

Jan 21, 2026

## Environmental Commission Meeting Minutes

Present: Commissioners Ramsey Saymuah, Lamis Srour, Mahmoud Tanana, Claudia Walters, Mohamed Dabaja, Asma Said, Machhadie "Micho" Assi, Rene Ziaja, and Paul Boyce. Also present: Sara Elhasan, City Liaison and Adam Mourtada, Council.

### Summary

Chair Ramsey Saymuah called the Environmental Commission meeting to order, with Paul Boyce confirming a quorum and the subsequent unanimous approval of the December meeting minutes. Paul Boyce presented the Urban Forestry Plan Committee's nomination of six additional members—Leslie Herrick, Janet Damian, Samra'a Luqman, Cheryl Lieblang, Silas Gray, and Lawrence Law—for a six-month term, which the commission unanimously approved after clarification from Adam Mourtada regarding the appointment process. Mohamed Dabaja and Paul Boyce proposed the "Follow Our Wastestream" short films to enhance public education on waste processing, leading to the unanimous motion by Claudia Walters and Rene Ziaja to task them with developing a formal recommendation for the Department of Public Health. The commission discussed environmental stewardship and tabled Asma Said's Green Schools recommendation, seconded by Mahmoud Tanana, until the next meeting to update statistics and consult with the City Beautiful Commission on the involvement of Junior Commissioners. Rene Ziaja proposed inviting the City Engineer to a future meeting to discuss stormwater mitigation, following an update from Ramsey Saymuah on the food truck park grease interceptor ordinance and Ali Abazeed's confirmation that a broader Fats, Oils, and Grease (FOG) ordinance is a city priority. Finally, Ali Abazeed announced his departure to become Detroit's Health Director and addressed concerns with Sara Elhasan and Adam Mourtada regarding best practices for using commission email addresses.

### Details

- **Meeting Convening and Virtual Shift** Chair Saymuah officially called the Environmental Commission meeting to order on Wednesday, January 21st, 2026, at 5:31 p.m. The recording and transcript were set up using Gemini AI ([00:01:02](#)).
- **Roll Call and Attendance** Secretary Boyce conducted the roll call, confirming the presence of all Commissioners ([00:01:02](#)). Also noted in attendance were Sara Elhasan (liaison) and Adam Mourtada (council), with the expectation that Ali Abazeed would join shortly. Ramsey Saymuah confirmed a quorum was met ([00:02:49](#)).
- **Approval of December Meeting Minutes** The commission reviewed the December meeting minutes, which were prepared by Boyce with assistance from



Gemini AI. Ziaja motioned to approve the minutes, seconded by Walters, and the motion passed unanimously ([00:04:11](#)).

- **Urban Forestry Plan Committee Update and Appointment** Boyce, as Chair of the Urban Forestry Plan Committee, provided an update on the committee established at the last meeting to define goals, metrics, timeline, and stakeholders for a proposed urban forestry plan ([00:05:19](#)) ([00:08:25](#)). The committee, consisting of Commissioner Zaja, Commissioner Walters, and Commissioner Boyce, nominated six additional members (Leslie Herrick, Janet Damian, Samra'a Luqman, Cheryl Lieblang, Silas Gray, and Lawrence Law; who include residents and arborists. Boyce then moved to appoint these additional committee members for a six-month term ([00:06:42](#)) ([00:13:45](#)).
- **Discussion on Committee Member Appointments** A discussion ensued regarding the procedure for appointing additional committee members, with Paul Boyce asserting that the guiding ordinance permits the commission to appoint members for a certain time and forward the names to the mayor ([00:08:25](#)). Adam Mourtada, council, confirmed there was "no issue with it from their reading of the code" as long as the appointment was not indefinite, supporting the six-month term proposed ([00:11:00](#)). Paul Boyce further clarified that the committee's scope is not to write the plan, but to outline four specific areas for a future plan ([00:08:25](#)) ([00:12:22](#)).
- **Motion to Appoint Additional Committee Members** Following Ziaja seconding Boyce's motion, Assi asked for more details on the proposed members, which Boyce directed commissioners to the meeting folder for their background information ([00:13:45](#)). Ziaja added that in selecting committee members, they looked for community engagement, environmental activism, and knowledge of public policy. The motion to appoint the six additional committee members for six months was passed unanimously ([00:18:08](#)).
- **Discussion of "Follow Our Wastestream" Short Films** Dabaja introduced the idea of "Follow Our Wastestream" short films to educate the public on what happens to waste at various facilities ([00:19:37](#)). Dabaja and Boyce detailed the concept for short educational clips or films for social media to explain waste processing, encourage behavioral changes, and show the impact of incorrect waste sorting ([00:20:45](#)) ([00:23:06](#)). Paul Boyce noted this aligns with public health's request for social media blast ideas and acknowledged that the suggestion originated from a resident ([00:21:59](#)).
- **Logistical Considerations and Recommendation for Short Films** Walters raised a concern about potential restrictions on filming at recycling facilities, noting that the one they visited had a no-recording policy ([00:25:57](#)). Dabaja suggested seeking permission beforehand, while Ziaja questioned how this advisory idea should be phrased as a recommendation to the city ([00:26:49](#)). Dabaja suggested wording the recommendation around expanding education on composting, recycling, and landfills through short films ([00:28:31](#)).



- City Support and Next Steps for Waste Films** Elhasan indicated that the Department of Public Health (DPH) would welcome a recommendation focusing on education and outreach via social media through short clips ([00:28:31](#)). Ali Abazeed, joining the meeting, advised that the recommendation does not need to be overly formal and suggested Boyce and Dabaja email Elhasan with their ideas ([00:34:58](#)). Abazeed added that CDTV could handle recording and editing, and DPH would publish the content, making sure it is branded as coming from the Environmental Commission ([00:36:04](#)). Elhasan offered the potential for DPH summer fellows to collaborate on this work, starting in May ([00:37:15](#)).
- Motion to Develop a Formal Recommendation for Waste Films** Dabaja and Boyce indicated that they did not plan on voting today, but wanted feedback on how to move forward ([00:38:20](#)). Walters motioned to task Dabaja and Boyce with developing a recommendation to DPH on how to proceed with the "Follow Our Wastestream" short films project, which Ziaja seconded. The motion passed unanimously ([00:40:56](#)).
- Discussion on Environmental Stewardship** Chair Saymuah reintroduced the topic of environmental stewardship, recalling that the initial idea of an award program was deemed redundant by DPH ([00:42:05](#)). Sara Elhasan suggested focusing on educating the public on what it means to be a good environmental steward through content, possibly connecting with the proposed short films ([00:45:04](#)). Assi suggested defining environmental stewardship in terms of behaviors and actions and offering that definition to DPH as a recommendation, potentially engaging summer fellows to incorporate residents in educational videos ([00:46:16](#)).
- Defining Environmental Stewardship** Walters questioned the purpose of defining environmental stewardship now that the commission is no longer planning an awards system ([00:50:44](#)). Other commissioners agreed on the importance of having a common understanding to guide educational efforts ([00:53:05](#)). Tanana suggested categorizing stewardship into two spheres: education (workshops, youth involvement) and action (volunteerism, fundraising for green spaces) ([00:54:21](#)). Ziaja offered a basic definition of stewardship as an ethical duty to pass on a healthy planet to future generations. Walters provided the comprehensive UN definition focused on responsible use and protection of the natural environment ([00:55:36](#)). Boyce offered a simple definition: "minimize impact to the environment," and Dabaja emphasized the importance of daily choices ([00:58:34](#)).
- Environmental Stewardship Resources and Philosophies** Walters shared resources on environmental stewardship, including the book *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer, a Native American scientist who incorporates Indigenous teachings about respecting nature and avoiding an extractive mindset ([01:00:01](#)). The concept of the seven generations, where the current generation is influenced by past generations and strongly influences future ones, was also



discussed, suggesting a current problem is not thinking about future generations enough. Saymuah asked for the name of the book again, and Tanana mentioned ordering it ([01:01:12](#)).

- **Environmental Stewardship Activities for Citizens and Businesses** Said differentiated between environmental stewardship for businesses and residents, suggesting businesses could be encouraged to use more sustainable packaging and less takeout packaging ([01:02:17](#)). For citizens, she proposed activities like encouraging others, especially younger children and older adults, to practice recycling, composting, and gardening ([01:03:38](#)). Srour emphasized the importance of ensuring a project's long-term sustainability, noting their personal experience and hesitation with adopting initiatives that might result in an unkempt eyesore, such as a garden that is not maintained ([01:10:04](#)).
- **Green Schools Recommendation Proposal** Said presented a recommendation for the city to encourage more schools to participate in the Michigan Green Schools program, which awards schools that prioritize environmental sustainability through activities like waste-free lunch programs, teaching units on Michigan's environmental issues, or recycling programs ([01:04:52](#)). The aim is to educate children, especially those from immigrant families who face language barriers regarding recycling, so they can teach their parents at home. Said noted that only seven schools had qualified for the green school status from 2024 to 2025 out of approximately 27 to 30 total schools, but Ziaja clarified that 15 schools received green status (including Emerald or Evergreen) in the 2025 school year and that participation has been high over the past 15 years, with some rebuilding needed following 2020 ([01:06:06](#)).
- **Addressing Green Schoolyard Sustainability Challenges** Said, in collaboration with Tanana and Srour, amended the recommendation to include city support for the Green Schoolyards initiative by applying for a grant to purchase materials and potentially hire someone to manage the initiative across multiple schools, since current staff are strained for time and funds for maintenance ([01:06:06](#)) ([01:09:02](#)). Srour supported the idea of a city partnership to match district funding or provide a budget for supplies to sustain the projects, acknowledging that maintenance is the biggest challenge. Tanana suggested increasing the involvement of the City Beautiful Junior Commissioners and recruiting volunteers to help with the upkeep, possibly through an "adopting a school garden program" ([01:11:17](#)).
- **Coordination with City Beautiful Commission and Resource Sharing** Walters gave a "shout out" to the Environmental Interpretive Center (EIC) for installing the gardens in collaboration with Wayne State ([01:12:34](#)). Tanana shared that they spent about \$10,000 of their employer's money on a previous garden project and were willing to do so again. Tanana also commended the Dearborn Public Schools (DPS) system for their willingness to offer a coordinator position to help alleviate pressures ([01:13:37](#)).



- **Motion and Tabling of the Green Schools Recommendation** Walters moved to accept and move forward the Green Schools recommendation, seconded by Tanana, but requested a friendly amendment to ensure the correct number of schools with green status was used ([01:14:49](#)). Ziaja expressed the need to clarify the "ask" of the City Beautiful Commission regarding the junior commissioner involvement and ensure their agreement ([01:16:04](#)). The motion to approve the recommendation was tabled until the next meeting, following a motion by Ziaja and seconded by Boyce, to allow for the collection of more information and consultation with the City Beautiful Commission ([01:20:12](#)).
- **Clarifying Commission Authority and Collaboration** Walters sought clarification on the relationship between the Environmental Commission and the City Beautiful Commission, particularly if the recommendation would be "legally binding" for the City Beautiful Commission ([01:21:19](#)). Saymuah explained that the Environmental Commission only makes non-legally binding recommendations ([01:23:49](#)). Ziaja clarified that while the Environmental Commission's recommendations are not legally binding, they are tasked with working collaboratively and fostering positive relationships with other commissions, especially concerning the 60-year-old Junior Commissioner program of the City Beautiful Commission ([01:22:45](#)).
- **Proposed Revisions for the Tabled Recommendation** Tanana summarized the required changes for the recommendation: updating the correct statistics for the green schoolyards program and including language about the City Beautiful Commission's Junior Commissioner involvement being "pending the approval" of that commission ([01:24:54](#)). Srour suggested a meeting between themselves, Said, Ziaja, and Tanana before the next commission meeting to determine what partnership the City Beautiful Commission is comfortable with ([01:26:05](#)). Ziaja confirmed that they would communicate with the City Beautiful Commission before the next meeting, noting that there were "mixed feelings" about the proposed involvement ([01:27:13](#)).
- **Speaker Request for March Meeting** Dabaja proposed inviting a Wayne State faculty member who leads the environmental science program and a sustainability center to be a speaker at the March meeting, offering a short presentation with resources and potential ways for collaboration ([01:28:16](#)). Saymuah and the other commissioners agreed that this would be an outstanding guest, asking Dabaja to provide information for the agenda ([01:29:41](#)).
- **Adjusting the March Meeting Date** Srour raised a concern about achieving a quorum for the March meeting, as the scheduled date conflicts with iftar during Ramadan and the following week is spring break ([01:31:48](#)). The commission agreed to move the March meeting date from the 18th to March 25th, 5:30 p.m., with a motion from Ziaja and support from Tanana ([01:33:53](#)).
- **Food Truck Park Grease Interceptor Ordinance** Srour requested an update on previous recommendation concerning the food truck park and the potential need



for larger grease interceptors. Saymuah shared that additional context provided and academic articles to support the recommendation, citing a case in Oklahoma City where a lack of grease interception led to the need to redo the stormwater system ([01:35:58](#)). Saymuah maintained that the current language in the ordinance is insufficient to protect the stormwater system and recommended requiring grease interceptors for food trucks ([01:37:09](#)).

- **Stormwater Mitigation and Request for City Engineer Presentation** Srour emphasized the need to urge the city to prioritize the grease interception issue due to its effects on many citizens and the city's current infrastructure ([01:38:22](#)). Ziaja proposed inviting the city engineer to a meeting to discuss the status of stormwater mitigation efforts, mentioning cleaning the Colson-Palmer line and installing lines down Oakwood Avenue ([01:40:54](#)). Abazeed agreed to pass the request for the city engineer along to the Department of Public Works (DPW) ([01:44:18](#)).
- **Update on the Fats, Oils, and Grease (FOG) Ordinance** Abazeed informed the commission that the FOG ordinance is on the 2026 priority list for the economic development and building and planning teams, and the focus is broader than just food trucks, including brick-and-mortar establishments. Abazeed highlighted that this focus on FOG aligns with the city's health-in-all-policies approach and requires buy-in from various departments ([01:45:18](#)).
- **Announcement of Ali Abazeed's Departure** Abazeed announced that his last day with the city is January 30, and that he will be taking on a new role as Detroit's next health director in early March ([01:47:22](#)). Abazeed thanked the commission for their service and patience through staff turnover, expressing pride in the department's work and the establishment of the commission ([01:49:07](#)). Walters inquired about the timeline for filling Director position, and Abazeed speculated it may not be until August or September, noting that Elhasan is present in the interim ([01:49:55](#)).
- **Discussion on Commissioner Email Addresses** Elhasan asked which commissioners did not have access to their dearborn.gov email ([01:51:38](#)). Srour and Walters both shared difficulties in managing a third email and preferred using their work or personal emails, despite attempts to link them ([01:52:48](#)). Mourtada, from the legal department, confirmed that the commission is a public body and subject to FOIA requests, and using the dearborn.gov emails simplifies the collection process for commission-related business ([01:54:58](#)). Elhasan followed up by asking if commissioners could use their preferred email addresses for correspondence, while still abiding by legal and IT best practices ([01:58:19](#)).
- **Email Communication Best Practices** Mourtada clarified that the best practice for streamlined communication is to keep all correspondence within a @dearborn.gov email. They noted that emails sent from a dearborn.gov account to a non-dearborn.gov account would still be tracked and that third-party



contractors' emails also end up in email chains, so using the Dearborn email is preferable but not strictly necessary for tracking ([01:58:19](#)). Srour confirmed she receives Elhasan's emails via her forwarded school email, resolving initial concern about communication issues ([01:59:33](#)).

- **Alternative Communication Methods and Follow-up** Saymuah acknowledged that some members, including Micho and possibly others, have had access issues to emails and that they follow up via phone calls to confirm attendance and ensure receipt of information ([01:59:33](#)). Walters suggested using text messages as an alternative option for quick replies, especially when unavailable for phone calls due to back-to-back meetings, which Saymuah agreed was an option. Saymuah explained that his follow-up calls are due to the nature of his construction management job, which requires constant follow-up and may seem "aggressive," but it is not a reflection on anyone present ([02:01:20](#)).
- **Update on Shirts and Meeting Adjournment** Dabaja inquired about updates on the shirts, and Elhasan confirmed that shirts were made available and distributed to those who attended previous meeting. Elhasan requested that anyone who did not receive a shirt should send them their size to make it happen. The meeting was adjourned after a motion by Walters and seconded by Ziaja ([02:02:03](#)). Meeting adjourned at 7:33pm.

