

Recommendations from the Committee on the Environment (COE)

To: Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway, Madison Common Council

Date: January 6, 2020

Statement of Purpose: This recommends strategy, ongoing projects, and roles related to environmental quality for the city of Madison.

Mission for Committee on the Environment: Advises the Mayor and Common Council in making studies and recommendations relative to water, land and air quality, noise abatement, use control, safety and management of the lakes, rivers and streams and other bodies of water and their shorelands under the jurisdiction of the city and all drains, outlets and sewers emptying into any such streams or bodies of water; acts toward improved quality of land, air and water; makes recommendations on matters pertaining to environmental quality, including measures to further the maintenance of safe and healthful conditions; protects spawning grounds, fish and aquatic life, and preserves shore cover and natural beauty. (Title of body changed from commission to committee per MGO Sec. 33.11, adopted 3-17-09/effective 8-1-09)

Summary Statement: The lakes give Madison its unique character and environmental quality has been a factor in attracting businesses and tourists to the area. The city of Madison should continue to protect and preserve these valuable resources and adopt a strategy for managing water, air, solid waste, and land quality. The COE is concerned that dissolving the COE will dilute the focus on environmental quality and an overall strategy on environmental quality will not be a priority. Protecting groundwater, surface water, air quality, solid waste management, and land use will be dwarfed by priorities in other committees.

The COE requests that the Mayor and Common Council share the following before Common Council members vote to dissolve the COE:

- The strategy for considering environmental quality, especially how water resources will be prioritized, and where those priorities will reside.
- How the recommendations for projects and strategies the COE has been working on and listed below will be managed.

Recommendations:

Role of COE:

- 1) The Committee has served as a watchdog for other committees and with Common Council with regard to environmental concerns. It is recommended that this role is continued, and that ties to the Common Council are strengthened through appointments of two senior alders such that proposals are brought forth for consideration.

- 2) The COE should work with the Common Council to develop a forward looking overall strategy for prioritizing environmental quality, including water, air, solid waste, and land use.

Water Issues

- 3) **Chloride:** The Committee has been working on efforts to reduce salt in the wastewater stream contributed by water softeners. This is of concern as chloride is a mobile ion and is not removed during the wastewater treatment process. These ions eventually end up in area streams and lakes and contribute to the rising levels of chloride in our lakes and groundwater. Chloride levels continue to rise, growing closer to toxic concentrations for aquatic life. Madison Metropolitan Sewage District reports that it costs 20 cents to add a pound of salt to water and \$5 per pound to remove it, so there is the potential for residential cost savings by introducing this program. The committee has investigated requirements for water softening for new construction, for commercial establishments, replacing timers on water softeners with hardness sensors, and the replacement of old timer water softeners in residential homes. The Committee recommends that this work be continued and that a program for commercial and residential rebates to reduce chloride discharges with specific goals for reductions in chloride discharge levels be supported. The Committee also recommends that the City increase its efforts to publicize chloride issues and salt reduction opportunities.
- 4) **The quality of surface water going into lakes and streams** has been a concern for the Committee, and we recommend that projects and education related to decreasing the amount of phosphorus in surface water continue. Educational programs for residents to keep leaves out of roads and storm drains, support of residential rain gardens, support of composting leaves and yard waste, and raking of leaves from the curb should be promoted.

Air Quality Issues

- 5) **Air quality and fossil fuel** use have been a concern for the Committee. The Committee has been working on a proposal for incentives for Madison residents to switch from 2-cycle gas powered lawn mowers to electric mowers. The switch from gas powered lawn equipment would result in significant reductions in emissions of reactive organic gases, reducing gallons of fuel spilled while refueling lawn equipment, reductions in used oil in landfills, and overall improve air quality. It is recommended that a proposal for a rebate/ lawn tool exchange/ buy-back program be drafted and presented to the Mayor and Common Council.

Land Use

- 6) **Flood mitigation and habitat improvement:** Another priority that the Committee has considered is working with the Parks and Engineering Departments to improve quality of life, safety, and health for Madison residents to mitigate flooding events, improve habitat for wildlife, and keep weeds and invasive species under control. The committee recommends continuing this important work and overseeing programs that support this.

Solid Waste

- 7) **Recycling and reduction of waste streams to landfills** has been a priority for the Committee as benefits include cost savings to the city, improvement in environmental impact, and a reduced carbon footprint, resulting in an overall

positive impact on climate change concerns. We recommend support of a robust public education program to improve recycling waste streams so that the quality of waste streams for recycling is improved and the amount of waste diverted to landfills is decreased. We also recommend further pilot programs and work on composting options for Madison residents.

Other Environmental Quality Issues

- 8) **Transportation:** The Committee has been concerned about transportation initiatives and improving the quality of life and the environment for all of Madison residents, including improving access to public transportation in neighborhoods designated as “food deserts.” We recommend that initiatives that improve public transportation and encourage residents to use public transportation be continued. We also recommend increased use of electric buses and other transportation options that decrease our carbon footprint and reduce air pollution.
- 9) **Climate Change:** The Committee recommends working with the Madison Metropolitan School District and various school groups on climate change and environmental impacts. It is suggested that the Common Council consider adopting proposals that will decrease carbon footprints such as supporting a carbon fee and dividend program.
- 10) **Pest management:** The Committee recommends working with the Common Council on updating the City’s Integrated Pest Management Policy. Currently, there are concerns with mosquitoes carrying diseases and with the Emerald Ash Borer and Asian Longhorn Beetle associated with climate change.
- 11) **Incentives:** Another area to investigate is an environmental certification program for commercial establishments where designations will be given for meeting requirements for areas of environmental concern such as energy conservation, switching to sustainable energy sources, reduction in salt usage from parking lot and sidewalk salting and water softeners, water conservation, solid waste recycling, composting, and reduction in air emissions. The Committee recommends establishing this program to encourage and reward commercial establishments for improving overall environmental impacts and working with the Chamber of Commerce and Visitor’s Bureau to highlight these establishments with potential consumers.

Thank you for your consideration of these important initiatives.

Respectfully submitted,

The Committee on the Environment