

Regular Meeting of the Dearborn Environmental Commission

Summary

The commission unanimously approved the previous meeting minutes after incorporating amendments to correct Claudia Walters' last name and a call-to-order time, following a motion by Commissioner Walters and a second by Commissioner Ziaja. Ramsey Saymuah presented a recommendation on food truck park grease management, which was unanimously approved to be submitted to the Dearborn Health Department (DPH), and Commissioner Boyce successfully moved to engage marine terminal owners (Ford, Cleveland Cliffs, Levy, and Marathon) regarding air quality improvement and participation in the Detroit Wayne County Port Authority initiative. The commission formed an Urban Forestry Plan Subcommittee, which will be chaired by Paul Boyce and tasked with drafting a recommendation including goals, metrics, a timeline, and stakeholders. Commissioner Assi initiated a discussion on defining environmental stewardship and developing an awareness campaign in partnership with the DPH, which will be revisited at the next meeting. Ramsey Saymuah was re-elected as chairperson, Machhadie "Micho" Assi was elected as vice chairperson, and Paul Boyce was elected as secretary; the commission also voted to continue meeting bi-monthly on the third Wednesday of the month starting January 21st, 2026.

Details

Meeting called to order at 5:32pm by Chair Saymuah.

Commissioners present: Ramsey Saymuah, Asma Said, Mahmoud Tanana, Claudia Walters, Rene Ziaja, and Paul Boyce. Commissioners absent: Lamis Srour, Machhadie Assi, and Mohamed Dabaja. Also present: Sara Elhasan, DPH Liaison and Jeremy Brown, Corporate Counsel. Quorum present.

- **Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes** The commission reviewed the minutes from the August and October meetings. Proposed amendments included correcting Claudia Walters' last name with an "s" and changing the call to order time for August from 5:24pm to 5:34pm. A motion to approve the previous meeting minutes, including the proposed changes, was made by Walters and seconded by Ziaja, passing unanimously.

Commissioner Srour arrived 5:35pm.

- **Urban Forestry Plan Subcommittee Formation** The previous meeting concluded with a proposal to create a committee to provide insight and recommendations to the city on an urban forestry plan. Commissioners Ziaja, Walters, and Boyce volunteered to be on the subcommittee, and the committee was permitted to select additional members, including residents, with names and qualifications to be forwarded to the mayor for approval. Paul Boyce volunteered to chair the committee.
- **Urban Forestry Plan Committee Motion Details** Commissioner Boyce motioned to create a committee to draft a recommendation for an urban forestry plan, setting goals, defining metrics, establishing a timeline, and identifying stakeholders by June 30th. Commissioner Ziaja seconded initial motion. Following discussion about the motion's scope, Boyce revised the motion to simply set goals, metrics, a timeline, and identify stakeholders, which align with key points outlined by Lawrence Law (Certified Arborist, MI DNR Urban and Community Forestry) in previous meeting. The amended motion, seconded by Commissioner Walters, passed unanimously.
- **Food Truck Park Recommendation and Grease Management** Commissioner Saymuah presented a recommendation regarding the city council's new land use designation for "food truck parks," particularly focusing on the handling of grease to protect the storm water system. The concern is that existing grease interceptors, often inherited from former brick-and-mortar restaurants, are not adequately sized or maintained for multiple food trucks. The recommendation calls for separate grease collection, on-site grease interception engineered for the collective use, and reoccurring maintenance plans to prevent the discharge of grease into the storm water drainage system.

Commissioner Assi joined the meeting at 5:50pm.

- **Discussion on Food Truck Park Recommendation and Enforcement** Saymuah clarified that the new food truck park ordinance was intended to prevent individual food trucks from parking at places like gas stations, limiting them to designated food truck parks or public parks. There was discussion about whether the recommendation should be directed to the City Council or the Dearborn Health Department (DPH), with the consensus to use the DPH as a conduit. Commissioner Tanana made a motion to approve the recommendation, seconded by Walters, and the vote was unanimous to submit it to the Public Health Department.

- **Detroit Wayne County Port Authority Environmental Project Update** Commissioner Said introduced the update on the Detroit Wayne County Port Authority (DWCPA) environmental project, which received a \$24.9 million EPA grant primarily for pollution reduction through the purchase of electric and hydrogen-powered equipment. Said was noted as the attendant to the DWCPA meeting. Boyce noted that Dearborn has significant marine terminals, including those for Ford, Cleveland Cliffs, Levy, Marathon, and Waterfront Petroleum Terminal Company, and that over 50% of air emissions are related to trucking or "drayage".
- **Recommendation on Marine Terminals and Air Quality** Commissioner Boyce noted that only one of Dearborn's marine terminals, the smaller Waterfront Petroleum Terminal, is participating in the DWCPA initiative. He recommended that the city engage the owners and operators of marine terminals in Dearborn (including Ford, Cleveland, Levy, and Marathon) to address air quality improvement and encourage their participation in the DWCPA initiatives or independent action, potentially with city incentives. Boyce motioned for the city to engage these terminal owners/operators to address air quality improvement and offer the commission's opinion to the mayor upon request. The motion was supported by Ziaja and passed unanimously.
- **Air Quality Monitoring Data and Recycling Facility Recommendation Follow-up** Sara Elhasan confirmed that real-time air quality data from 14 sensors in Dearborn is available on justair.co and that DPH's 2024 air quality report is on the city's website. Regarding the previous recommendation for metal recycling facilities to operate within an enclosure, Sara Elhasan indicated that DPH received the recommendation and keeps it on file to inform conversations with DPW and Council, but no movement has been made on it.
- **Environmental Stewardship Discussion and Educational Outreach** Commissioner Assi asked to revisit the discussion about defining environmental stewardship and creating an awareness campaign. It was clarified that the idea of an award or certificate for environmental stewardship was considered redundant with the City Beautiful Commission's existing recognition efforts. However, the commission agreed on the value of the educational and outreach component, particularly through social media campaigns and involving residents of all ages.
- **Methods for Environmental Education** DPH has produced informational magnets, distributed through the performing arts center, libraries, and outreach events, and as inserts in water bills, which is seen as a better investment for lasting visibility than paper flyers. The focus for the commission's next steps

should be to define environmental stewardship beyond recycling to develop content for the awareness campaign, as this was not formally covered in previous meeting. The goal of defining environmental stewardship is to formulate educational content for the residents, which is seen as an important undertaking for the commission.

- **Environmental Stewardship Campaign Recommendations** Commissioner Assi discussed the need for a campaign on environmental stewardship to clarify its meaning for Dearborn residents, focusing on how to encourage them to be good stewards. They determined that the commission's role is to submit recommendations for the city to potentially accept and partner on, rather than building the awareness campaign directly. The Dearborn Public Health (DPH) representative offered their department's willingness to work with the commission on the education, awareness, and outreach components.
- **Defining Environmental Stewardship and Campaign Strategy** Commissioner Walters introduced a definition of environmental stewardship, highlighting that it involves responsible use and protection of the natural environment, shared responsibility, and activities like reducing waste and conserving energy. They emphasized that the commission's recommendations should focus on explaining the "how" for average residents. A suggestion was made to create a unifying message or logo, and to recommend that the city emphasize a different topic monthly on a rolling basis to manage the breadth of issues.
- **Inclusion of People in Environmental Definition** Commissioner Ziaja commented that the definition of environment should also include people and social-emotional aspects, such as environmental justice and how people treat each other, believing that nurturing and keeping people safe and well should be part of the concept. The commission agreed to put environmental stewardship back on the next meeting's agenda to define the scope and bring creative ideas.
- **Annual Election of Officers** Chair Saymuah announced the annual election for the chairperson, vice chairperson, and secretary positions. Ramsey Saymuah indicated his intention to step away from the chairperson role due to an increased schedule starting with law school and teaching. Before entertaining nominations, Commissioner Saymuah motioned to amend the commission's bylaws to specify that annual elections for all officers will be held at the last regularly scheduled meeting of the calendar year. Commissioner Tanana seconded. All in favor, motion passed with six or more votes per by-laws.

- **Election of Chairperson and Vice Chairperson** After outlining the chairperson's duties, Ramsey Saymuah was nominated by Commissioner Ziaja and seconded by Assi to continue as chairperson, and the vote was unanimous for Saymuah. Machhadie Assi nominated herself for the vice chairperson position and was seconded by Commissioner Srour, and the vote was unanimous for Assi.
- **Election of Secretary** Paul Boyce was nominated for the secretary position by Commissioner Tanana, seconded by Commissioner Srour, with speaker commending him for their excellent work, high quality, and timeliness of messaging. Boyce accepted the nomination on the condition that he hear more voices, and the vote was unanimous for Boyce.
- **Discussion and Decision on the 2026 Meeting Schedule** The commission discussed the frequency of meetings for 2026, with the current schedule being bi-monthly. Commissioner Ziaja preferred meeting monthly for the next six months to improve commission cohesion and understanding of their role, expressing concern that the current bi-monthly gap was too long. A suggestion was made that much of the work occurs between regular meetings in small working groups, though effectiveness depends on commitment from individual commissioners.
- **Vote on Meeting Cadence and Schedule** The motion to meet bi-monthly was introduced by Commissioner Assi and seconded by Boyce. Despite a discussion favoring monthly meetings to foster collaboration and learning, the motion to meet bi-monthly passed with one opposing vote by Commissioner Tanana. Commissioner Saymuah motioned to meet every third Wednesday of the month bi-monthly, starting January 21st, 2026, seconded by Commissioner Ziaja with the motion passing unanimously.

Motion to adjourn by Commissioner Ziaja, seconded by Commissioner Walters. All in favor. Meeting adjourned 7:22pm.