

A regular meeting of the Sustainability & Energy Commission (SEC) was called to order by Dan Small at 6:02 p.m. on Thursday, November 13, 2025, in the Council Chambers of Grand Haven City Hall.

Present: Pamela Blough, Ryan Cotton, James Hagen, Patti Nelsen, Nancy O'Neill, Andrei Skelly, Dan Small, and Jean Madden.

Also present: Eric Law (Administrative Liaison)

Call to Audience: Larry Burns and Martha Gitt present as audience members. No comment during call to audience.

Approval of Minutes: Minutes from the previous meeting were approved.

Agenda

Forest Management Update:

1. The City Council has approved a resolution adopting the Deer Management Plan. Madden presented “next steps” outlining how the plan will be implemented. **Winter** (Annual Census)- Conduct a deer population survey using the City’s thermal-imaging drone along with coordinated street-count methods. **Spring** (Habitat Monitoring)- Install and maintain a deer exclosure in Mulligan’s Hollow and/or other locations to measure browsing impact. Throughout the growing season, compare vegetation growth inside and outside the exclosures to evaluate herd pressure. **Late Summer / Early Fall** (Management Evaluation)- If forest regeneration remains limited, assess whether additional herd reduction is needed. Findings will be documented in the annual Forest Health Index. **Annual Cost Review:** Each winter, review deer management costs based on census data, exclosure findings, and ecological conditions. The 2026 allocation of \$25,000 will serve as a baseline for operational decisions, with adjustments made as needed. **Annual Reporting:** By May each year, the City will publish a report detailing deer population data, program outcomes, and recommendations.
2. Curt Terhaar (Ottawa County Coordinator of Park Planning and Development) has submitted a trail analysis of the Mulligan’s Hollow Forest, identifying trails in good, fair, and poor condition, along with

recommendations for improvements. There was discussion about pursuing a Department of Natural Resources grant to enhance the sustainability of trails in the City's forested areas.

3. Tree Trimming Policy Review & Discussion. The Reforestation group has recommended a goal of striving for a 40% tree canopy goal based on national environmental and beautification standards. The first step is completion of a tree canopy survey. Further discussion illuminated the desire for additional governmental tools to address dangerous trees on private property. Ryan Cotton volunteered to research and author a cover memo to the City and BLP with invitations to come to the next meeting.

Community Energy Update:

Cotton proposed creating a Community Energy Advisor position to help reduce residential energy costs and improve home comfort. He noted that many homes in Grand Haven show signs of significant heat loss in winter—such as large icicles—indicating poor insulation and wasted energy. Further discussion with City administration will be needed to determine the level of support for this initiative.

Volunteer Outreach:

At a previous meeting, the SEC discussed revising the tradition of sponsoring four beach clean-ups per year—previously scheduled to coincide with summer holidays and festivals—due to the increased efficiency of the beach cleaning equipment at City Beach. The committee brainstormed additional volunteer opportunities for environmental improvement in the area. Proposed activities included site clean-ups, removal of invasive plants in parks and forests, and shoreline clean-ups along the Grand River. These events could be held during spring, summer, and fall. The SEC also discussed involving other groups in these efforts, such as Boy and Girl Scouts, the Grand Haven Area Public Schools GREEN Club, and other organizations. O'Neill highlighted GVSU's "Making Waves" initiative, which has organized kayaking events to remove trash from the Grand River. Discussion tabled for now.

Ordinance Review Discussion:

The City is planning an ordinance review and the SEC is seeking guidance from administration on providing input. Blough suggested that we review

other city ordinances around the State that have been rewritten with sustainability in mind. Hagen has been attending regularly scheduled weekly meetings with City staff regarding potential projects in the pipeline. With the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) rescinded and renewable energy tax credits no longer available, fewer projects now incorporate sustainability features. Hagen noted a potential project at 1500 Kooiman, which would require a zoning change from industrial to planned unit development. The site would remain partially wooded but primarily be developed with new buildings. The SEC recommends incorporating environmentally responsible and resource-efficient practices, including native landscaping, rainwater harvesting and local re-use, high-performance insulation, and electrification of systems where feasible.

Other Business:

Madden reported that Brittany Goode has reached out and offered to meet with City Planner Brian Urquhart to complete the City's annual submission to the Michigan Green Communities (MGC) Challenge. Each year, during the reporting period (Jan. 1–May 1), City staff must complete and submit the online MGC Challenge form. To retain Gold status, the City must demonstrate progress or meet its targets in at least four key metrics, which include reducing greenhouse gas emissions, increasing renewable energy use, lowering water consumption, expanding clean-fuel vehicle adoption, and improving tree canopy coverage.

Adjournment: Small made a motion to adjourn at 8:02 P.M. Blough supported. Motion carried by unanimous consent.