

Minneapolis Northern Green Zone Task Force

July 10, 2019

5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Mill City Commons, 3023 Randolph St NE

Board/Commission Members: Jim Voll, Joanne Goddard, Lars Morris, Linnae Nelson-Seys, Markeeta Keyes, Roxxanne O'Brien, Juli Leerssen (Quorum 9)

Guests: Noa Shavit-Lonstein, Georgianna Yantos, Anna Schmiel, Rebecca Walker, Marita Bujold, Danielle Shelton Walczak, Jose Luis Villasenor, Fawkes Steinwand

Staff and facilitators: Kelly Muellman, Kennedy Kruchoski, Sam Grant

Welcome + Introductions

Sam Grant welcomed Task Force members and guests, acknowledging that only six Task Force members were in attendance. Attendees introduced themselves, sharing their role and what they have enjoyed about the summer.

Announcements

- **Garden Survey** Folks were invited to complete a brief, 10-minute Urban Agriculture Survey if they were part of a community garden in Minneapolis, and also, RSVP for one of two presentations of survey highlights. RSVP and learn more at www.minneapolismn.gov/UrbanAgSurvey or direct questions to Emma at Emma.Greenberg-Bell@minneapolismn.gov or 612-673-6106 or Claire at Claire.Baglien@minneapolismn.gov or 612-673-2466.
- July 21, 2019 Attend a **Toxic Sites Bus Tour** hosted by Northside churches. 1:30-4:00 PM. Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church, 4150 Dupont Ave N, Minneapolis MN. Suggested donation of \$25. Please RSVP here so we can rent the appropriate amount of buses: <http://mpls-synod.org/event/toxic-sites-bus-tour/>
- The second **Minneapolis Food Action Plan** meeting is Wednesday, July 24, 2019 from 5:00-7:30 p.m. at East Side Neighborhood Services (1700 2nd St NE). Food Action Plan: Topic 2 is Diets & Community Demand.
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is looking for six new members for our **Environmental Justice Advisory Group**. The Environmental Justice Advisory Group meets every other month and provides recommendations and advises the MPCA Commissioner. Application deadline is August 12, 2019. <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/about-mpca/mpca-and-environmental-justice>
- Free Brownfields Technical Assistance Available To Communities. Register at <http://www.clu-in.org/conf/tio/BFTA2/> for Webinar #2 - Wednesday, July 17; 11 am-12 pm CT (10-11am MT).

- MPCA is now seeking input to help shape the second round of funds from the Volkswagen settlement. Learn more about the settlement and how to provide feedback at the MPCA VW Settlement webpage, or by contacting Noa Shavit-Lonstein from Mn350 at noa@mn350.org.
<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/air/volkswagen-settlement>
- Lead and Asthma update: So far, 6 kids have tested positive for lead this summer. More families are aware of lead and asthma resources than have been previously, but are reluctant to apply for fear of rejection or not being qualified. The program has reached 125 families so far. A “Home Sick” event is taking place at East Side Neighborhood Services on July 30, 5:30-7:30 p.m. Learn more at the EJCC Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/PPPEJCC/>
- Highway 252/I94 expansion: The MN Department of Transportation is in the preliminary design phase of a project to expand Highway 252 and I94 in North Minneapolis. Converting 252 from a freeway to an expressway is proposed, as well as adding two additional lanes (one in each direction) on I-94 north of Dowling, to accommodate additional traffic. Most engagement around this project has been in Brooklyn Center, not Minneapolis. The only planned Open House to take place in Minneapolis will be at Folwell Rec Center, 1615 N Dowling Ave, on August 15 from 4:30 – 7:30. For more information about the project and other upcoming information sessions, visit the project webpage.
<https://www.dot.state.mn.us/metro/projects/hwy252study/index.html>
Concerns were voiced about the impact on North Minneapolis that this project will have, including increased air pollution from traffic.
- There has been a vacancy on the Northern Green Zone Task Force over the past month, and there have been no new applicants. The group decided to keep the application open, and previously received applications will also be considered. If Task Force members are interested in being part of the recruitment process, they can reach out to Kelly (kelly.muellman@minneapolismn.gov).
- Due to a conflict with another Minneapolis advisory group, the Task Force members in attendance decided to reschedule their monthly meetings to the **1st Wednesday** of every month. Kelly will follow up with the rest of the members, and the change will take effect starting next month.

Overview of Agenda

Due to low attendance from Task Force members, the facilitator Sam Grant adjusted the agenda to allow for more group discussion instead of breaking out into subcommittees.

Report out from subcommittees

Subcommittees did not meet outside of the larger Task Force meetings between June and July. However, Lars brought up ideas he came up with for how to use the funds available to the group in a lasting way. One of these is a large community outreach focused event, incorporating musicians, artists, poets, and more, using the group’s resources to pay those artists for their contributions, thus reaching the community using existing powerful voices

in the community. Jamming for Justice was a similar event held in Minneapolis in 2018, promoting a community-led vision of the Upper Harbor Terminal redevelopment.

This event also aligns with the ideas from the Green Workforce subcommittee. Another possibility would be collecting these voices and creating a small publication (or “zine”), forming a small committee that collects content from community members who care about these issues. Something similar to this, but with more longevity, would be a podcast or recurring radio segment. A podcast would have low initial startup cost, and could continue past the deadline for use of the funds. This podcast could interview people in the community about the issues that the Northern Green Zone was made to address. All of these options address the potential issue of the task force members not hearing from people living in the community and only making decisions based on what the group sees as important.

Rebecca Walker, a researcher at the University of Minnesota, mentioned that another researcher is interested in documenting environmental justice stories, especially within the Green Zone, and that they would more than likely be willing to assist with a project of that type.

So far there hasn't been much lasting outreach in the community about the Northern Green Zone. Many people in these neighborhoods simply can't participate in these conversations, since there are other issues that are more urgent for them to address. Roxxanne O'Brien mentioned that these discussions have been happening for a long time, and at this point the Task Force just needs to start implementing ideas.

Roxxanne brought up the issue of emergency preparedness in the Green Zone, since this is the community that will be most overburdened when climate emergencies occur. Right now there isn't a plan for emergency preparedness, which is an environmental justice issue. The impacts of this lack of preparedness were exemplified with the 2011 tornado.

Marita Bujold mentioned that emergency preparedness and resilience are part of the community food and water bill. With what Roxxanne suggested, the group can point to all of the community's experiential knowledge to support developing an emergency preparedness program, and creating the model for what the community needs. The group can start making demands for resources needed. A community climate resilience plan would require engagement throughout the community.

Kelly Muellman mentioned that the City's Chief Resilience Officer, Ron Harris, is interested in developing resilience hubs across the city. These are physical spaces in a community, generally run by a community based organization, with resilient infrastructure enhancements including weatherization, solar and storage, storage space for resources, and more depending on specific community needs. This would be a partnership between the City and the community organization, so the City would provide resources during an emergency, but the organization would be the facilitating party. The City of Minneapolis is investigating what this framework would look like, and is pursuing a small pilot project with Little Earth. Kelly suggested that Ron Harris come and speak to the task force if this is something that they are interested in pursuing in the Northern Green Zone.

Various members expressed that the group's engagement needs to be multifaceted and thorough. Spreading the word about what needs to be done will help the group gain traction in the community. Marita mentioned that in South Africa, a youth-led engagement team used an app to encourage residents to take less time in the shower, using songs as a

self-timer. Lars said that he has connections that would be willing to assist the group if they are interested in an app or another tech-based outreach method. The group is encouraged to think about how to engage people and encourage participation while pursuing the work that the task force takes on. Initial ideas included distributing solar phone chargers for use during a power outage. MIGIZI, a Native-American nonprofit in Minneapolis that works with indigenous youth in the community through a green tech training program, developed a “library house” that charges cell phones.

Roxxanne said the City needs to consider what the lives of the people in North Minneapolis are worth, and address the issue of de-industrialization directly. For perspective, she mentioned that Justine Damond’s family was given \$20 million to settle a lawsuit over her July 2017 shooting, whereas GAF is asking for \$75 million to move locations.

Linnae Nelson Seys asked a variety of questions, including whether there will be a separate process for deciding whether to pursue a project that doesn’t require funding, such as “behind the scenes” political work.

The group also discussed the need for coming up with clear data that helps understand the urgent need for this work, and for coming up with specific decision criteria.

Discussion: Decision-Making model

More weight will be placed on the ideas that have been discussed at this meeting.

Sam Grant suggested that the group use a consensus method called “fist to five”, in which a fist signifies “unable to support”, and five fingers is “fully support”. This method can be attempted at the next meeting, and discussed as a method to potentially use at all future meetings.

At the next Task Force meeting, the group will be discussing how to spend available funds before the end of the year. Items that had been discussed are evenly splitting the funds between subcommittees, and hosting a series of events or outreach opportunities. Members were instructed to think about more options before the next meeting, coming ready to discuss them.

Subcommittee Self-assignments check-in

Representatives from the MPCA presented to the group instead of the air, water and soil subcommittee. Jose Luis Villasenor and Fawkes Steinwand, who work on furthering environmental justice work at the MPCA, discussed a variety of environmental justice strategies that the MPCA is trying to implement. Areas where these strategies are being implemented include training, addressing concerns about specific facilities that further environmental injustice, engaging with overburdened communities, and meeting the community where it’s at.

Marita responded that removing the GAF is in line with the MPCA mission: to “protect and improve the environment and human health”.

A question was asked about how to change the fact that a company that is hurting health is legally allowed to operate, and how to prevent that from happening in the future. Jose Luis answered with two options: Joining the new environmental justice advisory group for the MPCA, which will address not only issues, but rather systems change; and being intentional with who is being elected at a state level.

Roxxanne asked a follow up question about organizations that seem to be “grandfathered”, even though there is no policy that specifies why, and thus can’t be prevented from operating. She voiced that there is a lack of clarity around how to require an environmental review of the GAF, and wondered how the company came to hold so much power while the community holds so little. She reminded attendees that these concerns have been raised for a long time, and that the “grandfathered” system is racist and classist.

Rebecca asked about who makes the siting decisions. Jose Luis answered that the location is a City decision, but the permits for operating come from the State. He also clarified that the GAF is in its current location due to the history of white supremacy in City policies.

Joanne Goddard referred to a piece from NPR about how what is classified as “clean” air still holds enough pollutants to contribute to adverse health effects and death, and asked how to implement standards to protect people breathing this air. Jose Luis also acknowledged that while Minneapolis as a whole ranks as having cleaner air than average, there are distinct differences between the air in overburdened communities or communities of color and air in wealthier, whiter communities. He added that air regulatory standards are more strict in MN than at the federal level, and that permitting and regulatory staff make sure that facilities meet those standards. After evaluations, those roles take note of areas of concern in the community, specifically in the context of environmental justice, to consider whether the facility should continue to operate in its current location.

Jose Luis clarified the MPCA’s authority and structure. It was created by the State Legislature, and according to statute has authority to write rules, which must be run by the Governor’s office. The Commissioner of the MPCA is appointed by the Governor. There used to be a citizen’s board but a republican Legislature dismantled it about five years ago.

A point was raised that the community is asking the MPCA to do some sort of study on the impacts of what the GAF is doing, and the fact that the MPCA is making it difficult to do so should be a red flag, and is indicative of the power that GAF holds over the community.

Marita mentioned that community leaders from other areas within the Twin Cities (Frogtown) are feeling fatigued and discouraged with the lack of power they have to affect change in their neighborhoods. She said that is the mission of the MPCA is to promote health and wellbeing, that there doesn’t even need to be a study to identify a reason to remove companies that are polluting communities, like the GAF. Even without a study of the specifics, the GAF should not be where it is.

Jose Luis said that he and Fawkes and others at the MPCA aren’t shying away from having these conversations with leadership, and bringing in more tribal, indigenous and POC voices. Their team is working on educating staff that has been there for a long time about not just looking at the rule of the law, but the spirit of the law, especially around environmental protection. The road to change is long, and groups like the Northern Green

Zone Task Force need to continually put pressure on the MPCA and the State to help speed the work along.

Lars, in response to the proposal for a stack at GAF that would alleviate the odors in the neighborhood, said that the community isn't as concerned about the odors, since that isn't where the harm lies.

The group expressed a desire to meet with leadership and staff from the MPCA to ask questions that have not yet received answers. This meeting would also need to include relevant staff from the City and the County.

There is currently a research partnership opportunity with the University of Minnesota. The Task Force could find someone there who would do the needed research, to a level that would be recognized and accepted by the MPCA, and present it to MPCA leadership. While the State permits the activity, the City permits the location of the facility. However, State law prohibits the City from removing these facilities without buying them out. If this group would like to see that law changed, they could use the research that proves that they are being directly harmed by the pollution from the GAF to garner support at the State level, or potentially start a civil case.

Another potential action item would be for the MPCA to review the study that had been funded by the community in question.

Kelly and Sam (with help from the MPCA) will pull together existing data on the GAF and other facilities in the "toxic corridor". Jose Luis and Fawkes will follow up with staff at the MPCA, asking whether the existing study is valid, and if not what steps need to be taken to make it so. A meeting will be organized between the task force and essential staff from the MPCA, City and County.

Evaluation of this meeting

Meeting attendees reflected on the structure of the meeting, and what they see as next steps for moving forward.

7:30 p.m. Adjourn

Next meeting: Wednesday, August 7, 2019 from 5:30-7:30 p.m.

Location: tbd

For reasonable accommodations or alternative formats please contact the Sustainability Division at 612-673-3014 or e-mail kelly.muellman@minneapolis.gov. People who are deaf or hard of hearing can use a relay service to call 311 at 612-673-3000. TTY users call 612-673-2157 or 612-673-2626. Para asistencia 612-673-2700 - Rau kev pab 612-673-2800 - Hadii aad Caawimaad u baahantahay 612-673-3500.