Staff Report Memo

To: Mayor and Council	From: Samantha DeSeelhorst, Associate Planner & Sustainability Analyst
Date: July 26, 2022	
Re: Recommended Sustainability Projects	
Meeting Requested:	Business Meeting ☒ Work Session ☐ Other ☐ _____
Public Hearing Needed?	Yes ☐ No ☒ Undetermined ☐

BACKGROUND

In Summer 2021, the Millcreek City Council adopted the Interlocal Sustainability Action Plan (ISAP)—a planning effort to outline sustainability initiatives for the Tri-City Region of Millcreek, Holladay, and Cottonwood Heights. Written as one document for three cities, this plan features a high-level scope, with the recommendation that each city dive deeper into the topics they find most pertinent to their communities.

The *Recommended Use of Plan* section states, "This action plan is intended to serve as a guiding document for elected and appointed officials, city staff, and community members of Cottonwood Heights, Holladay, and Millcreek. As decisions are made within each city, both administratively and legislatively, this document should be used as a guide for viewing the impact of these decisions through a lens of sustainability. It is anticipated that sustainability staff will utilize this document to make regular recommendations on specific sustainability priorities for each community."

UPDATE AND REQUEST

At the request of the City Council, and in consistency with the ISAP's anticipated approach, staff has prepared a list of recommended priority projects. Following City Council review and discussion, staff will conduct detailed research on any projects which the City Council designates as priorities from this list, as well as additional projects which they identify. Detailed research will include estimated timeline, costs, available grant funding, potential partners, etc. Staff's 2022 recommended priority projects include:

1. ***Continue*** **participating in the Community Renewable Energy Program**

ISAP Reference: *"Continue to engage with Utah's Community Renewable Energy Program." (Energy Use Section)*

- Emissions reductions are one of the most transformative sustainability goals for cities to strive toward. Thus far in the Program's set-up process, staff considers the Community Renewable Energy Program to be the most practicable approach for cities to reduce emissions on a large scale.
- Participation should be continually evaluated as the program is further developed, with the potential for this program to ultimately serve as a viable pathway for Millcreek to meet its renewable energy goals.

2. ***Continue*** **working toward an updated water conservation landscaping ordinance which meets eligibility standards for incentive programs**

ISAP Reference: *"Coordinate with agencies to educate the community on existing low-water incentive programs, and consider city-initiated incentives to fill gaps as needed." (Landscaping Section)*

- A large portion of Utah's water is allocated toward outdoor landscaping. The potential to reduce water use via landscaping design is emphasized in the newest section of *Utah's Coordinated Action Plan for Water*, a collaborative effort led by the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget, with the state committing to strengthening rebate programs which provide monetary incentives for turf removal and waterwise plantings.

- Staff coordination with water districts and state agencies indicates that adoption of a landscaping ordinance which includes lawn maximums and other waterwise design criteria will be a requirement for communities to be eligible in these incentive programs.
- In addition to enabling community members to be eligible for these incentive programs, a water conservation landscaping ordinance which includes lawn maximums conserves water, promotes the use of species which provide habitat, and may result in cost savings on water bills.

3. *Continue* working toward sustainable design decisions for Millcreek City Hall

ISAP Reference: "*Encourage the use of quality construction techniques and durable materials, including recycled and sustainably-sourced materials when feasible. Incentivize the use of fixtures and systems which conserve water, exceed energy performance, or otherwise reduce environmental impacts." (Development Section)*

- As is feasible with budgetary and timeline guidelines, continue to consider sustainable design for city facilities, such as Millcreek City Hall and Millcreek Commons.
- Beyond the design process, consider sustainability in determining policies for the operation of these facilities. Potential policies may include turning off lights when leaving facilities, shutting off faucets while lathering hands or scrubbing dishes, enforcing no-idling in parking lots, instituting a sorted recycling system in break rooms, etc.

4. Update city-owned public landscaping with waterwise design and pollinator-friendly species

ISAP Reference: "*Serve as an example of low-impact landscaping through the use of xeriscaping and stormwater management solutions at city-owned properties." (Landscaping Section)*

- Cities have excellent potential to demonstrate the efficacy of sustainable landscapes through the type of landscaping used in city spaces.
- Consider implementation of waterwise species, as well as pollinator-friendly species, within city park-strips, plazas, parks, and other public areas.
- Waterwise landscaping efforts should still prioritize the allocation of water for trees and large shrubs, in order to promote the aesthetic, cooling, and carbon-mitigating properties of urban forests.

5. Institute a telecommuting policy which encourages remote work on poor air quality days

ISAP Reference: "*Consider telecommuting or adjusted work-week policies to reduce employee commute impacts." (Transportation Section)*

- Telecommuting was tested and largely proven as a viable work model during the lockdown stages of COVID-19. Its benefits extend beyond those related to public health amid a pandemic, as telecommuting was found to have a positive impact on air quality by reducing the number of commuting vehicles.
- The Utah Clean Air Partnership (UCAIR) recommends telecommuting on poor air quality days as a key approach to reducing air pollution in the Salt Lake Valley. UCAIR recommends that employers consider allowing employees to work from home on days when the Division of Air Quality (DAQ) shifts their action alert from "voluntary" to "mandatory."

6. Host a community recycling event which targets hard-to-recycle materials

ISAP Reference: *"Provide community members with information on where to drop off items that cannot be processed via curbside service." (Waste Management Section)*

- Curbside recycling is an important component of sustainable waste management, but it does not facilitate the recycling of all materials. Many recyclable materials must be taken to offsite drop-off locations, rather than discarded in curbside recycling bins.

- The inconvenience associated with offsite recycling can lead to households choosing to throw these materials away instead, resulting in greater landfill pressure.
- To provide an option for easier recycling, cities may consider partnering with waste management providers to host an annual recycling event for community members to bring their hard-to-recycle materials for more sustainable disposal. Community recycling events may also benefit from including shredding services, which facilitate baled recycling of all shredded paper—a material which cannot be recycling in curbside bins.

7. Transition future city fleets to electric models

ISAP Reference: *"As is financially practicable, consider purchasing electric vehicles, hybrid vehicles, or other low-impact alternatives to traditional fuel models." (Transportation Section)*

- As the city continues to build and modify its fleet, consider electric models which produce fewer harmful emissions that fuel-combustion varieties. These models are continually becoming more widespread and available, both for vehicles and off-road equipment. Additional savings may also be realized in reduced fuel costs.
- The procurement of electric models may coordinate well with the Community Renewable Energy Program, by ensuring that in the future, any electricity used to charge electric vehicles and equipment is produced renewably.

8. Institute additional electric vehicle charging stations throughout the community

ISAP Reference: *"Conserve energy through implementing strategies such as efficient appliances, gap sealing, weatherization techniques, efficient lighting, strategic heating and cooling, solar infrastructure, and electric vehicle chargers." (Energy Use Section)*

- A robust network of electric vehicle charging stations supports both an internal transition to electric vehicles, as well as a community-wide transition for those who choose to purchase electric models.
- Most drivers travel outside of their own city boundaries, meaning that coordinating in the regional installation of electric vehicle charging stations supports not only local residents, but regional community members as well.
- Sizeable grant funding is available through state and utility partners, making this project a timely option to consider prior to grant funding running out.

9. Work toward a more robust active transportation network

ISAP Reference: *"Continually maintain existing pedestrian and cycling paths. Identify connectivity gaps and prioritize transportation connections in these areas." (Transportation Section)*

- Active transportation, whether via walking, cycling, rolling, scooting, etc. is another viable way to draw down community emissions. Aside from the sustainability benefits, active transportation has the potential to benefit public health, as well as a sense of civic pride and engagement.
- While avid hobbyists and commuters may be comfortable, utilizing active transportation can be a daunting task for the average community member. To encourage more broad-based active transportation, cities should prioritize connecting gaps in bike lanes, sidewalks, and paths, as well as building in more robust safety mechanisms such as buffers, crosswalks, and signals. These improvements can be made segment by segment, as budget and grant funding allows.
- Aside from infrastructure improvements, cities can support active transportation through wayfinding projects which streamline existing routes, as well as community outreach which educates residents on safety tips and easy-to-reach destinations.

10. Provide sustainability outreach and community engagement

ISAP Reference: *"Although some sustainability work can be achieved through the sole efforts of city staff and officials, other initiatives benefit from multi-stakeholder participation. In terms of municipalities, this entails community engagement with residents, business owners, service providers, and other community partners. Research has shown that projects which incorporate community engagement are more effective than those without." (Community Engagement Section)*

- Anecdotally, individuals often report that sustainability is daunting, obtuse, and overwhelming topic. One of the most effective ways to strive toward a more sustainable city is to collaborate with community members to realize wider, more long-lasting changes.
- Cities can facilitate this coordination through regular newsletter and social media content, which provides sustainability guidance for community members on topics such as energy efficiency, water conservation, habitat preservation, etc.