



City of Farmers Branch

Minutes

Sustainability Committee

Fire Station #2
13333 Alpha Link
Farmers Branch, TX, 75244

Wednesday, March 8, 2023

6:30 PM

Fire Station #2

Meeting held at 6:30 PM

Presiding: Joseph Riegel (Chairperson)

Present: Soren Thomsen (Vice Chair)
Loren Rives (Secretary)
Shelby Anders
Val Clark
Al Mahesh
Lisa Massey
Price Trosin
Suzette Vaquera

Absent: None

Staff: Alex Pharmakis, Sustainability Manager
Robert Diaz, Deputy Director of Sustainability and
Public Health

A. CALL TO ORDER

Joseph Riegel called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, March 8, 2023.

B. CITIZEN COMMENTS

Councilmembers Omar Roman and Michael Driskill introduced themselves to the Committee.

C. AGENDA ITEMS

C.1 Consider approving minutes for the February 8, 2023 meeting; and take appropriate action

Soren Thomsen made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Shelby Anders. All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.

C.2 Receive a staff update on sustainability initiatives

- Joseph Riegel provided the Committee's bi-annual update to City Council yesterday which was well received.
- Water rebate program has received 11 applications to date with 8 approved and the others in process. The program was also presented to the Branch Connection. There has also been various communication in other city communications.
- Grant reimbursement for EV charger installations was received.
- The RFP for consultants to create an Active Transportation Plan will go out later in the month.
- Climate Symposium with the City of Dallas is upcoming on March 28th.
- Those with terms expiring this June should let staff know if they would like to stay on. Committee members indicated their interest.
- Committee and staff indicated interest in making environmentally friendly information more readily available (such as on the website, information on rebates, etc.)

C.3 Receive a presentation on potential water conservation programs

Al Mahesh shared information about the importance of addressing water waste in the community. He provided a presentation on ways to reduce waste, such as through a professional irrigation audit. He proposed a pilot program that would provide irrigation audit services to community members.

Committee members provided feedback on the proposed pilot. Staff noted that Dallas has a program that sends out licensed professionals to check irrigation systems; the city of Frisco has a similar service. The Committee discussed the potential to collect data through a pilot such as this (such as through a survey or from the auditor). The form could be standardized to collect meaningful data. The Committee emphasized the need to ensure the pilot was economically viable and considers other costs (i.e., pumping, maintenance, etc.). The Committee also suggested incorporating other ideas, such as smart rain sensors. The subcommittee will incorporate feedback from the group and further refine their plan.

Staff noted that the City monitors their water usage and reports it on an ongoing basis. They also have frequent audits and oversight.

Staff will look at similar cities for examples and how they conduct data collection.

C.4 Receive an update on the Westside Art Trail

Robert Diaz provided an update on the Westside Art Trail. He highlighted key connection areas on the trail. City staff is coordinating with adjacent cities, Dallas County, utility companies, TXDOT and working on securing federal funds to extend the trails. The goal is to have the project completed in the summer of 2024. Both safety and aesthetic items will be kept in mind.

C.5 Consider recommending the City Council issue a proclamation for 'Lights Out, Texas' to protect migratory birds; and take appropriate action

Committee members have requested the City participate in the "Lights Out, Texas" campaign. Staff drafted a proclamation based on other cities and the committee provided feedback. The proclamation is a way to drive awareness in the community and includes a call-to-action.

The Committee noted that this coincides with Earth Day and peak migration for birds. Information about the importance of reducing lights will go out in City communications. The group discussed timing of the initiative and how it fit into other priorities. Lisa Massey shared information about communication tools and resources that she was able to identify and suggested possible venues to share information with others. The Committee discussed purchasing a small number of signs that could be used to drive interest.

April 18th is the target date for the proclamation. The committee was in favor of starting with the proclamation and then building up efforts for the Fall and into the future.

Shelby Anders made a motion to recommend the Council issue the proclamation. The motion was seconded by Suzette Vaquera. Motion passed unanimously.

C.6 Receive subcommittee updates

- **Built and Natural Environment**
- **Communications**
- **Earth Day Runner's Race**
- **Water Conservation**

Built and Natural Environment

- Val Clark gave an update from the subcommittee. The subcommittee is working on a compost initiative, ways to support grow zones and ongoing work related to Dark Skies. Another area the subcommittee is interested in is rewilding. Group discussed potential areas for rewilding, such as Creek Ridge Park. Committee members suggested doing a presentation at Brookhaven, Library programs, or the Branch Connection.

Communications

- In addition to the “Lights Out, Texas” communications, the subcommittee is working on identifying appropriate venues to have a presence at community events. The committee noted the need for a welcoming presence. Alex Pharmakis shared that City staff is looking into all events. Group noted the need to identify high-impact events and what sort of incentives they would need to draw attention.

Earth Day Runner’s Race

- No updates

Water Conservation

- They are continuing to work on the audit proposal and are excited to see the toilet rebate project launch.

C.7 Receive an update from Committee members on activities attended

Committee members attended events on sustainability, such as the community college equity and sustainability event, electronics recycling centers, and more. Two Committee members will also be starting to attend the Citizen’s police academy sessions.

C.8 Discuss agenda items for future Sustainability Committee meetings

The Committee discussed that the May meeting will be held at Dallas College – Brookhaven and will feature speakers focusing on the college’s sustainability efforts.

D. ADJOURNMENT

Al Mahesh made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Shelby Anders. All were in favor. Motion approved unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:11 p.m.

Chair

Secretary