

# Environmental Quality Commission

## 2026 Work Plan Submissions for Consideration

### **Susannah Shmurak**

- EMFs from wi-fi and cell towers
  - Mounting research is showing wireless radiation is harmful to human, animal, and plant health, examine what safeguards are in place and consider whether others should be added.
- Address pesticide and herbicide use

**Staff Response:** While these are environmentally related topics, the City is asking the Commission to focus on tangible initiatives that align with or are derived from the City's Climate Action Plan, Strategic Plan, and Comprehensive Plan.

### **Robert Hanson**

- **2026 making progress with Xcel to figure out solutions for our electric grid congestion**

**Staff Response:** This initiative is already being monitored by staff in Engineering and Community Development. City staff have an ongoing relationship and dialogue with Xcel on this issue, as it affects many of the City's future projects. This isn't an initiative where the EQC could play an active role, since it falls under staff responsibilities.

### **Mike Provancha**

- Establish a reuseable diaper bank (includes reusable diapers, bio-detergent, two 5 gal buckets with lids, and water sprayer for toilet hookup)
  - Encouraging the use of reusable diapers reduces landfill waste, conserves resources, and saves families money over time compared to disposable options. Establishing a city-sponsored diaper bank can help make sustainable diapering accessible to all families, especially those facing financial hardship. Such a program promotes environmental responsibility while supporting public health and equity within the community.
- Green roof project on city property or a program to promote such initiatives
  - Promoting and implementing green roofs can significantly enhance urban sustainability by reducing stormwater runoff, improving air quality, and lowering building energy costs. Municipal incentives, such as tax credits or grants, can encourage property owners and developers to adopt this eco-friendly practice. Collaboration between city planners, architects, and environmental organizations ensures that green roof projects are both practical and impactful for community resilience.
- Add 3 more community gardens on city property

- Community gardens provide residents with access to fresh, healthy produce while fostering social connections and a sense of shared purpose. They transform underused spaces into vibrant, green areas that support pollinators and improve neighborhood aesthetics. Additionally, community gardens promote environmental awareness, food security, and local resilience through hands-on education and collaboration.
- Add more pollinator grasses and flowers on city owned property by partnering with organizations like Prairie Restoration
  - Planting pollinator-friendly grasses and flowers on city property enhances biodiversity and supports essential species like bees, butterflies, and other pollinators. These low-maintenance landscapes reduce mowing frequency, conserve water, and beautify public spaces. By adopting pollinator-friendly practices, cities like Northfield can lead by example in promoting ecological health and environmental stewardship.
- Outreach to residents about composting
  - Community outreach on composting helps educate residents about reducing food waste and turning organic materials into valuable soil nutrients. Workshops, demonstrations, and public campaigns can empower households to start composting at home or participate in local collection programs. By fostering awareness and participation, composting outreach strengthens community engagement and supports Northfield's sustainability and waste reduction goals.

### **Bruce Anderson**

- Continue educational/promotional campaign focused on home energy efficiency and electrification and EV adoption. The State of Minnesota plans to FINALLY roll out what they are now calling the "[Save Energy Minnesota](#)" program bundling state and federal rebates for home energy efficiency and electrification in early 2026. This warrants building on the 2025 work plan item related to this with regular promotion of these opportunities.
- As Rob suggested in his email this morning, he and I discussed working on addressing the roadblock to solar development in the Northfield area by partnering with Xcel on battery storage options to address grid congestion issues.
- Education campaign on the climate change implications of agricultural practices and dietary choices, perhaps with one or several forums/panel discussions focused on growing the local food economy, growing your own food, natural and edible landscaping, and greenhouse gas emissions associated with various diets (omnivore, vegetarian, vegan, flexitarian, pescatarian, etc.). Could partner with [Cannon Valley Grown](#) and the [Cannon River Sustainable Farming Association](#).

### **Ava Podracky**

- Water quality as its own, not put with water conservations. So focusing on the water quality of Northfield and like the manganese levels.

- Invasive Plants

### **Janet Petri**

1) I think that initiative #2, “Community Engagement Campaign: Energy Efficiency, HVAC Contractor and Homeowner Education”, should be continued:

Reviewing what we did in 2025: -On 11/17 we had a workshop that provided homeowner education on electrification, efficiency, etc., and the rebates that are currently available. -We did tabling at Riverwalk and at Earth Day, where we shared this type of information for homeowners. -In October there was a presentation to educate HVAC professionals.

Plans for 2026: Background info: We hear that there WILL be rebates available through the MN Dept of Commerce. These have been much delayed, but they are still expected (??) to come through. The following is from the MN Dept. of Commerce website:

<https://mn.gov/commerce/energy/consumer/energy-programs/save-energy-mn.jsp>

“Current update (11/12/2025): Save Energy Minnesota has not launched yet. Minnesota is waiting for formal approval from the federal Department of Energy to launch our program. Due to ongoing uncertainty during the federal government shutdown, we are delayed in launching the program. “

– Therefore, I think that in 2026 we should be prepared to do further outreach and information sharing regarding electrification and home efficiency opportunities for homeowners. This could include workshops, tabling at events and at Riverwalk, and social media. One goal, in my opinion, would be to reach people who meet the income guidelines for the rebates through HOMES and HEAR. (Assuming that the funds eventually do get released.) I am not a member of Rotary, but my understanding is that RCAT has tried to reach out to lower income homeowners, and has found it challenging to get engagement.

2) I also am impressed that both rain gardens and native landscaping made it into the takeaways and priorities. How could we promote these goals? Here are some thoughts:

We could promote the “lawns to legumes” program.

We could have a workshop, or several workshops, about native gardening. Or, how could we support or promote the local “Wild Ones” native gardening chapter? Last night, on Nov. 13, they had a workshop for chapter members that included seed sharing and also instruction on skills such as starting native plants from seed. Is there something we could do together with them, or help promote their work?

3) There’s more to the native landscaping priority. What about trees? Since commissioners Kinney, Shmurak, and Jones just literally “wrote the book” on how to manage trees in Northfield, I won’t say any more, but I look forward to hearing what they think we should work on in the future in this area.

4) One last topic: I would love it if there was more native planting in city parks, or maybe even just native groundcover in areas under trees in city parks. I think that would look good, if properly managed, and it would be good for native pollinators, and for the birds that depend on those native pollinators (=insects) to feed their nestlings. ("Songbirds as little as chickadees require some six to nine thousand caterpillars to raise a brood of nestlings." - Doug Tallamy). However, I know that if such areas aren't managed well, they become full of invasives such as buckthorn. Is there a way this could be an appropriate goal; how could it be doable.