



# 2024 Sustainability Commission

SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION  
ANNUAL REPORT

January 2024-December 2024

SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION

Office of Planning

January 15, 2025

## 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 nine (9) 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, 2027
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	May 15, 2024
Matthew S. Smith	September 5, 2023	June 30, 2025

Sheryl Burns	September 5, 2023	June 30, 2026
Cathleen Francois	July 1, 2024	June 30, 2027
Christopher Goeddeke	August 6, 2024	June 30, 2027
<b>Staff</b>		
Alexis Richards		Planner II - Liaison
Ryan Fox		Planner I - Liaison
Ava Miller		Planning Intern (Summer 2024)
Rachel Cushard		Sustainability Intern (Summer 2024)

## 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 2024:

The Sustainability Commission had a productive 2024. The Commission spent a good portion of this year reviewing the City's first ever Climate Action Plan, which will help guide the city toward a more sustainable future. The Commission also spent time reviewing the Greenhouse Gas Inventory (began in 2023) and worked tirelessly on researching a number of important issues facing the City.

2024 was the first full year of having established committees that cover a broad range of topics. Each committee succeeded in conducting research, advising staff, and creating materials for City Council review.

- **The Reduce, Re-Use, Recycle (R^3) Committee**, chaired by Secretary Jonathan Matthews. The R^3 Committee focuses on reducing trash waste produced by the City and its residents. This year, the Committee tackled food waste reduction and reviewed materials provided by a fellowship program hosted through the Office of Planning. The Committee also conducted research on the market surrounding recycled commodities to identify potential areas of the market to target with City recycling efforts.
- **The Green Energy Committee**, chaired by Chairman Nathan Inks. This Committee spent the majority of this year researching and perfecting draft solar panel amendments to the Zoning Ordinance, which would ensure that solar panels are permitted throughout the City. Along with that, the Committee also assisted with identifying opportunities to expand electric vehicle charging station access.
- **The Stormwater & Wetlands Committee**, chaired by Matthew S. Smith. This Committee conducted research into vernal pools in Sterling Heights and the benefits they provide to local wildlife. The Committee also reviewed the City's capacity to analyze flood risk, as well as established contacts which could assist with chemical testing in the Clinton River.
- **Biodiversity Conservation Committee**, chaired by Sherly Burns. The Committee assisted with the creation of educational materials that will be dispersed to property owners who receive a street tree as part of a federal grant the City received. The Committee also conducted research that was considered valuable to the creation of the Climate Action Plan.
- **The MI Healthy Climate Committee**, chaired by Mark Graf. This Committee provided valuable information to the Commission and City Staff regarding data showing the real-world effects of climate change. This Committee was put on inactive status in late 2024, due to a lack of communication from the statewide MI Healthy Climate Committee that this committee was designed to track and report on.
- **The Tree Committee**, chaired by Chairman Nathan Inks. This Committee had a highly productive year. It assisted with an Arbor Day event and tree planting. The Committee also assists the Office of Planning in identifying and applying for funding

opportunities to plant more trees on City property. This included a \$4,000 grant from DTE, which the City was awarded, to allow for plantings in Arlingdale Park.

2024 was a year of progress and success for the Commission, and for sustainability efforts in the City. The voters passed a millage to allow for tree plantings in City rights-of-way, as well as land acquisition for preservation purposes. City administration has begun work on the first ever Climate Action Plan for the City of Sterling Heights, a landmark document that will guide policy makers and administrators towards making more sustainable decisions.

The City has planted over 1,000 trees in City rights-of-way in 2024, and additional trees in City parks. The City has also done most of the work necessary to establish a community garden and butterfly house. Along with a large-scale rain barrel and sapling distribution event for Arbor Day, the Sustainability Commission has been there along the way providing feedback and supporting these efforts.

## Meetings

January 2024				
	Agenda Item	9.A	Title	Sustainability Self-Assessment
1	The first installment of a multiple part review of existing sustainability efforts began. Appropriate evidence was provided in this tracking document when needed.			
	Action: No action required			
2	Agenda Item	9.B	Title	Bee Keeping Ordinance Update
	The Commission discussed changes to the proposed hobby beekeeping ordinance, including the value of splitting hives to avoid swarming behaviors.			
3	Agenda Item	9.F	Title	TreeKeeper
	The Commission discussed the planned purchase of the TreeKeeper Software provided by Davey Tree. The purchase will likely head to City Council due to Ordinance Requirements on February 20 <sup>th</sup> .			
4	Action: No action required			
	Agenda Item	10.B	Title	Electric Vehicle Master Plan Implementation
	The Commission reviewed the implementation recommendations of the Electric Vehicle Master Plan. The Commission discussed the status of chargers to be installed at various City properties.			
Action: No action required				

R^3 Committee	The Committee discussed exploring opportunities to partner with school districts to educate students about recycling, as well as ensuring schools have adequate recycling access.
Green Energy Committee	An ordinance regarding solar panels is being reviewed by the City Attorney's Office. No other updates.
Stormwater & Wetlands Committee	The Committee planned to organize a meeting with the Clinton River Water Shed Council.
Native Plantings Committee	An update was given regarding the native plant sale.
Trees Committee	The Committee began planning for an Arbor Day Event.
MI Healthy Climate Committee	No update from the State this month

## February 2024

	Agenda Item	9.A	Title	Sustainability Self-Assessment
1	The Commission continued its multiple part review of existing sustainability efforts.			
	Action: No action required			
2	Agenda Item	9.B	Title	Bee Keeping Ordinance Update
	The Commission discussed feedback received from experts regarding the proposed hobby beekeeping ordinance.			
	Action: No action required			
3	Agenda Item	10.A	Title	Strategic Planning Follow-up
	The Commission discussed the strategic planning meeting, which City Council held in January. Topics discussed included: Urban reforestation initiatives, a Community Garden, an EV Pilot Program, a southeast quadrant park amenity, and others.			
	Action: No action required			
R^3 Committee		The Committee continued its efforts at contacting local school districts.		
Green Energy Committee		The City Attorney's Office continued its work of reviewing the solar panel ordinance.		
Stormwater & Wetlands Committee		The Committee began discussions around preserving and expanding vernal pools within the City.		
Native Plantings Committee		The Committee conducted research into alternative methods for mosquito control.		
Trees Committee		More work ensued to plan a successful Earth Day event. Discussion is had regarding potential partners, and what type of educational material to feature at the event.		
MI Healthy Climate Committee		The Committee discussed the five main goals of the Huron-Clinton Metropark Authority (HCMA): Education and Engagement, Preservation and Conservation, Water Quality, Transportation, and Waste Management		

## March 2024

	Agenda Item	9.A	Title	Sustainability Self-Assessment
1	The Commission continued its multiple part review of existing sustainability efforts.			
	Action: No action required			
2	Agenda Item	9.D	Title	Mosquito Control
	The Commission discussed new information learned by Ms. Burns regarding mosquito control. Discussion is had specific to the new community garden to be built at Nelson Park, and how chemicals can be harmful to aquatic life and plant life.			
	Action: No action required			
R^3 Committee		Extensive discussion is had regarding the City's new recycling pick up and waste hauler contract.		
Green Energy Committee		The Committee is still working on the solar panel ordinance proposal.		

Stormwater & Wetlands Committee	The Committee is still exploring vernal pool preservation throughout the City.		
Native Plantings Committee	The Committee discussed issues with mulch volcanos appearing in the City.		
Trees Committee	The Trees Committee discussed final plans for an earth day planting event.		
MI Healthy Climate Committee	The Committee shared information shared by Chris Edwards regarding climate change at an event held at the Library.		

## April 2024

	Agenda Item	9.A	Title	Sustainability Self-Assessment
1	The Commission continued its multiple part review of existing sustainability efforts.			
	Action: No action required			
	Agenda Item	10.B	Title	TreeKeeper Canopy
2	The Commission was presented with a version of TreeKeeper Canopy and asked their opinion on the software. The Commission recommended pursuing the software along with base TreeKeeper.			
	Action: No action required			
R^3 Committee		The Commission discussed the recycling of waste bins and pushed to educate the public on dates to recycle GFL bins.		
Green Energy Committee		The Committee continued with its work of creating a solar panel ordinance.		
Stormwater & Wetlands Committee		The Committee discussed an existing Vernal Pool, called SHNCRP-01 located in Dodge Park, and considered it as an education opportunity for residents.		
Biodiversity Conservation Committee		The Committee discussed internal restructuring.		
Trees Committee		The Committee planned for and helped host an Arbor Day event and Tree Planting, featuring various native tree species.		
MI Healthy Climate Committee		The Committee discussed concerning data from the NOAA showing March 2024 was the hottest month on record, and the concerning rise of ticks in Michigan.		

## May 2024

	Agenda Item	9.A	Title	Sustainability Plan Update
1	The Commission explored ways to integrate the Sustainability Plan and Climate Action Plan, and how to ensure their scopes are complementary but not redundant.			
	Action: No action required			
	Agenda Item	10.A	Title	New Master Plan Survey
2	The Commission discussed a new survey that the Office of Planning is hosting for the Master Land Use Plan. Members were encouraged to participate, and to encourage participation among their resident circles.			
	Action: No action required			
3	Agenda Item	10.D	Title	Composting Request

	<p>The Commission considered efforts to increase composting in the City. The Office of Planning shared their internal efforts to reduce food waste City wide, including a fellowship the City will have over the summer that would focus on educating restaurants and grocery stores.</p> <p>Action: No action required</p>
R^3 Committee	The Committee shared information learned on a recent trip to Troy's SOCCRA facility. Implementation of the new Priority Waste Recycling Bins was also discussed.
Green Energy Committee	The Committee is continuing work on the solar panel ordinance.
Stormwater & Wetlands Committee	The Committee was researching potential vernal pool education.
Biodiversity Conservation Committee	The Committee discussed education efforts to share native plant species with the public.
Trees Committee	The Committee celebrated a successful Arbor Day event, where 217 rain barrels and 50 seedlings were distributed to residents. Mulch volcanos remain an issue.
MI Healthy Climate Committee	The Committee reported on difficulties they were having communicating with the statewide Committee.

## June 2024 - Cancelled

## July 2024

	Agenda Item	9.A	Title	Climate Action Plan Discussion and GHG Inventory
1	The Commission discussed the Climate Action Plan and the Green House Gas Inventory. Some discussion is also had regarding floodplains in the City.			
	Action: No action required			
	Agenda Item	10.C	Title	Tree Grants Update
2	The Commission discussed various funding opportunities to plant trees, including grants from the State, Federal Government, and DTE. The Office of Planning used information from this meeting to apply and secure tree funding grants.			
	Action: No action required			
R^3 Committee	Committee discussed composting options for home owners.			
Green Energy Committee	The Committee returned a new draft of the solar panel ordinance to the City Attorney's Office.			
Stormwater & Wetlands Committee	No report or issues were discussed.			
Biodiversity Conservation Committee	The Committee provided a draft for review of a Vulnerability & Risk Assessment for Sterling Heights to utilize during the Climate Action Planning process.			
Trees Committee	The Committee discussed updated tree planting numbers, and mulching practices where discussed.			
MI Healthy Climate Committee	The Committee discussed recent extreme weather events affecting the City.			

## August 2024

	Agenda Item	5.A	Title	Climate Action Plan Letter
1		The Commission discussed a draft of a letter of support to be included in the Climate Action Plan. The conversation included discussion of a successful Master Plan Community engagement event centered on Sustainability, and the feedback provided by residents in attendance.		
		Action: Adopt the Climate Action Plan Letter		
	Agenda Item	9.A	Title	Sustainability Plan Update
2		Interns from the Office of Planning presented research on Sustainability Plans created by other communities. They also presented research along with the Office of GIS regarding work on a grant for tree plantings focused around environmentally vulnerable portions of the City.		
		Action: No action required		

	Agenda Item	9.C	Title	Review of the Tree Survey Process
3	The Office of Planning educated the Commission on the administrative process around tree surveys for private development, as well as how tree replacement requirements are administered per the ordinance.			
	Action: No action required			
4	Agenda Item	10.C	Title	Master Land Use Update
	The Office of Planning presented an update to the Commission on the drafting of the Master Land Use Plan. Commission members were encouraged to attend future Master Land Use Plan engagement events.			
	Action: No action required			
R^3 Committee	The Committee has begun work on a presentation to highlight the importance of waste reduction. The Committee also discussed materials provided by the Office of Planning to educate business owners on the costs of food waste.			
Green Energy Committee	The Committee is continuing work on the solar panel ordinance.			
Stormwater & Wetlands Committee	The Committee enquired on the City's capacity to analyze flood risk, which included the Office of Engineering. The Office of Planning also discussed efforts underway by SEMCOG to expand green infrastructure in the region.			
Biodiversity Conservation Committee	The Committee discussed a redraft of its mission statement. The beginning of a Sustainability Newsletter was also discussed.			
MI Healthy Climate Committee	The State Committee has been inactive, so the Commission as a whole discussed the need to keep this committee active.			
Tree Committee	The Committee discussed fall tree plantings and their funding sources.			

## September 2024

	Agenda Item	7.A	Title	Fresh Coast CAP Strategies and Actions
1	Fresh Coast Climate Solutions presented a high-level overview of the CAP Strategies and Actions portion of the plan. This included a responsibilities matrix to face internally indicating RASIC-type roles. Fresh Coast incorporated feedback from the Commission.			
	Action: No action required			
R^3 Committee	The Committee further discussed the City's food waste reduction efforts.			
Green Energy Committee	The Committee continued work on the solar panel ordinance.			
Stormwater & Wetlands Committee	A discussion was had regarding a Clinton Township resolution requesting Oakland County to work on reducing waste in the Red Run Drain, and the merits of signing onto that resolution.			
Biodiversity Conservation Committee	The Committee had nothing to report.			



MI Healthy Climate Committee	The Commission decided to disband this committee, due to inaction from the State.
Tree Committee	The Committee discussed pending grant applications, tree maintenance letters to be provided to residents, and data around tree plantings and removals.

## October 2024

	Agenda Item	8.B	Title	MISCON Recap
1	The Commission discussed the recently MI Sustainability Conference, in which the Chair and Vice Chair attended at least in part. The Commission discussed several of the presentations in length.			
	Action: No action required			
R^3 Committee		The Committee discussed research done into the market values of different recycling materials, as well as City purchasing policy around used materials.		
Green Energy Committee		The Committee had no report.		
Stormwater and Wetlands Committee		The Committee had no report.		
Biodiversity Conservation Committee		The Committee is continuing work on native planting education.		
Trees Committee		The Committee further discussed tree funding opportunities, specifically for plantings at Arlingdale Park. Discussion was also had on the micro forest to be established in Nelson Park.		

## November 2024

	Agenda Item	6.A	Title	SEMCOG Climate Ambassador Presentation
1	The Commission received a presentation from Carlton Jones and Renee Wallace from SEMCOG regarding their Healthy Climate Plan. This involved getting detailed feedback from the Commission.			
	Action: No action required			
2	Agenda Item	6.B	Title	CAP Matrix
	The Office of Planning presented the internal tracking matrix for the Climate Action Plan for comment from the Commission. Discussion was had on specific additions.			
	Action: No action required			
R^3 Committee		The Committee had no report.		
Green Energy Committee		The Solar Panel Ordinance is at its final stage, to be considered by the Commission in January of 2025.		
Stormwater and Wetlands Committee		The Committee has established contact with Erica Bloom from the Great Lakes PFAS Action Network. Discussion is had regarding testing the Clinton River for PFAS exposure.		
Biodiversity Conservation Committee		The Committee had no report.		
Trees Committee		The Committee discussed the RFP for tree plantings in 2025, including species breakdown.		

## December 2024

	Agenda Item	5.A	Title	Climate Action Plan
1		The Commission discussed an updated draft Climate Action Plan that included comments from the Commission. Additional edits were made during the meeting per commissioner feedback.		
		Action: Recommend adoption of the Climate Action Plan to City Council		
R^3 Committee		The Committee had no report.		
Green Energy Committee		Some discussion was had on the Solar Panel Ordinance to be presented in January		
Stormwater and Wetlands Committee		The Committee had no report.		
Biodiversity Conservation Committee		The Committee had no report.		
Trees Committee		The Committee discussed the 2025 planting schedule, as well as the contractor awarded the bid.		