



# May to December 2023

SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION

ANNUAL REPORT

May 2023-December 2023

SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION

Office of Planning

January 17, 2024



## 2023 Annual Report

### Purpose of Annual Report:

- The City Code of Ordinances calls for the publication of an annual report under section 2-150.63:

*(D) ...The Commission shall hold, at a minimum, one public meeting every calendar year to review its accomplishments and ideas during that year and preceding years, and shall present a summary of its events and accomplishments to the City Council each year in February or as soon thereafter as the City Council's calendar permits. At the public meeting, members of the community shall be permitted to speak about and showcase issues pertaining to sustainability during a public comment period.*

- It's an opportunity to increase information-sharing between staff, administration, boards, commissions and City Council.
- Allows for anticipation of upcoming issues and priorities, in order to prepare and budget, if necessary

### Creation:

Division 14 of Article III Boards and Commission Generally of Chapter 2 Administration of the City's Code of Ordinances.

### Membership:

The Sustainability Commission shall consist of five (5) voting members appointed by and serving at the pleasure of the City Council, who shall serve three (3) year terms.

Membership		
Commissioner	Original Appointment Date	Current Term Expires
Nathan Inks	September 1, 2020	June 30, 2024
Mark Graf	July 21, 2020	June 30, 2026
Jonathan Matthews	July 21, 2020	June 30, 2026
Mike Tabbert	November 3, 2021	June 30, 2025
Riley Maher	August 15, 2023	June 30, 2025
Naketa Jones	September 5, 2023	June 30, 2024
Victoria Carlino	September 5, 2023	June 30, 2024



Matthew S. Smith	September 5, 2023	June 30, 2025
Sheryl Burns	September 5, 2023	June 30, 2026
Kelley Skillin	July 20, 2022	Resigned July 19, 2023
<b>Staff</b>		
Alexis Richards		Planner II - Liaison
Ryan Fox		Planner I - Liaison
Cassidy Beaupre		Sustainability Intern (Summer 2023)
Juan Rebolledo		Planning Intern (Summer 2023)

## Purpose:

Pursuant to its City Charter authority to establish advisory boards and commissions, the City Council has determined that establishing a sustainability commission for the following purposes will serve and support the city's sustainability responsibilities and be beneficial for the City of Sterling Heights:

- (1) To advise and make recommendations to the City Council and City Manager on the city's long-range goals, policies, and programs on all matters pertaining to sustainability, including matters referred to the Commission for study as well as matters initiated by the Commission of its own accord;
- (2) To develop and advise the City Council on implementation of community-wide strategies regarding waste reduction, recycling, and sustainable growth and development;
- (3) To create a model of sustainability through efforts to advocate, educate, and promote the social, economic, and environmental health of the community, now and into the future;
- (4) To develop and implement public recognition programs promoting individual property and neighborhood level sustainability projects;
- (5) To develop educational materials and/or public campaigns regarding litter reduction, recycling, and sustainable yard and property enhancements;
- (6) To work in collaboration with city staff, officials, and existing city nonprofit partners to determine annual city and community priorities, projects, and resources relative to sustainability issues that improve the environment, save the city money, or reduce the city's carbon footprint;
- (7) To assist city staff with the engagement of the city's residents and businesses in sustainability initiatives;



- (8) To broaden the lens and scope of energy and environmental needs in the future such as wind, solar, clean air, water, and improving infrastructure;
- (9) To study and propose climate action planning, reduction of municipal energy consumption, increasing alternative energy use, and encouraging residential cultural change to embrace individual actions to help the city attain its long-term sustainability goals;
- (10) To recognize natural resources as chief assets of the city and encourage responsible stewardship of these assets;
- (11) To collaborate with state, county, and local officials, businesses, community organizations, developers, residents, educational agencies, and experts to complete studies, develop educational programs, establish volunteer programs, and identify grants;
- (12) To research initiatives outside of the city to determine how other communities are addressing sustainability;
- (13) To review the city's current plans and policies, and assist with planning, implementation, community engagement, goal setting, and progress monitoring;
- (14) To provide access for comment and input from residents and businesses in the city;
- (15) To offer recommendations for policy updates and revisions;
- (16) To educate and inform residents and facilitate sustainable practices that enable smart choices for the city and its residents which lead to a reduction of the city's carbon footprint while promoting, through education, outreach, and awareness efforts, the conservation of energy, water, and fuel; improvement of air, climate, and water quality; investment in renewable energy; reduction of waste; and protecting and restoring the community's natural resources;
- (17) To prioritize sustainability policies;
- (18) To create a Sustainability Plan by the end of its first year of existence, and thereafter update and maintain a three-year sustainability plan that outlines specific areas for City Council to study and the Commission's recommendations relating to those areas; and
- (19) To advise the City Council on any other issues and best practices related to sustainability as deemed appropriate by the Commission



## Summary of 2023:

The Sustainability Commission made several administrative changes in the latter half of 2023. Continuing its journey to create positive change in the City, the Commission expanded its membership from five members to nine upon City Council's approval. This expansion was made to bring more voices to the Commission, and to assist with expanding the Commission's operation. These new members allowed the Commission to expand and tackle more topic areas, allowing for the creation of three new committees.

With the increased membership, the Sustainability Commission now has six committees that provide in-depth research and reporting on important sustainability topics outlined in the City's 2021 Sustainability Plan. The memberships, scope, and accomplishments of each committee are described below:

- **The Reduce, Re-Use, Recycle (R<sup>3</sup>) Committee.** This Committee is chaired by Secretary Jonathan Matthews and includes Michael Tabbert, Victoria Carlino, and Naketa Jones. The R<sup>3</sup> Committee focuses on reducing waste going into landfills in the City. This year, the Committee provided valuable feedback to the Department of Public Works regarding the new Waste Haulers Contract. Going forward the Committee plans to assist further with the public education campaign regarding universal curbside recycling, as well as reducing waste in the City overall.
- **The Green Energy Committee,** formerly chaired by Michael Tabbert and currently chaired by Chairman Nathan Inks, this Committee discussed EV Charging in depth this year and provided insight and feedback to the Office of Planning. The Committee also drafted an ordinance to allow for Solar Panels in the City, which at the time of this report is under review from the City Attorney's Office. This Committee has Michael Tabbert and Matthew Smith as members.
- **The Stormwater & Wetlands Committee,** formerly chaired by Nathan Inks and now chaired by Matthew S. Smith, conducted research into the merits of a natural features setback ordinance. This included having conversations with the MI Department of the Environment, Great Lakes, and energy regarding their recommendations. They plan to investigate City stewardship of vernal pools, and how the City could serve to increase these vital habitats. This Committee consists of Mark Graf and Nathan Inks.
- The newly created **Native Plantings Committee** is chaired by Sherly Burns, serving along with Riley Maher and Naketa Jones. This Committee provided valuable insight into the preparation of the City's draft "Preferred Native Tree Species List." The Committee has discussed methods to assist native pollinators and plans to work to educate the public on the importance of native species.
- **The MI Healthy Climate Committee** was created to track the State of Michigan's environmental initiative by the same name. This Committee is chaired by Mark Graf. Jonathan Matthews and Matthew Smith make up the membership of this Committee.





This Committee plans to keep the Commission up to date on the latest funding opportunities and policies pushed by the State.

- **The Tree Committee**, chaired by Nathan Inks, seeks to help guide the City as it seeks to expand the urban Canopy of Sterling Heights. This is the largest Committee, its membership includes Jonathan Matthews, Mark Graf, Riley Maher, and Sheryl Burns.

The Commission has also played a role in assisting the Office of Planning with several projects. They passed a resolution in support of the city joining ICLEI, which initiated the City's first ever greenhouse gas inventory. Over the summer Commission members handed out free tree saplings to residents at Moravian Park. Members of the Commission represented the city at the MI Sustainability Conference in Gaylord, MI in October. Commission members also assist with tracking grant opportunities for the city and have even assisted with preparing applications for said grants. Also worth mentioning, the Chair of the Sustainability Commission, Nathan Inks, won the Commissioner of the Year for 2023.

In the coming year, the Commission is due to review its award-winning Sustainability Plan. This review will be limited in scope, with a more thorough examination of the Plan coming after the completion of the new Master Land Use Plan. As part of the Master Land Use Plan, the Sustainability Commission will provide input into the City's first ever Climate Action Plan. The Commission also plans to continue its work in committee topic areas and engage the public about sustainability initiatives overall. 2024 will be an exciting year for the Commission, just as 2023 was.



## Meetings

May 2023				
1	Agenda Item	5.A	Title	Ordinance to expand the Sustainability Commission
	The Sustainability Commission reviewed an ordinance proposal to City Council to expand the total members of the Commission from 5 to 9 total members, as well as change the date of the required annual report of the Sustainability Commission.			
	Action: Forward a recommendation of approval of the amendment to City Council.			
R^3 Committee		Discussion was had regarding the bidding process for the waste haulers contract, and that the bid would go live on May 18 <sup>th</sup> , 2023.		
Green Energy Committee		No report or issues were discussed.		
Stormwater & Wetlands Committee		Chairman Inks discussed communications he had with EGLE regarding stormwater regulations. The Office of Engineering's new stormwater standards were also discussed.		
June 2023				
1	Agenda Item	9.A	Title	Electronic Vehicle Charging Station Master Plan
	The Commission discussed the moratorium put in place on gas stations, and how the time will be spent considering zoning regarding EV Charging Stations.			
	Action: No action required.			
2	Agenda Item	9.C	Title	Rodent Extermination Update
	Ms. Beaupre presented on "Rodenticide" and potential alternatives to use for the extermination of rodents in the City.			
	Action: No action required.			
3	Agenda Item	10.C	Title	ICLEI Presentation
	The Office of Planning presented potential benefits of joining ICLEI, including emissions management opportunities and networking opportunities.			
	Action: No action required.			
R^3 Committee		The Commission discussed universal recycling as part of the bid process for the new waste hauler contract.		
Green Energy Committee		Discussion was had regarding the new City contract with State Electric. This included logistical questions such as the length of the lease, pricing, and hours of operation. Solar panels were also discussed.		
Stormwater & Wetlands Committee		Discussion was had regarding the impervious surface ordinance going to City Council in August.		
July 2023				
1	Agenda Item	9.F	Title	Street Tree Update
	The Commission was updated on practices regarding street tree plantings, as well as the new Inspiring Green Initiative that is being launched to stir private investment in street trees.			
	Action: No action required.			



2	Agenda Item	9.G	Title	Recycling RFP Feedback/Input
	The Commission discussed in detail the feedback it provided regarding the waste hauler RFP's. submitted.			
	Action: No action required.			
3	Agenda Item	10.A	Title	Wind Turbine Presentation
	Ms. Beaupre gave a presentation discussing wind power in the City and potential zoning amendments regarding the subject.			
	Action: No action required.			
4	Agenda Item	10.B	Title	Tree Grants
	The Office of Planning asked for input and feedback from the Commission regarding several possible grants regarding tree planting that the City is interested in pursuing.			
	Action: No action required.			
5	Agenda Item	10.C	Title	Election of Officers
	The Commission debated appointing the officers for the 2023-2024 fiscal year.			
	Action: Nathan Inks, Mark Graf, and Jonathan Matthews retained their positions as Officers.			
R^3 Committee		No report given.		
Green Energy Committee		The Committee reported that they are researching recommendations for solar panel zoning from SolSmart, a solar energy advocacy group, as well as solar panel ordinances of surrounding communities and using them to draft the City's first ordinance referencing solar panels.		
Stormwater & Wetlands Committee		The Committee reviewed videos posted by the Huron Watershed Council regarding wetlands regulations. The Committee had also set up a meeting for the Office of Planning to sit down with EGLE in August to discuss wetlands policy.		
August 2023				
1	Agenda Item	5.A	Title	Resolution in support of joining ICLEI
	The Commission discussed funding sources and the benefits of recommending that City Council join ICLEI. A Greenhouse Gas Inventory is discussed as a possible benefit.			
	Action: Forward a resolution recommending that City Council to approve funding to join ICLEI.			
2	Agenda Item	9.A	Title	DTE Grant Submission
	The City has submitted a grant to receive \$4,000 from DTE, in order to replace trees that have been lost due to storms in Delia Park.			
	Action: No action required			
3	Agenda Item	10.C	Title	Tree Volcanoes
	The Commission discussed communications they had had with the Facilities Department regarding tree maintenance, and the importance of preventing "tree volcanoes."			
	Action: No action required.			





R^3 Committee	The Commission discussed an in-depth schedule for the Waste Hauler RFP. It is announced that universal single stream recycling will be provided to residents.
Green Energy Committee	The Committee has continued with its work of creating a solar panel ordinance.
Stormwater & Wetlands Committee	Ms. Beaupre presented information she had collected regarding natural features setbacks in neighboring communities.

## September 2023

1	Agenda Item	6	Title	Welcome new members
	The Commission introduced its newest four members to discuss their background and expertise.			
	Action: No action required.			
2	Agenda Item	7	Title	Special Presentation – Plant It Forward
	Nethanya Fonseka from Plant It Forward presented to the Commission about the purpose and goals of her organization.			
	Action: No action required.			
3	Agenda Item	10.D	Title	New Committees
	The Commission established two new Committees. Native Plantings Committee with Burns as Chair, Maher and Jones as members. MI Healthy Climate Committee with Graf as Chair, Smith as a member.			
	Action: New Committees are created.			
4	Agenda Item	11.F	Title	Transportation Planning
	The Commission discussed a seminar that talked about the relationship between sustainability and transportation planning.			
	Action: No action required.			

R^3 Committee	The Commission discussed the Waste Hauler RFP contract that was approved by City Council on September 20 <sup>th</sup> , 2023.
Green Energy Committee	The Committee is continuing work on the solar panel ordinance.
Stormwater & Wetlands Committee	The Committee discusses tree species, which leads to the creation of a new Committee: The Native Plantings Committee

## October 2023

1	Agenda Item	10.D	Title	Not MI Species
	The Commission discussed a seminar hosted by the State discussing native and invasive species. This is related to the native tree list prepared by the Office of Planning.			
	Action: No action required.			
2	Agenda Item	11.A	Title	Stormwater Management Requirements
	The Office of Planning explained the new requirements established by the Office of Engineering in regard to stormwater standards.			
	Action: No action required.			
3	Agenda Item	11.B	Title	Tree City USA Application
	The Commission discussed the process in which the City applied to receive designation as a Tree City USA, as well as applying for the growth award. The Commission discusses some aspects of the award, as well as the City's Official "Tree Board."			



	Tree Committee is created with Inks as the Chair, Burns, Graf, Maher, Matthews as members.			
	Action: New Committee established.			
R^3 Committee	Commission continued discussion of the new waste hauler contract approved by City Council.			
Green Energy Committee	The Commission discussed the draft solar panel ordinance prepared by the Committee. The definition of a solar panel, the height of a solar panel, and the allowed slope of a solar panel were discussed.			
Stormwater & Wetlands Committee	No report or issues were discussed.			
Native Plantings Committee	The Commission reviewed a draft of the “Native Preferred Tree List” being prepared by the Office of Planning. The list will be provided to landscape architects for use in landscape design.			
MI Healthy Climate Committee	Committee is monitoring the State MI Healthy Climate initiative, nothing significant to report.			
November 2023				
1	Agenda Item	7	Title	City Planner Introductions
	City Planner Jake Parcell and Assistant City Planner Shawn Keenan introduced themselves to the Commission. They discussed the future of the Commission, the City’s redrafting of the Master Land Use Plan, the Sustainability Plan and other topics.			
	Action: No action required.			
2	Agenda Item	10.A	Title	Top 15 Action Item Review (SCOAR)
	The Commission reviewed the ongoing status of the Top 15 action items from the Sustainability Plan. The Commission agreed to review the list thrice annually.			
	Action: No action required.			
3	Agenda Item	10.B	Title	ICLEI Kick-Off Update
	The Office of Planning updated the Commission about the start of the Greenhouse Gas Inventory being conducted by a contract with ICLEI. The logistics of the inventory, including a timeline, was discussed in detail.			
	Action: No action required.			
4	Agenda Item	11.A	Title	Re-Use of Recycling Drop-Off Center Ideas
	The Commission discussed several concept plans presented by Nethanya Fonseka on how to re-use the Recycling Drop-Off Center upon its closing with the new Waste Hauler Contract. These ideas included a pollinator garden, as well as a micro forest.			
	Action: No action required			
5	Agenda Item	11.B	Title	Sustainability Self-Assessment
	The Commission discussed the merits of conducting a Sustainability Self-Assessment, based on the assessment created by Resilient Michigan. The Commission agreed to review each section for long range planning purposes and potential improvements to the next revision of the Sustainability Plan.			
	Action: No Action Required.			



R^3 Committee	The Commission discussed the public education around the new Waste Hauler contractor. The Commission suggested multilingual materials be provided to residents.
Green Energy Committee	Discussion continued on the draft of the solar panel ordinance. Solar panel draft was sent to the City Attorney's Office for review.
Stormwater & Wetlands Committee	No additional report for this Committee.
Native Plantings Committee	The Committee discussed its mission statement. Discussion was also had regarding public education through the newsletter, as well as the idea of a separate Sustainability Newsletter.
MI Healthy Climate Committee	The Commission discussed an upcoming meeting of the MI Council on Climate Solutions on November 28 <sup>th</sup> .
Tree Committee	The Committee discussed its functions and goals.

## December 2023

1	Agenda Item	5.A	Title	Beekeeping Ordinance Review
	The Commission reviewed and provided feedback on a proposed ordinance amendment to allow beekeeping in the City. A discussion also ensued discussing pesticides used by the City that could damage insect populations and bee hives.			
	Action: Postponed discussion until a later date.			
2	Agenda Item	10.A	Title	Food Waste Reduction Fellowship
	The Commission was informed of a fellowship the City will host in 2024, which will focus on educating local restaurants on the costs of food waste. The Fellowship will also work to partner with organizations to assist them with food waste reduction.			
	Action: No action required.			
R^3 Committee	After discussing the food waste reduction fellowship, discussion moved to composting options in the City. Potentially the food waste reduction fellowship could lead to an expansion of composting City wide.			
Green Energy Committee	Mr. Inks assumed the Chair of the Committee. More discussion was had regarding the solar panel ordinance.			
Stormwater & Wetlands Committee	A discussion is held regarding the expansion of vernal pools on City property, and the importance of vernal pools to the ecosystem. Mr. Smith assumes the Chair of the Committee; Mr. Graf joins the Committee.			
Native Plantings Committee	The Commission discusses the methodology utilized to combat mosquitos in City parks.			
MI Healthy Climate Committee	Discussion was had on recently passed state legislation regarding climate change, as well as a report released by the State.			
Tree Committee	The Commission reviewed the criteria for the Tree City USA Growth Award, to be submitted later by the Office of Planning.			