



Forest Preserves of Cook County Conservation & Policy Council Meeting
Meeting Minutes for June 21, 2023
River Trail Nature Center, 3120 Milwaukee Ave, Northbrook, IL 60062

Welcome and Call to Order. Alan Bell called the meeting to order at 9:38 am.

Advisory Council Members

Alan Bell, Chairperson
Henrietta Saunders
Mark Templeton, Vice-chairperson
Megan Bang
Mike DeSantiago
Ryen Nagel
Laurel Ross
Commissioner Josina Morita

Presenters

Amanda Grant, Forest Preserves
Benjamin Cox, Friends of the Forest Preserves
Eileen Figel, Forest Preserves
Emily Reusswig, Openlands
Raquel Garcia-Alvarez, Forest Preserves

Daisy Feidt did not attend.

Alan thanked Nature Center Director Michele Mottlowitz for giving Council members a tour of the nature center grounds. Alan stated that Shelley Spencer has stepped down from the Council and noted the important work she did to advance the Council's REDI work. Alan announced that the President accepted a recommendation from the Nominating Committee to appoint Dr. Jackie Samuels to the Council; the recommendation will be reviewed by the Board at its June 27 meeting.

Michele Mottlowitz welcomed the Council to River Trail nature center. Michele has worked for the preserves for 32 years. She grew up on the North Branch and her elementary school often took walks through Linne Woods. Michele explained, "I have always connected with nature and love being outdoors; I am a muddy-boots gal. And I love to talk to people about nature." River Trail has partnerships with schools, scouts, Nature Seekers, and other organizations. The team has also incorporated nature art throughout the nature center.

Commissioner Morita thanked Michele and her team for all their work—especially during these past few years which have been so tough. Alan stated that the Council also wants to support the work of Michele and her team and thanked her for her resilience and her passion for this work.

Approval of Minutes. Henrietta Saunders noted a typo on page 4 and Commissioner Morita noted an update to the size of the coyote enclosure. A motion to approve the minutes of the 4.19.23 meeting (subject to the correction and update) was made by Laurel Ross with a second by Mark Templeton. The amended minutes were approved unanimously.

Public Comments. There were no public comments.

Chairman's report. Alan invited Laurel Ross to provide an update on the Chicago Wilderness Land Trust Forum which she recently attended. Laurel explained that the forum focused on protecting landscapes for biodiversity conservation. She explained that the UN passed a resolution calling for 30% of the planet's lands and waters to be protected by 2030. She noted we are doing that work through the implementation of the Next Century Conservation Plan which established a very ambitious goal to protect 90,000 acres. To achieve this goal via fee simple purchase will cost more than \$1 billion. Even with the success of the referendum, we do not have that amount of funding available. The forum brought together land trusts, government agencies, and others to talk about how we can work together to protect more land through partnerships. For example, McHenry County acquired or protected with easements 682 acres at a cost of \$144,000 from district funds and \$6.8 million from outside funding. Laurel noted that is a 1 to 19 ratio which is inspiring. Alan added that these types of forums are important opportunities to learn about various best practices and strategies. Commissioner Morita asked if a written report is available. Alan also asked Council members to be sure to review all attachments in their agenda packets.

Alan noted that Laurel Ross, Mark Templeton and Mike DeSantiago have been on the Council from its founding; Alan thanked each of them for their work over the years.

Commissioner Morita. Commissioner Morita explained she is excited to be on the Council; she is an urban planner and has been involved in environmental justice since she was a kid. She believes there is an opportunity for the Council to better engage the board. She discussed several suggestions with the Council as follows:

- Newer commissioners may not understand the role of the Council. People are very interested in the work of the Council and the Forest Preserves, but information about the work needs to be packaged concisely. She suggests that the Council identify a clear ask, for example, ask commissioners to share information on social media or add information to their newsletters.
- The Council could provide updates to the full board at their monthly meetings. All the work we've done around the referendum is exciting; commissioners are starting to get questions from constituents about what we are doing with the money. We can provide packages of graphics and talking points throughout the year.
- Council members can build relationships with their commissioners and become their commissioner's point person with regards to Council issues. Likewise, Commissioner Morita will use her role to alert commissioners about issues.
- Laurel added that it is important to also talk to commissioners who do not have forest preserves in their districts. Laurel asked Commissioner Morita for advice on how to talk to commissioners about this. Commissioner Morita explained that the County runs several countywide systems--the hospital system, the courts and jail system, and the forest preserves. She added that the forest preserves are the good news and people across all districts engage in the forest preserves. She suggests we provide commissioners permit data by district.
- There is also the broader message – the forest preserves are free to visit, and they provide health and environmental benefits. Henrietta Saunders previously ran Faith in Place—a religious group that cares for the earth. There were several leaders who were very important to this work—including Benjamin Cox, who understood the need for jobs, and Arnold Randall, who provided transportation to get

people to the preserves. Henrietta stated that many relationships like these exist, and Council members can help raise them up.

- Commissioner Morita also suggests sharing referendum voting by district to show how people in each district voted for the referendum. The County is working on an environmental justice statement which will focus on how people connect to nature. Identifying relationships and developing a countywide infrastructure is important to this effort. Megan Bang agrees that this data would be very important. It is also important to show the voting data by age blocks because younger generations care very much about the environment. Megan also suggests presenting the information by race to breakdown false assumptions about how people think about nature. Mark Templeton added that Stuart Strahl was a master of this type of data and frequently reported on who visits the zoo.
- Commissioner Morita suggests inviting commissioners to attend group events to see people and welcome them. This could happen at the event or at the district location where people are boarding the bus to get to the preserves.
- Alan asked how this will be executed. He explained that he recently met with Eileen Figel and Carl Vogel to begin to develop a strategic communications framework. What are the target audiences? What do we want to say? How do we empower the board to advance this work? Commissioner Morita asked if the Council should have a communications committee. She is also interested in sitting down with the Communications team. Alan explained that the Governance Committee will convene to review current committees and assignments; they will also consider this public-facing work.
- Emily Reusswig added that it is not just white people who use the preserves. It is important to lift this up. We could have graduates of the Conservation Corps meet with their own commissioners and share what they learn.
- Megan added that it is important to combine narratives and data and push out this information. Is there a way to provide a library on a website that highlights key issues and provides data beyond what is broadly distributed?
- Should we offer training for someone who wants to be an advocate?

Alan suggested the following next steps: Alan will share a communications framework with Carl Vogel and Eileen Figel will provide the Council an update on the communications strategy.

General Superintendent's Report. Arnold Randall was unable to attend. Eileen Figel provided the following updates:

- The Forest Preserves and partners hosted the 8th annual Conservation Corps Career Fair at Moraine Valley Community College. The Forest Preserves is launching a new conservation corps "gap year" program for 12 young adults ages 18 to 22 years who have successfully graduated from our high school programs for a six-month internship to gain advanced technical trainings and certifications through a partnership with the Student Conservation Association and Cook County's Department of Economic Development through a grant from the American Rescue Plan Act. Since January 2023, adult conservation corps crews have helped maintain over 450 acres of Forest Preserves land through hands

on conservation work including assistance on prescribed burns, invasive plant control and tree removal efforts.

Due to time constraints, Eileen will provide additional updates via email to the Council.

Role of the Council. Alan explained that this session will focus on how the Council does its work. Benjamin Cox stated that the Next Century Conservation Plan calls for a Council to advise the President and Board. Benjamin noted that the Council often spends time giving advice to staff, but does not always do a good job advising the president and board. Benjamin believes there is an opportunity for the Council to feed commissioners the information they need; he also believes they will use the information.

Mark Templeton distributed the ordinance which established the Council and provided an overview of the purpose and duties of the Council. Mark indicates that the graphic in attachment 4B should be modified to depict the relationship between the President & Board, Council, and General Superintendent as a triangle to better depict the inter-relationships.

The following issues were discussed:

- The relationship between the Council and the Steering Committee has been confusing. The partners on the steering committee are vital to our work, but this is not addressed in the ordinance. The Governance Committee needs to clarify the roles and responsibilities, so everyone understands this.
- Is the NCCP the forest preserves' plan, or not?

Laurel suggested two questions for further discussion: (1) What do we as Council members need from staff and partners to do our job well? We especially need to hear from new members. (2) Are there next steps with the policy papers? We put a lot of energy into these papers; do we need to review them and/or write more?

Alan noted that some of these issues will be further discussed by the Governance Committee. Council members offered the following input:

- There are a lot of committees for a small Council with only 11 members. Think about combining committees.
- Can other commissioners (or staff) be part of these committees? This is another way to engage them.
- Are there ways to engage County staff from the Department of Environment or communications staff from commissioners' offices?

The Council agreed to add one hour to the August meeting to continue this discussion.

Commissioner Britton joined the meeting at 11:20 am.

Expanding the network of support. Henrietta stated that the referendum passed with great support from Friends of the Forest Preserves, Openlands, and other partners. This is more than a campaign; this is a movement.

Benjamin Cox explained the effort to build a broad coalition. People care about nature and climate change. Some people don't go to the preserves, but they do care about nature and supported the referendum. Other supporters take their families to the preserves. How do we engage the referendum partners to better figure out how their members connect to nature?

Emily Reusswig explained that the work the forest preserves did over the past ten years was an important base to build upon. Early support from the commissioners was also critical because it gave the advocates time to build a coalition. The structure of the coalition and the clear and simple messaging were also important. Advocates worked hard to build a broad coalition and engage volunteers to spread the message. They provided basic messaging to use on social media. There is a huge opportunity for the Forest Preserves to feed messages out to this network.

Henrietta added that the work of the forest preserves staff was also critical; people would not have voted for this without the great work of the staff over the past years. She also notes that the Forest Preserves has a unique model for partnerships.

Emily suggested that the Referendum Steering Committee could continue to be a megaphone promoting key successes and the annual report on the referendum. Sometimes it is beneficial for this message to come from partners.

The following issues were discussed:

- What is the short version of the good news we tell the voters? We need to develop a short answer and a long answer. People wanted to see permanent jobs that did not require a college degree; that has happened. We need to tell the story that resonates with each audience: Restoration is scaling up, capital improvements are under construction, etc.
- Can we institutionalize the structure?
- What is valuable to commissioners moving forward? How can we help them understand the value of these things? There is a huge spectrum of people who want to be engaged.
- Commissioner Morita asked if commissioners could get the polling results, the communication strategy, etc. And can the coalition continue? Benjamin needs to confirm that polling results can be shared.
- Emily cautioned that the coalition doesn't need constant input; an annual report could work. She added that there was also a public campaign committee consisting of civic leaders.
- Ryen Nagle asked about where the network is thin (geographically and/or demographically) and if so, is there an opportunity to build support there. Benjamin explained that there were few businesses engaged.
- The Burnham Plan had the buy-in from the business community; that is what drove success.
- Another important touchpoint is the editorial boards of the Tribune, Sun Times, etc. We need to sit down with them.

- We need to ask partners to share talking points with their members.
- Commissioner Britton added that, had the referendum not passed, it would have been horrific. There are so many opportunities to promote and celebrate all the great work going on at the preserves. People don't know everything we offer. We need a communications plan for outreach to small groups such as churches. It is also great to have board meetings out in the preserves.

Sustainability update. Amanda Grant and Raquel Garcia-Alvarez presented an update on the Forest Preserves' sustainability efforts. (See attachment 1.1.) The following issues were discussed:

- Please engage the Council early for any discussions related to solar farms. There was a lot of discussion on this previously and it was very controversial.
- Are there additional steps related to carbon credits, installing solar panels at the preserves, and/or alignment with the County's goals? This is important for the Council to understand, and we need an opportunity to weigh in on these issues.
- How is the Forest Preserves' thinking about funding from the *Inflation Reduction Act* and the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*? Is there a strategy for this? This might be a good way for us to connect to businesses because these acts may provide incentives for them to engage. Eileen responded that the County invited the preserves to participate in a very lengthy process for ARPA funds and then awarded over \$15 million to the Forest Preserves. The district's grant team recently worked with a partner to submit a proposal for over \$35 million in IRA funding.
- Mike DeSantiago explained that much of this work is implemented through building codes and the codes in Chicago and Cook County are a mess.
- Why are the newer nature centers using so much energy? Were they not built to be efficient? Amanda responded that Little Red School House and Sagawau are fairly new, but technology has changed so much in the past ten years. A consultant will be looking at these facilities to see if there are improvements the district can make to achieve higher energy efficiency.
- Why are we buying RECs (renewable energy credits)? This doesn't achieve our goal of producing clean energy; we are just spending more money to get the numbers we want. Raquel responded that this market-based tool is being used to offset the district's energy use in the short-term; the long-term goal is to generate solar power to fully meet the district's needs and eliminate all carbon emissions. Megan expressed concern that the RECs are being bought from Texas and asked if it is possible to instead buy the RECs from a local organization we have a partnership with.

Partner/Commissioner Updates. The following updates were presented:

- **Openlands.** Jerry Adelman will retire at the end of this year. He has led Openlands for almost 30 years. We will celebrate Jerry and our 60th anniversary at the annual luncheon on Oct. 17. Thanks to Forest Preserves for the event celebrating the new Prairie Boat at Beaubien Woods celebrating the African American Heritage Trail. Check out our new website and brand at [Openlands.org](https://openlands.org).
- **Friends of the Forest Preserves.** FOTFP is celebrating its 25th anniversary; we will have our Beer in the Woods event at LaBagh on Sept. 30. FOTFP submitted an application for IRA funding to scale up

Conservation Corps. We are seeking \$35M over 5 years with matching funds from the Forest Preserves.

- **Key Steward.** Henrietta welcomed Linda Masters who is a steward and has joined the steering committee.
- **Zoo update.** Jen Baader was unable to attend and asked Eileen Figel to provide the following update: The Chicago Zoological Society is embarking on the creation of a new master plan to guide the future of Brookfield Zoo, and we'd welcome the Policy Council's input. This planning process will focus on excellence in animal care, impactful wildlife conservation, transformative programs, innovation, and the delivery of a fun guest experience. Do you have thoughts on new conservation projects or animal species the zoo should consider in the future? Ideas on community programs or ways the zoo can engage new audiences? Or comments to share from a recent visit to the zoo? Please feel free to share them with Jennifer Baader or send them directly to the planning team at PlanYourZoo@czs.org.

Commissioner Britton thanked everyone for their work and stated that the success of the referendum will yield dividends for years to come.

Adjournment. Laurel Ross made a motion to adjourn; the motion was seconded by Henrietta Saunders. The motion passed and the meeting was adjourned at 12:44 pm.

ATTACHMENT 1.1: Sustainability Update



Forest Preserves
of Cook County
Sustainability & Climate Resilience Plan
September 2019

FOREST PRESERVES
ILLINOIS
Prairie Research Institute
fpdcc.com

**Forest Preserves
of Cook County**
Clean Energy Framework
May 2021

FOREST PRESERVES
ILLINOIS
Prairie Research Institute
fpdcc.com

OVERVIEW

SUSTAINABILITY GOALS:

1. 100% clean electricity (2030)
2. Reduce GHG Emissions by 45% (2030)
3. Carbon Neutral (2050)
4. Institutionalize Sustainability throughout the Forest Preserves

Various strategies to reach these goals

PATH TO ACHIEVING GOALS

Forest Preserves of Cook County Planning and Development
Building Energy and Sustainability Consultant
Request for Proposals Response

Submitted January 13, 2021 by:



Smart Energy Design Assistance Center
800-401-0360
info@sedac.com

with
University of Illinois
(800) 214-7954
info@sedac.org

Primary Investigator:
Wael El-Sharif
wael@sedac.com

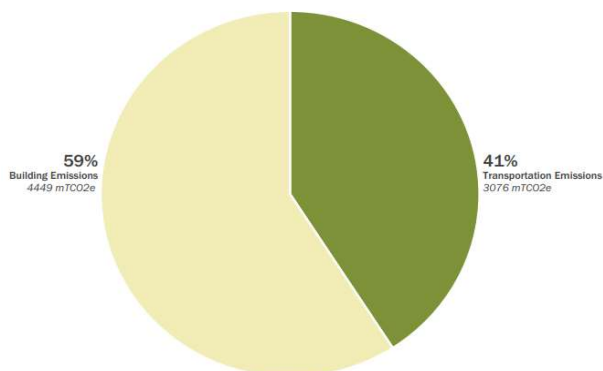
BUILDING ENERGY And SUSTAINABILITY CONSULTANT: SEDAC

- Assisting the Forest Preserves to achieve our sustainability goals
- ISTC – Illinois Sustainability Technology Institute (Prairie Research Institute)

PATH TO CARBON NEUTRALITY

GREEN HOUSE GAS (GHG) EMISSIONS

- 59% GHG emissions are from buildings
- 41% GHG emissions are from vehicles



BUILDING PORTFOLIO

- 472 structures
 - Picnic Shelters
 - Field Offices – LM, RM, & Police
 - Pools
 - Boating Centers
 - Concessions
 - Camps
 - Support/Administrative

BUILDINGS USING ENERGY

- Buildings with utility connections
 - 234 have electricity
 - 99 heated by natural gas
 - 52 heated with electricity
 - 13 are heated with propane

FLEET

- Over 470 vehicles in use
 - Invested in propane and hybrid vehicles
 - Moving toward electric vehicles

Current Status

Goal #1. 100% Clean Electricity (2030)



ACHIEVED ✓

PURCHASING RENEWABLE ENERGY CREDITS (RECs)

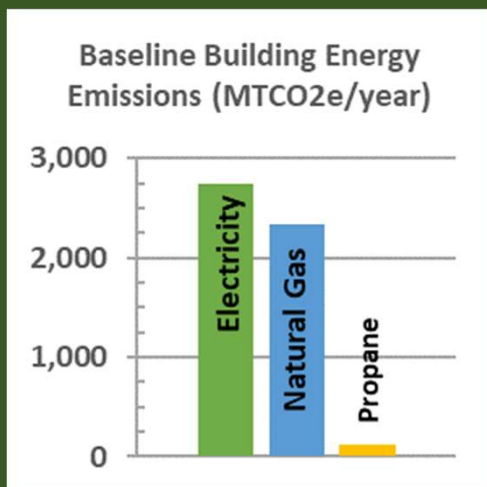
2019 WHEN WE OFFSET 20% OF OUR DIRTY ELECTRICITY.

2021 WE HAVE OFFSET 100%.

IN 2022 THE COST OF THE OFFSET RECs WAS ~ \$ 18,000.

Current Status

Goal #2. Reduce GHG Emissions by 45% (2030)

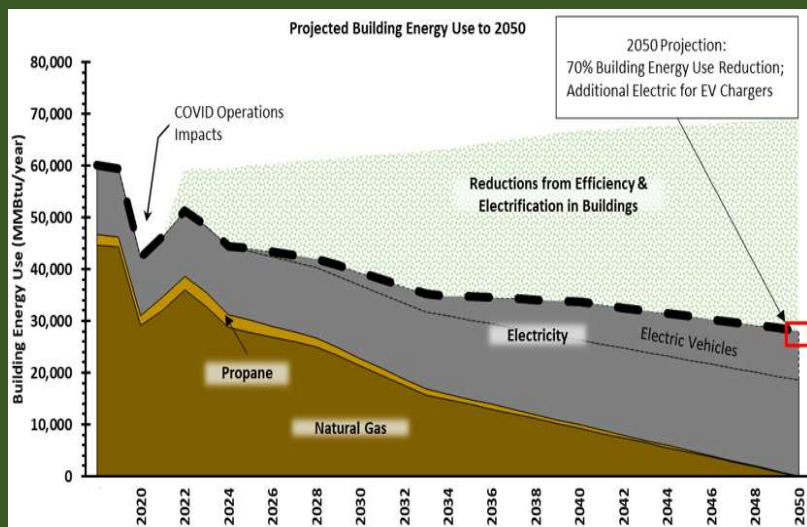


ACHIEVED ✓

BY OFFSETTING 100% OF OUR DIRTY ELECTRICITY, THE FOREST PRESERVES' GREEN HOUSE GAS EMISSIONS HAVE BEEN REDUCED >50%.

GHG EMISSIONS ARE PROJECTED TO BE REDUCED TO 75% BY 2030.

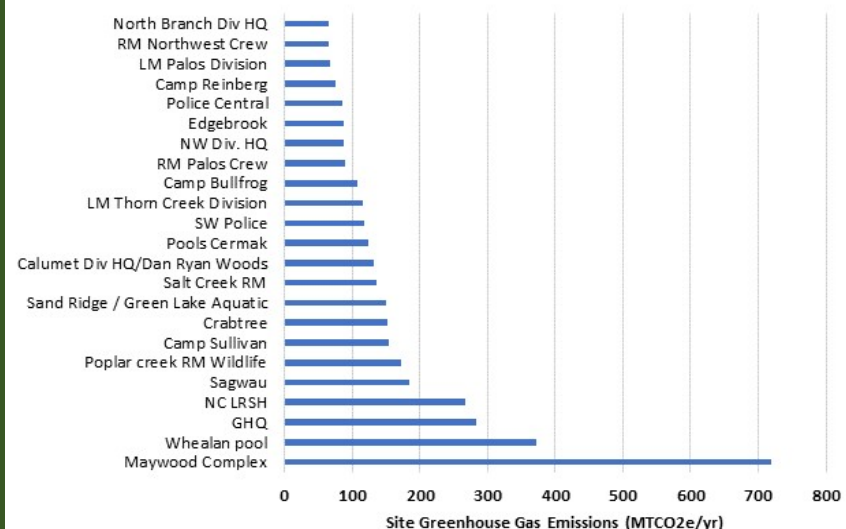
Current Status & Projected Energy Use



STRATEGIES

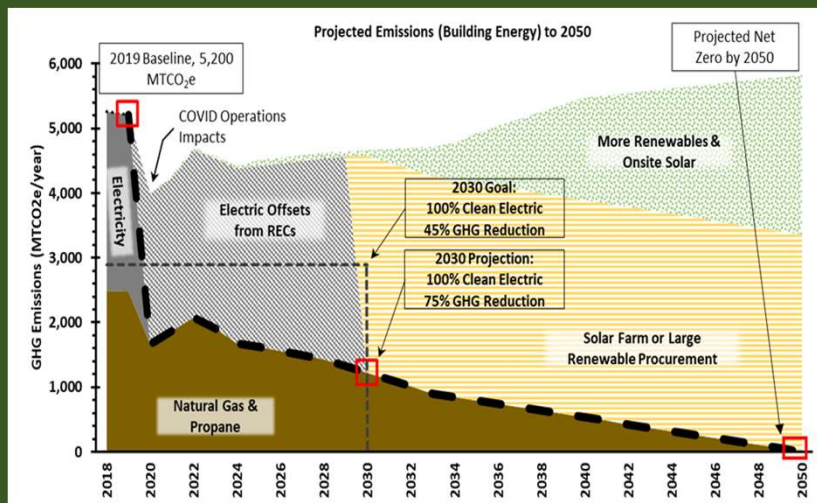
- Conservation
- Electrification
- Optimization
- Generation
- Compensation

HIGHEST GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSION LOCATIONS FOSSIL FUELS & ELECTRICITY



Current Status

Goal #3. Carbon Neutral (2050)



PENDING

STRATEGIES

- Conservation
- Electrification
- Generation
- Compensation

ENERGY ACTION PLAN

CONSERVATION - RENOVATIONS & NEW CONSTRUCTION

- Modify, replace or install systems to reduce energy use
 - Improve building envelope tightness
 - Increase insulation
 - Use energy efficient equipment (EnergyStar)
 - Replace fixtures with LED fixtures
 - Modify existing fixtures to accept LED lights if comparable LED fixtures are not available.

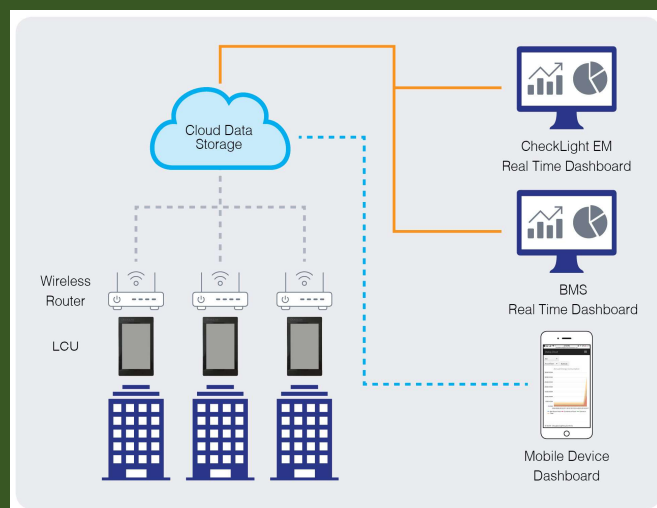
PATH TO ACHIEVING GOALS



PATH TO ACHIEVING GOALS



LED lighting with
cloud based controls



ENERGY ACTION PLAN

GENERATION - RENEWABLE ENERGY

- Install on-site solar systems to generate electricity where possible
- Continue to study off-site renewable energy generation through a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) on NEW Forest Preserve Acquisition Land. (Potential cooperative program with Cook County.)
- Continue to purchase third party RECs to offset “dirty” electrical consumption.



PATH TO ACHIEVING GOALS

3.f. Sample images



Figure 3. Photo of solar over pollinator plants. Source: [Illinois DNR Solar Site Pollinator Scorecard website](#).



Figure 4. UIUC Solar Farm 2.0: photo with early emerging pollinator ground cover (left) and artist rendition (right).

OTHER ACTION PLAN ITEMS

- Offer EV charging stations for operations/staff use & offer public locations
- Establish guidelines, plans, and policies concerning
 - Green Fleet Transition & Purchasing
 - Sustainability Water Resources, Stormwater practices
 - Develop a seed nursery plan with the Chicago Botanic Garden
 - Zero Waste plan
 - Fly Dumping Reduction & Enforcement
- Continue restoration work across 700+ new acres in 2023
- Increase recycling efforts at all grove sites (new bins)
- Develop and launch a sustainability/climate change webpage
- Continue to align efforts with Department on Environment
- Continue to host Green Team events for 2023



CHALLENGES to ACTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

- Supply chain issue
 - i.e. Electric vehicles dump trucks
- Staff Capacity
 - Not enough staff in i.e. Facilities in Fleet
 - Referendum passing should alleviate some of this
- Contractor Capacity – Restoration
- Equipment
- Infrastructure – transformers (long lead – 2 years)
- Batteries
- Transition & training
 - of how to use new equipment & habits





ENERGY ACTION PLAN

ELECTRIFICATION - REDUCE FOSSIL FUEL USE

- When possible, replace natural gas-fired and propane-fired heating equipment at the end of their useful life with energy efficient electric heating equipment

PATH TO ACHIEVING GOALS



PATH TO ACHIEVING GOALS



PATH TO ACHIEVING GOALS



HIGHEST ENERGY USE LOCATIONS FOSSIL FUELS

TOP FOSSIL FUEL USING LOCATIONS

- 7 Locations consume 50% of all FPCC fossil fuels (2019)

1. Central Compound - Maywood Campus
2. Whealan Pool
3. GHQ
4. Salt Creek Resource Management
5. Southwest Police
6. Sagawau ELC
7. Crabtree Nature Center

PATH TO ACHIEVING GOALS

Solar Potential Summary

Meter group	Electric Use (kWh/yr)	% of Site Use	Solar kW for 100%
Central Garage	150,000	53%	130
Warehouse, Paint Shop, Etc.	60,000	21%	50
Carpenter Shop	29,000	10%	30
Lawn Mower Repair	23,000	8%	20
Heavy Equipment	16,000	6%	15
Garage / Storage	4,200	1%	4

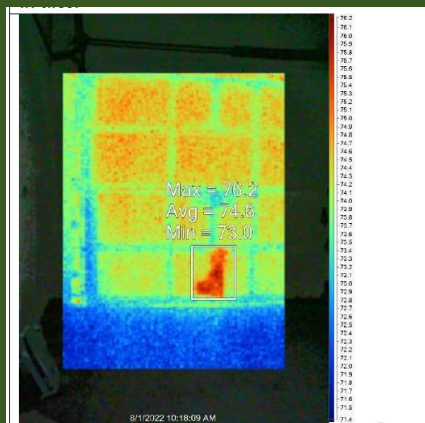
Initial budgetary estimate: \$480,000

Evaluate roof conditions

Evaluate condition & available capacity of existing electrical service / main panels. If electrical upgrade/ repairs are needed, complete as part of solar project or prior to solar project.

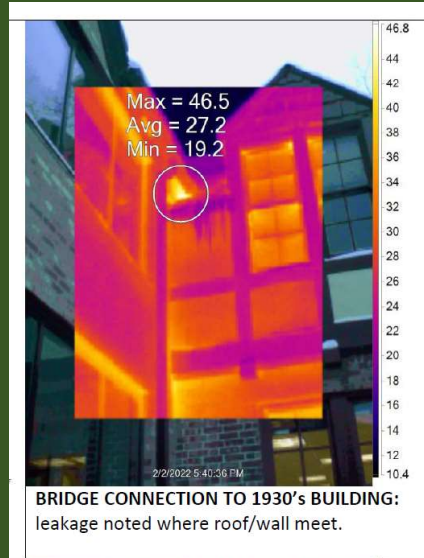


PATH TO ACHIEVING GOALS



OVERHEAD DOOR – CONDUCTIVE LOSSES/GAINS:

Thermal conduction noted through overhead door. Note the compromised section at the base of the door.



BRIDGE CONNECTION TO 1930's BUILDING:

leakage noted where roof/wall meet.

PATH TO ACHIEVING GOALS



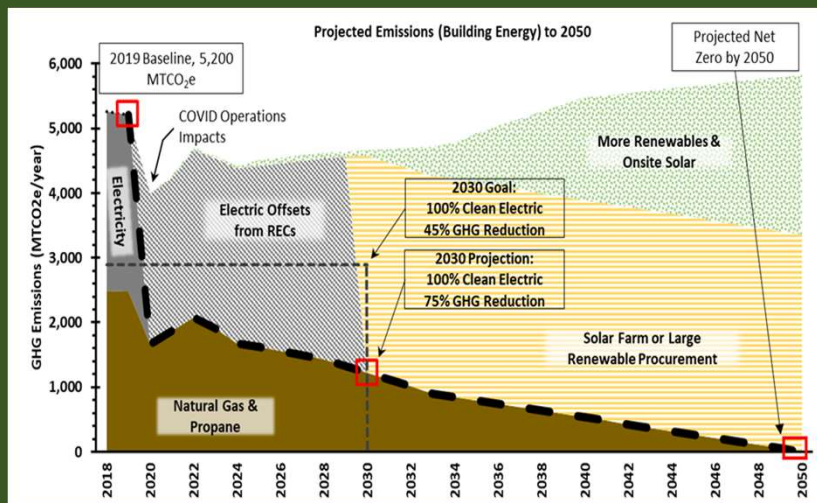
HIGHEST ENERGY USE LOCATIONS ELECTRICITY

TOP ELECTRICAL USING LOCATIONS

- 10 Locations consume 50% of all FPCC electricity (2019)

1. Little Red Schoolhouse
2. Central Compound - Maywood Campus
3. Whealan Pool
4. Poplar Wildlife/NW Police Campus
5. GHQ
6. Cermak Pool
7. Green Lake Pool
8. Camp Sullivan
9. Sagawau ELC
10. Camp Bullfrog

Recap - Path to Carbon Neutrality (2050)

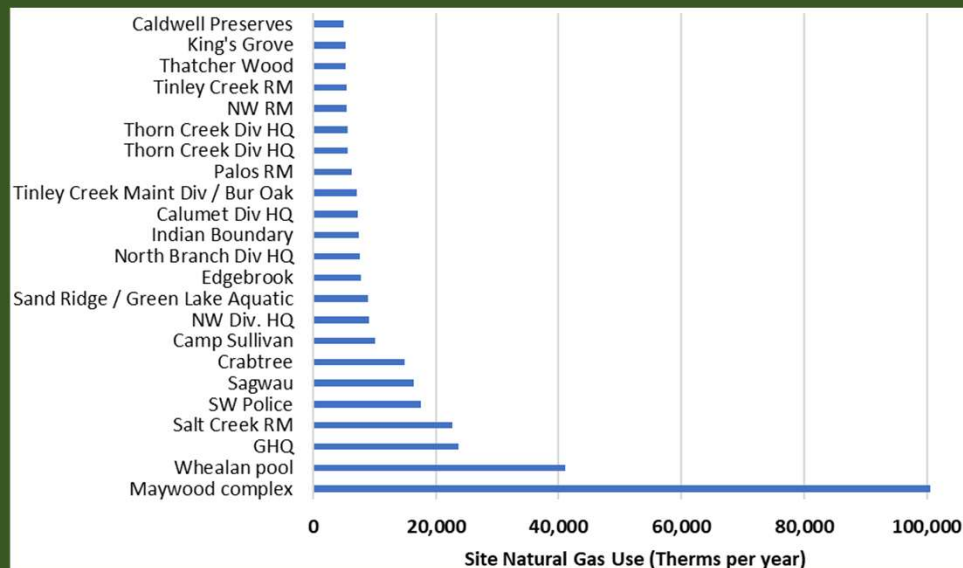


PENDING

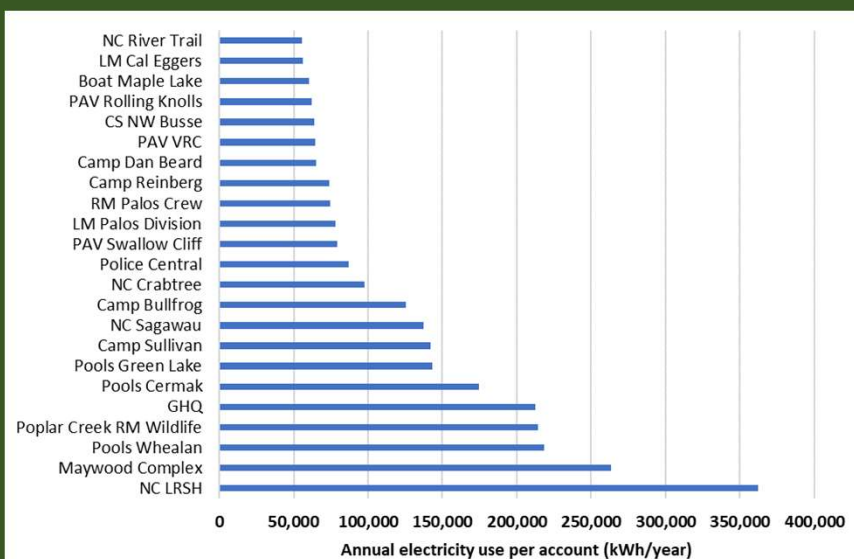
STRATEGIES

- Conservation
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- Compensation

HIGHEST ENERGY USE LOCATIONS FOSSIL FUELS



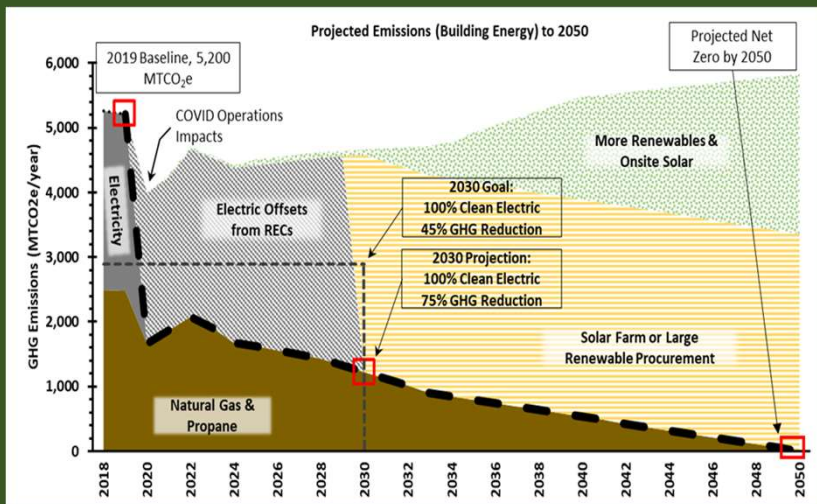
HIGHEST ENERGY USE LOCATIONS ELECTRICITY



PATH TO ACHIEVING GOALS



Path to Carbon Neutrality (2050)



PENDING

STRATEGIES

- Conservation
- Electrification
- Generation
- Compensation

HIGHEST GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSION LOCATIONS FOSSIL FUELS & ELECTRICITY

TOP GREENHOUSE GAS EMITTING LOCATIONS

- 10 Locations produce 50% of all FPCC GHG (2019)

1. Central Compound - Maywood Campus
2. Whealan Pool
3. GHQ
4. LRSH
5. Sagawau ELC
6. Poplar Wildlife/NW Police Campus
7. Camp Sullivan
8. Crabtree Nature Center
9. Green Lake Pool
10. Salt Creek RM