

A meeting of the Sustainability & Energy Commission (SEC) was called to order by Dan Small at 6:03 p.m. on Thursday, April 16, 2026, in the Council Chambers of Grand Haven City Hall.

Present: Ryan Cotton, James Hagen, Jean Madden, Patti Nelsen, Nancy O'Neill, Dan Small, and

Absent: Pam Blough, Andrei Skelly

Also present: Eric Law (Administrative Liaison) and Larry Burns (Assistant Director of Urban Forestry Department of Public Works)

Call to Audience: Chris Roberts stated that he is in favor of the City of GH utilizing neglected or seldom used small parcels of land to plant Dune Grass or other natives. Since GH is known as being a beach town we should showcase beach grass. Cindy Fricano said she was interested in learning more about what the Sustainability and Energy Commission does.

Previous Meeting Minutes approved unanimously.

AGENDA

Forest Management: Jean Madden reported that the City has completed its annual Deer Management Program. The program took place over two evenings, in accordance with City guidelines and permits issued by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The effort was conducted in coordination with the City's contractor and the Department of Public Safety, with no incidents or public complaints reported. Of the 50 deer harvested, one was deemed unsuitable for human consumption due to illness. The remaining venison was provided to food pantries.

Madden also provided an update on the observational study. The deer exclosure has been delivered; however, the site is currently overrun with invasive plant species - primarily orchard grass. Eric Law has consulted with the Department of Public Safety regarding removal methods, and a plan is still being determined. Native plant experts from "Wildtype Natives" are developing a list of suitable native species, and Pushaw Builders has graciously agreed to help with the deer exclosure installation. Informational signage will be posted which reads: "Research in Progress. This site is part of a study examining how native vegetation responds to deer browsing pressure. The results will help guide forest management, biodiversity

protection, and long-term ecosystem resilience. Please keep people and pets out of this area to protect the integrity of the study.”

Larry Burns discussed the “See it, Snap it, Share it” initiative, which will include signage with a QR code to enable the public to easily report signs of disease or invasive species in City forests.

Budget Update: Eric Law reported that funding for a tree canopy census is included in the proposed budget for the next fiscal year. Budget approval is scheduled for May. There is no money in the budget for a Home Energy Residential advisor.

Larry Burns explained that the Department of Natural Resources Urban and Community Forestry Grant is a worthwhile opportunity to pursue; however, eligibility is limited to a small area near the airport due to the requirement that funds benefit a disadvantaged community. Eric Law clarified that only City staff may apply for grants, not members of commissions or committees. For this grant, the application would need to be prepared by Larry Burns or Derek Lemke (Facilities & Grounds Manager and Deer Management Liaison).

Dan Small moved to recommend that the City Manager’s Office explore this DNR grant opportunity. Ryan Cotton supported the motion, which was approved unanimously by the members.

Jim Mathews Tree Dedication: Funds have been raised by SEC members to purchase a tree in honor of Jim Mathew’s advocacy for forest management in the City of Grand Haven. The Commission discussed logistics, including several potential planting locations and a several native, deer-resistant tree species. Cotton will coordinate with Larry Burns to finalize the location and tree selection. The City will provide a commemorative plaque to accompany the tree at the time of planting.

OTHER BUSINESS

Ryan Cotton reported that he conducted a winter inventory of homes in Grand Haven and observed significant icicle formation on many roofs, indicating potential energy loss and inefficiency. He also noted that the

March/April edition of the Board of Light and Power's (BLP) "Plugged In" pamphlet contains useful information on its Energy Waste Reduction Programs.

Cotton shared information about the City of Holland's Energy 101 program, which is offered at no cost to residents but is supported through a combination of municipal utility support and City of Holland. The primary funding source is the Holland Energy Fund (HEF), a nonprofit established to support the city's Community Energy Plan. This funding helps cover the cost of in-home energy visits and provides efficiency materials and rebates to participating households. The program is also supported by the Holland Board of Public Works (HBPW), the city's municipal utility. Overall, the program operates under a hybrid funding model that includes city contributions, utility support, and potentially grants or other energy efficiency funding sources.

Cotton and Hagen reported that they have requested a meeting with the General Manager of the BLP to discuss developing a similar energy efficiency program for local residents but have not yet received a response.

Jim Hagen was late to the SEC because he had attended the Board of Light & Power trustee meeting. He provided an update. The BLP has issued a letter of intent for clearing trees at the site in preparation for a Community Solar field. They have also issued a letter of intent for turnkey installation of a community solar project. They plan to sell 100 shares for the 300 kW array. They have also purchased a building on an approximate 5 acre existing industrial parcel near the site. The key date for the project to be completed is Dec. 2027. The Michigan Municipal Power Agency (MMPA) encourages municipally owned utilities to pursue small-scale, dispatchable energy sources—such as RICE generators.

Nancy O'Neill participated in a "Treekeeper" webinar which focused on the planting, care, and advocacy for urban trees. She said it was very good and will share the link with others.

ADJOURNMENT

Small made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:47, supported by Madden, unanimously approved.

