

Mar 25, 2026

Environmental Commission Meeting Minutes

Present: Mahmoud Tanana, Lamis Srouf, Rene Ziaja, Claudia Walters, Ramsey Saymuah, Mohamed Dabaja, Paul Boyce, Machhadie "Micho" Assi arrived 5:50pm, Asma Said joined 5:57pm.

Also Present: Maria Willett, Interim Public Health Director; Donna Kashian, WSU/UNRCE

Absent: Corporation Counsel

- **Call to Order, Roll Call:** Chair Saymuah called meeting to order at 5:30pm. Roll call, quorum present. Corporation Counsel absent.
- **Suspension of Legal Counsel Attendance for the Current Meeting:** Boyce motioned to suspend counsel for the meeting, Tanana seconded motion. The commission discussed and voted on the motion to suspend the requirement for legal counsel to be present for the current meeting. The vote was unanimous, and the motion passed. It was noted that this vote would need to be taken again for every meeting that legal counsel is unable to attend ([00:19:26](#)).
- **Introduction of Maria Willett, Interim Public Health Director:** Willett was introduced as both the director of philanthropy and grants for the city and the interim director for the public health department. She provided an update on two grants being pursued: one for a 2.2-mile stretch connecting Lonyo to the Joe Louis Greenway, and another through the Land and Water Conservation Fund for a universal play area at Levagood Park. Willett noted that she would need to leave the meeting soon due to running a DNR required public input meeting concurrently ([00:17:18](#)).
- **Discussion on Necessity of Legal Counsel and Bylaw Amendments:** There was a discussion regarding the ongoing absence of legal counsel and the need to confer with them on potential legal ramifications of any actions. It was suggested that all recommendations be circulated to legal before moving forward ([00:20:28](#)). The commission considered a proposal to amend the bylaws to remove the section requiring the attorney to be present ([00:26:42](#)).
- **Clarification of Legal Counsel's Role:** The commission confirmed that the commission's role is strictly advisory. Counsel does not have voting privileges and advises on matters or questions of law. The consensus was to suspend the requirement for the attorney to be present at meetings but to ensure that any decisions requiring legal input are vetted by legal counsel ([00:23:23](#)). An opinion

was shared that an attorney attend meetings on a regular basis in the future is unlikely ([00:24:30](#)).

- Commissioner Machhadie “Micho” Assi arrived at 5:50pm.
- **Commissioner Introductions and Commission Goals:** New attendees and current commissioners introduced themselves, sharing their involvement and environmental passions. Several commissioners mentioned being involved with the Urban Forestry Plan Committee, and others emphasized youth involvement and strengthening partnerships between the city and schools to build environmental stewardship ([00:29:30](#)).
- **Public Health Department Updates and Earth Day Involvement:** Willett provided an update on public health activities, noting active involvement in Earth Day events and the ongoing process of interviewing candidates for public health fellows this summer. They mentioned the department is actively discussing the climate wall and that they are grateful for Jill Chochol’s continuous work and engagement on environmental issues ([00:32:30](#)).
- Commissioner Asma Said joined meeting virtually at 5:57pm.
- **Safe Route Program Update for Schools:** Willett described the Safe Route Program, which aims to provide pedestrian and bike infrastructure improvements for 11 schools within the Dearborn public school system ([00:33:20](#)). The program can secure up to \$300,000 per school for infrastructure and an additional \$15,000 for programming, with a total potential funding of \$3.1 million ([00:34:12](#)). The team is developing standardized programming options so schools can meet the mandated programming requirement without needing to create their own from scratch ([00:36:06](#)).
- Interim Public Health Director Maria Willett left meeting at 5:59pm.
- **Introduction and Presentation by Dr. Donna Kashian (UN Regional Center of Expertise):** Commissioner Dabaja introduced Dr Donna Kashian, director of environmental sciences and the director of the United Nations Regional Center of Expertise (UNRCE) at Wayne State University ([00:37:06](#)). Kashian explained that the UNRCE focuses on sustainability education, covers southeastern Michigan and the Essex region of Canada, and centers its work around eight of the UN Sustainable Development Goals ([00:40:24](#)). Kashian also shared that the UNRCE's funding primarily comes from grants, donations, and internal university support, including \$9,000 stipends for 12 summer interns from the State of Michigan ([00:50:02](#)).

- RCE Community Partnerships and High School Council:** Kashian detailed the UNRCE's partnerships, including a focus on environmental justice issues, collaboration with nonprofits like Make Food Not Waste, and youth programming ([00:42:54](#)) ([00:46:35](#)). The RCE runs a High School Sustainability Council that engages students from schools including Fordson to develop community-focused sustainability projects, such as a zero-waste basketball game initiative and bird-safe glass projects. An example of a local partnership included a student intern working at the Arab American National Museum's Hadiqa project ([00:45:20](#)) ([00:52:19](#)).
- Feasibility of Commission Participation in the RCE Sustainability Council:** Dabaja asked if it would be feasible for members of the Dearborn Environmental Commission to serve on the RCE's External Sustainability Council ([00:54:54](#)). An opinion was that since the commissioners are volunteers, serving on the external advisory board is permissible and aligns with their ordinance to represent the city with different relevant groups ([00:56:08](#)). Saymuah will send an email to Sara Elhasan/Public Health to notify the city of the interest in serving on the council ([00:58:33](#)).
- Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes:** The commission reviewed and approved the minutes from the previous meeting. A motion was made by Walters and supported by Dabaja, passing unanimously ([01:04:04](#)).
- Green Schools Recommendation Follow-up:** Commissioner Asma Said provided an update on the Green Schools recommendation, stating the information had been updated and was ready to be presented ([01:05:18](#)). A motion by Tanana, seconded by Srour to forward recommendation. The commission then unanimously voted to recommend the Green Schools proposal be forwarded to Public Health ([01:07:38](#)).
- Urban Forestry Plan Committee and Arbor Day Recommendation:** An update on the Urban Forestry Plan Committee noted that the committee is on track to deliver its final recommendation to the Environmental Commission in July, following a public meeting in June ([01:07:38](#)). The committee forwarded a recommendation via the commission/Public Health to the mayor for Arbor Day 2026. This recommendation included broadcasting the benefits of trees via social media, reminding residents to order a free tree for their property, and providing concise planting and care instructions via a link to the USDA's tree owners manual ([01:09:05](#)) ([01:11:42](#)). A motion by Boyce, seconded by Ziaja made to forward recommendation to Mayor via Public Health. Approved, all in favor.

- **Follow Our Waste Stream Short Films Proposal:** The commission discussed the proposal for creating a series of short video clips to educate the public on the solid waste stream, specifically focusing on landfills, recycling, and composting facilities ([01:11:42](#)). The DPW provided a list of the three waste facilities, and Dabaja compiled a two-page script for four videos. It was noted that CDTV could potentially produce the video clips and that Public Health's summer fellows might work on the project ([01:13:02](#)).
- **Motion to Forward Waste Stream Video Recommendation:** Boyce introduced a recommendation to forward a proposal for creating short video clips about the municipal waste stream to public health, noting that the waste currently goes to the Woodland Meadows landfill, which is projected to be full this year ([01:14:36](#)). The motion was seconded by Dabaja, and discussion was opened before going to a vote ([01:16:00](#)).
- **Summary of Proposed Video Content:** Dabaja summarized the four planned videos, noting that the first would show where trash ends up and the impact of household choices, the second would focus on recycling and contamination issues, the third on yard waste and composting, and the fourth would provide practical curbside guidelines on managing trash, recycling, and yard waste ([01:17:13](#)). The goal is to better educate the public, especially as Boyce noted a decrease in the use of green recycling bins ([01:16:00](#)).
- **Recommendations for Video Translation and Character Diversity:** The recommendation was expanded to include the Arabic translation of the script, with "Micho" Assi offering to assist with the translation ([01:18:33](#)). It was also suggested and agreed upon to ensure the videos feature diverse residents from different ages, including youth, seniors, and small business owners, to emphasize responsibility and inclusivity ([01:19:47](#)) ([01:25:14](#)).
- **Emphasis on Visuals and Future Language Needs:** There was a discussion about making the videos more visual ("more action, less talk") to reduce dependency on language, which would make subtitled translations easier ([01:22:32](#)). Srour also noted an increase in the need for Spanish translations within the school district, though Spanish translation was not included in the immediate motion ([01:21:08](#)).
- **Unanimous Approval of Amended Motion:** The original motion was amended by Boyce to specify that the short video clips on the waste stream should be available in English and Arabic, be more action-oriented with less dialogue, and include diverse resident characters ([01:23:37](#)). Seconded again by Dabaja. The

amended motion was unanimously approved, and the recommendation was submitted ([01:26:40](#)).

- **Port of Detroit Environmental and Sustainability Initiatives Update:** Said and Boyce provided an update on the Detroit/Wayne County Port Authority's initiatives, which aim to switch larger vessels and semi-trucks to using 100% biodiesel by 2040 ([01:26:40](#)). The Port Authority also plans for greater community involvement and reviewed hydrogen research ([01:27:53](#)).
- **Port Authority's Focus on Transportation Emissions:** The Port Authority's primary focus is addressing emissions from cargo transportation vehicles, such as ships, tugs, trucks, and forklifts, both to/from and within the terminals, which significantly impacts the south end ([01:29:11](#)). Boyce noted that the current plan does not address emissions from rail transportation, despite the significant rail activity in the South End ([01:30:38](#)).
- **Terminal Participation and Outreach Strategy:** Of the five active terminals in Dearborn, only the smallest one, the Waterfront Petroleum Terminal Company, is actively participating in the Port Authority's initiative ([01:30:38](#)). Boyce and Said are continuing conversations to identify contacts at the other four major organizations (Cleveland Cliffs, Ford, Levy, and Marathon) to encourage their participation in the emissions reduction effort ([01:32:02](#)).
- **Addressing Source Pollution and Hydrogen Feasibility:** A major issue is that the Port Authority's initiative does not address the actual production at the facilities behind the terminals, such as steel making, which uses high-emission materials like coal and coke ([01:32:02](#)). Boyce suggested that if the Port Authority's initiative successfully establishes a viable supply of hydrogen—a cleaner fuel being researched by Next Energy—it might be possible to approach companies like Cleveland Cliffs about retooling to use hydrogen instead of coal/coke for steel making ([01:33:32](#)) ([01:39:16](#)).
- **Community Concerns and Local Action:** Discussions highlighted local concerns, including the historical ineffectiveness of industry advisory boards and the need for legislative involvement to address pollution ([01:39:16](#)). Locally, the city had successfully sued one processing company, resulting in a court order for 2.4 million in remediation efforts ([01:35:06](#)). Saymuah provided an update on positive local developments in the south end, including the unanimous rejection of a proposed industrial rezoning near residential areas by the planning commission ([01:43:03](#)).

- **Earth Day Expo Announcement:** Tanana announced an Earth Day Expo open to the public is scheduled for April 22nd at Salina School for the opening of their new playscape ([01:44:20](#)). This event is part of the green schoolyards coalition and will feature material on future initiatives ([01:45:41](#)).
- **Town Hall Meeting including Flood Mitigation:** An invitation to the City Engineer has been extended to attend a future commission meeting regards flooding. Boyce reminded commissioners that the Mayor sent notice of a town hall meeting on April 1st at 6:00 p.m. at the library, which will include the topic of flood mitigation ([01:46:43](#)). The meeting was then adjourned following a motion and support ([01:47:55](#)).
- **Adjournment:** Chair Saymuah entertained a motion to adjourn. Walters so moved, Ziaja supported, all in favor. Meeting adjourned 7:10pm.