

**MINUTES**  
**Sustainability Committee**  
**November 17, 2021**  
**Municipal Complex, 100 W. Woodstock Street, Crystal Lake, IL**

**1. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. on Wednesday, November 17, 2021 at City Hall in Crystal Lake.

**2. Roll Call/Attendance**

Present were the following committee members: Lisa Janezic, Terry Dieckhoff, Emilie Hoffman, Lisa McLaughlin, Jen Oliver, and Nicky Strahl. Members of the public in attendance were Dean Farr, Stephen Platt, Kris Hall and Carol Elkins with the Wildflower Preservation and Propagation Committee, Jan Carter Seymour with Go Green Crystal Lake, Administrative Intern Ryan Oates, and Assistant to the City Manager Nick Hammonds.

**3. Public Comment**

Jan Carter Seymour discussed an initiative she started called Go Green Crystal Lake. She has established a website, [gogreencrystallake.org](http://gogreencrystallake.org), which primarily focuses on the harmful effects of invasive species like buckthorn. She provided information to the Committee regarding her initiative and the Committee discussed a recent article she created which appeared in the Northwest Herald.

Jan stated that 42% of the trees in McHenry County are made up of buckthorn and honeysuckle, which are invasive. She stated that since 2004, buckthorn is no longer legal to sell in stores, but the plant continues to thrive. Jan discussed her efforts to educate the public that just because a plant is green, it does not mean it is good or a native plant. Jan discussed how to remove invasive buckthorn and honeysuckle, how the berries from the plants are toxic to wildlife, and that the plants smother out other natural plants. Emilie Hoffman stated that a scavenger hunt item could be added for the Bike With Your Neighbor event for participants to locate and identify invasive species.

Stephen Platt with the Environmental Defenders discussed his main priorities such as banning coal tar from driveway sealing, monarch butterfly preservation, and establishing solar panels at the Downtown Metra Station.

**4. Approval of the Minutes from October 20, 2021**

Terry Dieckhoff moved to approve the minutes from the October 20, 2021 meeting. Nicky Strahl seconded the motion. Upon voice vote, motion passed.

**5. Guest: Kris Hall, Wildflower Preservation and Propagation Committee**

Kris Hall and Carol Elkins with the Wildflower Preservation and Propagation Committee (WPPC) joined the Sustainability Committee to provide an overview of the WPPC program. Kris Hall stated that the Environmental Defenders began in the 1960s and focused on preserving the natural habitat of McHenry County as residential developments increased in magnitude over the years. The WPPC was established in the 1980s to continue native plant preservation focused solely on McHenry County.

Kris Hall discussed the homeowner mentoring program where the WPPC will have a mentor provide guidance on native plants for residential homes. She stated that homeowners can apply to the program, a mentor will discuss the homeowner's goals for their property, and a mentor will visit the property to provide guidance on what plants to use, where to plant them, preparing the site, and designing the plant plan. The program primarily begins in the fall with site visits to properties, and the homeowner will select a plant list to pick up in the spring.

Kris Hall and Carol Elkins discussed the goals of the WPPC. The focus is on educating homeowners and the public about native plants and how to properly maintain native plant gardens. The WPPC will hold a seminar at McHenry County College (MCC) on February 19, 2022 where sponsors and vendors can promote environmentally friendly initiatives. The WPPC holds a plant sale in early May each year. Kris Hall stated that the WPPC also hosts plant walks each year. The walks are open to anyone for free and focuses on local properties that have maintained native plant gardens.

Kris Hall stated that the WPPC has worked with local schools and churches to promote native plant preservation. Prior to Covid, the WPPC would gift plants to teachers to use as part of their teaching curriculum. She stated that this program has been difficult in the past two years, but that the WPPC is looking forward to continuing this partnership with local schools.

Kris Hall stated that there is a push for carbon sequestering technology to help the environment, but that the most efficient and effective carbon sequestering is achieved through plants, birds and trees. The tools to help the environment are readily available, and the WPPC works to promote sustainability through their home mentoring program.

Carol Elkins stated that she is on the mentoring committee of the WPPC and she is also active with the Mayors' Monarch Pledge, the Bee Alliance, and home conservation efforts. She discussed the importance of explaining the 'why' when educating people about sustainability and preserving the environment. She also discussed the importance of insects for the environment, since insects provide a food source for birds.

Jan Carter Seymour inquired if there are any fees for the WPPC program. Kris Hall stated that there are no fees and all mentors are volunteers. The only cost related to the program is for the plants that homeowners decide to buy for their native garden. She stated that plants can be pre-ordered and participants in the program will receive a discount. Kris Hall also stated that homeowners who implement their garden will receive a sign in their yard signifying their participation.

Jen Oliver asked how many people participate in the program each year. Kris Hall stated that there were 17 mentees in the 2021 program with 20 mentors. The mentor program began in 2005 and over 300 gardens have been installed through the program. Jen Oliver then asked how much time is spent at each house for mentoring. Kris Hall stated that this depends on the level of knowledge of the homeowner. She stated that the mentors generally recommend homeowners to install a 100 square foot area of garden to be easier to maintain. Carol Elkins stated that native plants are essentially garden plants, but that maintenance is still needed to protect against invasive species.

Stephen Platt discussed the action items for the Mayors' Monarch Pledge. Collecting and handing out seeds was one of the action items pursued by the City in 2021. He asked if the WPPC could work with

the Committee to have demonstrations and hand out seeds. Kris Hall stated that the WPPC typically only works with plant plugs. This makes it easier for homeowners to follow their garden design plans and to identify plants as they grow.

Dean Farr asked if the WPPC works with schools, churches, or government agencies. Kris Hall stated that they have worked with schools in Crystal Lake and two churches so far. Kris stated that there is a garden at the McHenry County Government building which was installed with the guidance of the WPPC. She also stated that the WPPC will be involved with the Pine and Oriole rain garden project.

Dean Farr asked if the WPPC has been involved with plantings along road sides or large rural areas. Kris Hall stated that a ComEd representative provided a presentation at a WPPC meeting and discussed the efforts by ComEd to seed large rural areas, especially near power lines maintained by ComEd. Carol Elkins stated that the WPPC focuses primarily on the personal level through homeowners, providing advocacy including the benefits of reducing mowing.

Emilie Hoffman asked if there is anything the Committee can do to help promote the WPPC. The Committee then discussed posting links on the City website to the WPPC and including the native plant list for reference. Emilie discussed how there are many people who just do not know about the program and they could benefit from this resource. Lisa McLaughlin stated that she recently purchased plants through the WPPC for her home and it would be beneficial to the community to share the benefits of the program.

Kris Hall stated that the WPPC now has a website to help direct people to their resources. The website is [www.thewppc.org](http://www.thewppc.org). She stated that the website has dates for their walks on the wild side and seminars. There is also a section regarding the mentoring program for homeowners. Jen Oliver stated that she appreciates the efforts of the WPPC and the time commitment for the program. Kris Hall stated that the WPPC posts plant lists on their website as a resource for the public.

Lisa McLaughlin asked if the WPPC still accepts new applicants for the mentoring program. Carol Elkins stated that the program runs from the fall through the spring, and the 2021-2022 group is already underway. Carol also discussed the shortage of plants this year as the popularity of native plants has grown. Lisa McLaughlin reiterated the importance of getting information to the public about the program. She stated that the Chamber of Commerce has a community news bulletin which focuses primarily on local businesses, however, MCC is a member of the Chamber and highlighting the February 19, 2022 seminar, which will be hosted at MCC, may qualify to be marketed through the Chamber.

Lisa McLaughlin inquired if the Committee can be involved at the next seminar hosted by the WPPC. Kris Hall stated that the Committee could have a table at the seminar and there is no fee to participate. Space is limited so the Committee will need to inquire early. Carol Elkins stated that she will provide the coordinator of the seminar's contact information to Nick Hammonds.

## **6. Greenest Region Compact (GRC): Green Business Designation Program**

Nick Hammonds stated that the GRC application is now open and businesses are able to submit applications. The open period runs through the end of January and the Committee will review applications as they come in. Nick stated that there will be a December newsletter article promoting

the program and encouraging local businesses to apply. Jen Oliver stated that the Committee could publicly post submissions from businesses to help promote the program. Nick stated that submissions can be posted as long as the business allows it.

**7. Mayors Monarch Pledge Review**

Stephen Platt discussed the Mayor's Monarch Pledge website and how every town has their profile shown. The Committee thanked Mayor Haleblian for pursuing the pledge.

**8. Open Discussion**

Emilie Hoffman discussed the McHenry County Moves 2050 long range plan. The County has started the plan to be similar to the CMAP 2040 plan. Nicky Strahl stated that she is happy to see more long range planning. Emilie Hoffman stated that the County is looking for feedback from the public through a survey, which a QR code was available at the Downtown gazebo.

Stephen Platt inquired about the possibility of installing solar panels at the train station now that the City will be buying the property. He would like to see the City take advantage of the large parking lot by installing solar.

Jan Carter Seymour inquired if the City bans gas powered leaf blowers. Nick stated that he is not aware of such a prohibition in the City Code. The Committee discussed the harmful effects on the environment of leaf blowers and pollution, as well as the negative effects of removing leaves from lawns.

The Committee discussed the benefits of involving Homeowners Associations with coal tar sealant awareness and issues with leaf blowers. Nicky Strahl inquired if the City contacts Homeowners Association property managers regarding these items. The City provides timely information in the newsletter to promote awareness of certain issues.

**9. Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, December 15, 2021 at 7:00 p.m.

**10. Adjourn**

There being no further business, Jen Oliver moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:55 p.m. Nicky Strahl seconded the motion. On voice vote, all voted aye. Motion passed.