Eckman stated that (probably due to CoVID-19) she has noted many more open fires, including those in six backyards in her block alone, since last fall. So backyard fires are a common source.

Naming of the New Park in SSAP

A subgroup of this Committee decided we needed to try to get input from Indigenous People for a better name than "Westgate" for the new park on the old Weyerhaeuser site, which was the name proposed by the city.

Wheeler contacted nearly 20 people of Native background in Minnesota. As she found more contacts and did much more research on Indigenous People and traditions from more local to SAP, she better identified who would be our most authoritative contacts. She also became aware that the short deadline that the city gave us is not a good approach for our contacts, because their ways of collaboration and reflection are not very amenable to short deadlines. The city told us they want our options by mid-May.

Luckily, Wheeler received a few responses, and among the contacts are two who were able to meet with a few of us via a Zoom videoconference. We held that meeting on April 7. That discussion was extremely enlightening and provided us with the name *čekpá* (chay-k'páh).

From what we learned, Russelle described to the Committee that the word means "twin" and connotes the connection among neighbors living near the park and those using it. The word extends to the connection between St. Paul and Minneapolis, reflecting the two cities'

boundary immediately west of the park. The name also incorporates the spiritual connection between the Mother Earth and Father Sky. One Dakota origin story says they came to Earth from the Sky at the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers. We may want to consider planting pasque flower on the site. This native prairie plant is also associated with this name.

We feel this name would be very good for our new park. Russelle also noted that Mastey's forwarded article shows that the city has recently adopted Dakota names for two of the four parks that will be developed within the old Ford Plant site. This is encouraging.

Yetter asked what will be the spelling of the name? He stated that we should advocate for the Native spelling and suggested that we need to get agreement on exactly what the phonetics will be.

Eckman mentioned that, in the story presented by our collaborators, the rope hanging from the center of tipi poles is considered to be the umbilical cord from the Sky. The symbols within the Dakota writing comes from how the Dakota view the constellations in the sky, which can be seen inside the circular area above the tipi poles.

Wheeler stated her preference that the artwork and interpretive educational materials for the park should be contracted to Dakota artists. She also mentioned that we need to remember the need for long lead times for our Dakota partners in developing artwork and materials, so we need to start early on the process. Russelle stated that the city has no money now for artwork, because they told us that will be done in Phase 2. (Update: Mastey later emailed to the group that every park must dedicate 3% of the budget for artwork and interpretive materials. But we don't yet know how much that will be, or when the city would allow us to start searching for artists.)

Eckman stated she thinks the potential botanical association is great, and wondered if there are any other native plants associated with the word that can be planted at the park. Russelle suggested that we should check with our collaborators on that.

Eckman also affirmed her support for prioritizing Dakota artists, especially those who are local to this area. She mentioned a few Native artists she knows.

Wheeler also stated that our collaborators asked us for our support for a bill moving through the Legislature. It would allow a waiver of State Building and Fire Codes for earthlodges specifically for Tribal members. These will be built in the same way that Native People constructed their earthlodges for millennia, based on their oral traditions. They are also cool in the summer and warm in the winter, and only need a little extra heat from hearth fires, so they compare relatively well to other energy efficient designs, in this time of climate change.

Indigenous People have acquired a small parcel of land (21 acres) near Granite Falls to build some earthlodges upon. The city of Granite Falls is supportive of this project, but the State Codes are inflexible as written, so the work already done was stopped and may not resume until this law can be passed. Russelle added that the bill puts restrictions that prohibit the sale or transfer of the earthlodges to anyone not directly associated with the Tribes.

Russelle stated that the small group drafted a letter in support of this law as introduced at the Legislature and submitted it to the SAPCC Executive Committee. It passed unanimously and was sent on April 12 to many State Senators and Representatives. It had to be decided and sent very quickly because of how fast that bills were moving through the Legislature, before the end of the Session. Thus, we didn't have time to bring it to the entire Environment Committee.

Public Art at Carter and Como

Russelle reminded us that the Committee gave input in 2019 for a new exhibit being built, which will replace the old kiosk that existed at the northwest corner of this intersection, before the reconstruction of Como a few years ago. The design will look like a (beekeeper's) beehive with bronze bees to represent honeybees, as well as pollinators more generally. There will be two windows for the public to look into the 'hive', one at the height of an adult's eyes and one at the height for a child. Another side of the display will allow for people to put up local notices (as the old kiosk did). There will be a cover over that part, so paper notices will not get wet from rain. This Committee must take care of the kiosk. The artist says he is nearing completion of the project. Also, the pooling we saw on the sidewalk (after Como reconstruction) at the site has been corrected, so we should expect the project to be installed this summer. We will need to submit an article about it for the Bugle.

Potential Speed Increase on Trunk Highway 280

SAPCC became aware that MNDOT may do a speed study on TH 280, in anticipation of potentially increasing the speed limit. Wheeler stated that, according to very knowledgeable members of the SAPCC Transportation Committee, the speed limit is usually adjusted to the 85th percentile of the speed that people are driving, but with additional consideration of certain site-specific factors such as crash history, curves, site lines, etc.

Members on the Transportation Committee are unanimously against raising the speed limit for various reasons, including perceptions of safety issues, excessive noise affecting our neighborhoods, and other reasons. Wheeler read to the Environment Committee the letter which was drafted and unanimously approved by the Transportation Committee against raising the speed limit.

A couple of edits of that letter were offered by members of the Environment Committee; one particular edit was to include the concept that increases in speed decreases fuel efficiency. That would be detrimental and contrary to efforts to reduce drivers of climate change.

Wheeler made a motion to approve the letter (with the edits) to be sent from the Environment Committee to the SAPCC Board. Eckman seconded the motion. The motion was passed unanimously.

(At this point, Mastey arrived to the meeting.)

Kasota Ponds

Mastey asked if anyone had yet seen turtles on the basking logs which this Committee placed. Eckman said turtles need a warm sunny day to emerge; and there had not yet been such a day, so she doubted any had used the logs yet.

Mastey reported on the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization (MWMO) planning grant process. The deadline for submission is in mid-May, only about three weeks away.

He has had some response privately from informal discussions with Alicia at the city Public Works. Her belief is that the MWMO rating process for grants generally will rank proposals higher up if they include an outside consultant (but not the city). She thinks we would have a better chance of getting the grant if we use outside expertise, and we might even get more money for the grant.

Mastey proposed that someone (perhaps Bruce Jacobson) would be a great outside consultant to help us. In addition, Pat Murphy has been helping us to remove buckthorn.

Mastey is also hoping to reach out to Stan Koch (owner of the property on both, the north side of Kasota Ave. at 2495 Kasota, but also on the south side of Kasota, just north of the East Pond). He hopes that reaching out to Koch to engage them might help to build a relationship, and maybe see if they would be willing to help this Committee.

Eckman asked Mastey to clarify, that he really thinks we need outside consultants, for a better chance to get the grant?

Mastey replied that our internal expertise is fine, but it will be voluntary. It is welcome, but to the MWMO, it is not a paid position so they don't value it a lot. He thinks that if a person at the city wanted to do the design, while SAPCC was leading the engagement, that would be ok for the MWMO, but he thinks we would get more money from the MWMO if a consulting firm were involved. Also, Mastey learned that planning grants typically work with outside expertise. When the city is not comfortable to do the design work on city property, then they get outside expertise. In either case, our staff will get the 'overhead' portion of the grant for coordinating the project.

In any case, the grant application is due mid-May. We have our objectives and products very clear for writing the grant. Also, the work session with Murray and Mastey went very well, so the application should be in good shape. He thinks we have a good chance to get the funding.

Russelle asked what we are going to do about the required match? Mastey suggested we ask the city. If they do 25% of the design work using staff, that would be a good in-kind match.

Russelle mentioned the springs on the north-east side of the East Pond that Eckman had reported at our last meeting. There is now easier access from the north side, where there are no cattails. A temperature probe could be used to see where water is coming into the pond, to locate what area to protect, if sediment is removed from the pond.

Eckman stated the spring water temperatures measure between 42°-45° (F). She visited Skonard Spring some years ago with Greg Brick. She said they were looking at the site on a map 25 years old. The original spring was piped into the East Pond, but Brick also pointed out multiple seeps along the NE side of the East Pond. The northwest corner of the pond has two pipes, but there was no water running in them as of last week.

There is a big pile of gravel and dirt at the north end of the West Pond. They are apparently about to repave that area of the parking lot. We should talk to the owner of the property about winter plowing (particularly, how to protect the pond from salt), contouring the lot during the repaving work, etc.

Yetter suggested that perhaps the property owners need a partner. Eckman mentioned that the ponds are all designated wetlands, so they are under the protection of the DNR. Therefore, there is a minimum 30 foot setback from the ponds required. That area needs to be planted in native plants.

Mastey suggested we try to engage the agent tasked with conservation in Hennepin County. Mastey is certain he will speak with the property owners, and to help enforce wetland rules. The County might even find cost share money to assist.

Yetter asserted that people want to do the right thing. It helps them if they can be shown where they are failing. A way to help them is to approach them with the idea that they will be spending capital (i.e., money) to redo the parking lot anyway, so now is the time to bring the lot into compliance. He also mentioned that the distance at the northwest corner of the West Pond is not even 30 feet, so they could not get any truck through that area without crossing the setback. He thinks the property owners will need a variance for that area.

Mastey mentioned that not even a play area is allowed within the 30 foot setback from a DNR designated wetland. Also the Ramsey County Soil Conservation District would be glad to help. He thinks either one would be very helpful. Mastey will call tomorrow to talk to both conservation officers. He also thinks he can probably get letters of recommendations from them for our MWMO planning grant.

The property management company is called PK Property Services. They are located on Kasota Avenue, at the other end of the NAPA building.

Russelle mentioned that the buckthorn that was cut previously is still just laying there. It is difficult to walk across. Would it be better to lug it up to the mowed area, to be picked up?

Mastey said to leave it where it is. Moving it around would be a lot of work. We should just let the Forestry mower run over it, and the mower will shred it. The grant will continue from here.

Eckman said that the Forestry mower also is needed at the south area of the West Pond.

There was no need to make a motion on submitting the application for the MWMO planning grant because it will be a continuation of work we have already been doing and was previously approved by this Committee.

Litter in SSAP

Steve Ray sent an email showing a lot of litter not far from the WestRock plant, especially along the fence lines near the top of the Cretin-Vandalia offramp from I-94. Much of it looks like paper and may be from them.

(Aaron Hinz joined us at this time in the meeting.)

Junemann mentioned she thinks she is making good progress with discussions with WestRock and will contact Gunderson about the litter.

Neglected property in SSAP

Junemann reported that there is a small strip of land along the Dynamic Fastener property that no one will clean up. She would like to find out who is responsible for the property or how to get the area cleaned up. Mastey shared a map on the screen and determined where the strip of land is. Mastey suggested that it may have been the route of an old (long removed) rail line, because it has a gently curving shape. It is the kind of land that is 'too big to mow, too small to plow', so often doesn't get attention.

Junemann mentioned she has not obtained cooperation from Dynamic Fastener to clean it up. Could a tree maybe be put there?

Russelle said that if there had been an old rail line on that property, it likely would not have good enough quality of soil to successfully establish a tree there. Much of our old rail line routes have creosote in the soil. He suggested that we ask Shardlow if he would speak with them and learn what he can about the soil.

Mastey suggested that we should get pamphlets about rain gardens and conservation practices to give to them. Cervenka has previously done lots of work with us on rain gardens, especially last year.

The property owners might even be able to get some grant money to cover some of their costs. Mastey requested some pamphlets be put into the mail to Junemann. He will connect Junemann with links to information about these practices. He will also visit the company, with his friend from Minnesota Native Landscapes, to provide them with additional information.

Finally, Eckman introduced Hinz to the Committee, who had met some of us at last month's meeting. He is a graduate student at the UM in the Natural Resources and Science Management program, and is interested in landscape architecture and hydrology. He is hoping to work with this Committee to obtain hands-on experience. He is working with Eckman and will assist with the Kasota Ponds projects.

The meeting was then adjourned.

Respectfully submitted, Betty Wheeler

* References:

https://cfpub.epa.gov/si/si_public_record_report.cfm?Lab=CEMM&dirEntryId=350075

<http://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/aq-spec/field-evaluations/purple-air-pa-ii---field-evaluation.pdf?sfvrsn=4>