

**Sustainability and Resiliency Committee
City Commission Chambers
March 18, 2025 2:30 p.m.**

The meeting of the Sustainability and Resiliency Committee was held in the City Commission Chambers at Fargo City Hall at 2:30 p.m., Tuesday, March 18, 2025.

Present:

John Strand (chair), Fargo City Commissioner
Dr. Tim Mahoney, Fargo Mayor
Brenda Derrig, Assistant Fargo City Administrator
Bruce Grubb, Fargo City Administration
Ben Dow, Fargo Public Works Director (via conference call)
Becki Majerus, Director of Facilities Management for the City of Fargo
Shawn Ouradnik, City of Fargo Inspections Director
Greta Gramig, At-Large Member of the Public
Shawn Paschke, Xcel Energy Representative (Ex-officio)
Chad Brousseau, Cass County Electric Cooperative Representative (Ex-officio)
Dave Bietz, Fargo Park District Representative (Ex-officio)
James Hand, Fargo School District Representative (Ex-officio)
Julie Bommelman, City of Fargo Transit Director
Mike Williams, At-Large Member of the Public (via conference call)

Absent:

Nicole Crutchfield – Fargo Planning Department
Setiya Hamidi – Fargo Youth Initiative
Jennifer Sweatman, At-Large Member of the Public
Casey Steele, At-Large Member of the Public

Chair Strand called the meeting to order. Introductions were done around the table.

Approval of Agenda

Ms. Bommelman moved, second by Ms. Derrig that the agenda be approved as read. There was unanimous approval by all members present.

December 10, 2024 Minutes Approved

Mr. Dow moved, second by Ms. Derrig that the minutes from the December 10, 2024 meeting be approved. There was unanimous approval by all members present.

Status of Sustainability Grant Opportunities – HDR Presentation:

Commissioner Strand said at the SRC August 2024 meeting, HDR presented a sustainability and resiliency roadmap. A key takeaway, he said, was the potential for building retrofit energy efficiency projects.

Mr. Grubb provided an update on the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) funding.

Ms. Majerus confirmed the City received approximately \$176,000.00 in EECBG funds, which are being utilized for three priority projects, with the top priority being the implementation of a Computerized Maintenance Management System (CMMS) to improve asset tracking and facilitate timely and cost-effective retrofits. She said the contract with FM 360 for the CMMS selection and implementation was approved at the last City Commission meeting and she confirmed the EECBG funding is still in place.

Brian King from HDR provided an update on the current state of grant funding opportunities, noting significant discussions and fast-moving developments in Washington D.C. He emphasized the situation is fluid and information is changing rapidly.

Seth Strongin from HDR highlighted the North Dakota Energy Conservation Program that is still running and presents a good opportunity for energy efficiency and facility improvements. Another state program, he said, is the North Dakota Energy Program, which has a broader scope and utilizes federal funding, requires further due diligence regarding its funding for the next year and potential cycle disruptions and that HDR is available to assist with this program. The next generation of the former RAISE grants, he said, is the PROTECT program, which closed its annual application deadline in February. While it is an annual program, he stated, its future is uncertain due to the current environment. If funding has already been allocated through the state, he said, there may still be opportunities to access CDBG funds, which are administered by the state but originate from the federal government. Identifying specific projects of interest would be necessary to explore this further, he said. The Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant and the Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) program from FEMA are currently in a holding pattern, he said. FEMA has a disclaimer on its website indicating that it is updating its opportunities and website to align with the current administration's priorities, he said. While these programs are likely to continue in some form, details and criteria may change, he said. Various subprograms under the Bridge Investment Program, covering bridge projects of different scales and planning, are also subject to the same uncertainty. The Economic Adjustment Assistance Program typically operates on an ongoing basis without specific deadlines, he stated; however, the application portal is currently unavailable, indicating uncertainty about its future.

Commissioner Strand emphasized the importance of informing the City's federal delegation, particularly Sen. John Hoeven, who sits on the Appropriations Committee, about any potential grant funding risks or program cuts.

Mayor Mahoney inquired about the possibility of using the Bridge Investment Program (BIP) for the 12th Avenue bridge project, which currently has a RAISE grant for design.

Mr. Strongin clarified that staying within the RAISE program is likely an option, especially for projects already underway, although future phases may be uncertain. He noted that other opportunities within the BIP could potentially support the project.

Mr. Grubb highlighted the City's past success in securing grant funding, including pre-disaster mitigation and BRIC grants, and the benefits of these programs for infrastructure.

Commissioner Strand cautioned about the sensitivity of language used in the current political climate and the need to advocate for local needs while being mindful of potential consequences. He also acknowledged that City departments are generally aware of grant opportunities and the effort required for competitive applications.

In response to a question from Mayor Mahoney asking whether HDR is contracted to actively seek grants for the City, Mr. Grubb clarified that HDR was selected for the roadmap development and has a national team for grant research and writing, which the City could utilize if desired, given the committee's lack of a dedicated budget for such activities.

Mayor Mahoney suggested the need to consider allocating budget funds for grant writing to proactively pursue significant funding opportunities for critical infrastructure projects such as the 64th Avenue interchange and the 12th Avenue bridge. He emphasized the potential for millions of dollars in grant funding and the importance of being prepared when opportunities arise.

Commissioner Strand acknowledged the current uncertainty surrounding grant

programs, citing the recent loss of an anticipated EPA grant for street light conversions.

Mayor Mahoney suggested exploring potential natural gas applications for City buildings given current energy trends and to continue to monitor the status of federal and state grant funding opportunities and Mr. King and Mr. Strongin said they will also continue to provide updates on grant funding opportunities as they become available.

Water Service Line Preplacement Program:

Mr. Grubb introduced the topic, highlighting the importance of the lead water service line replacement program for the sustainability and resiliency of Fargo's water distribution system. He mentioned that he spoke with Troy Hall, Water Utility Director, who agreed to present the program to the committee.

Mr. Hall introduced Matt Christensen, Regulatory Manager, and Maggie Sahr, Compliance Coordinator, who would be presenting the program details. He mentioned the recent award of a lead service line grant and ongoing grant applications.

Mr. Christensen provided an overview of lead service lines, their history and the regulatory context, including the Lead and Copper Rule revisions. He explained the division of ownership between the City and homeowners, and the presence of galvanized pipes. He said the City's website has an interactive service line material map.

Ms. Sahr discussed the health risks associated with lead exposure and the City's water quality monitoring efforts. She explained the corrosion control measures and the EPA action level.

Mr. Christensen explained the corrosion control process and the City's efforts to minimize lead and copper in drinking water. He provided historical context, referencing the Flint, Michigan, water crisis, and detailed the steps residents can take to reduce lead exposure. He described the City's plan for lead service line replacement, including funding sources, timelines and the trenchless replacement method. He outlined the post-replacement requirements, including flushing instructions and water testing. He also outlined the communication and outreach plan.

Ms. Sahr explained the crucial importance of removing lead exposure as there is not a safe level of lead exposure. She said this is especially vital for infants, young children and pregnant women. Lead accumulation in the environment also poses a significant threat, she said, and lead exposure causes interference with red blood cell formation, anemia, kidney damage, impaired reproductive function, interference with vitamin D metabolism, cancer, cardiovascular disease, reduced IQ, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder and lower birth weights. She said the risk of lead exposure has decreased significantly since the 1970s due to Federal action including the banning of leaded gasoline and lead plumbing, decreasing blood levels of lead in children by 95%. She said Fargo tests for lead in drinking water by collecting one-liter samples from a selection of single-family homes with either lead service lines or copper pipes with lead solder. She stated that by 2027, as mandated by new regulations, testing will expand to include all structures with lead service lines, and sample volume will increase to five consecutive one-liter samples. She said the EPA uses the data from these samples to assess the corrosivity of Fargo's water and if more than 10% of samples exceed the action level during a monitoring period, Fargo will be required to enhance public education, improve corrosion control treatments and accelerate lead service line replacement. She said that corrosion control is crucial, as the amount of lead leaching into drinking water depends on the water's corrosivity. While all water is corrosive to metal pipes to some extent, certain factors, such as temperature, can increase this effect. She explained the City optimizes water treatment plant parameters, including pH, alkalinity, mineral content (hardness), disinfection residuals and corrosion inhibitors such as orthophosphosphate, to minimize lead and copper release. She said orthophosphosphate

creates a protective layer inside pipes, preventing direct contact between the water and the metal. She explains that maintaining stable water quality parameters is essential to preserve this protective layer. She said disruptions, like those seen in Flint, Michigan, where water chemistry changes and the discontinuation of orthophosphosphate led to descaling and high lead levels, can result in significant lead contamination. She said the City has been testing water since 1992 and lead levels have consistently been below the 15 parts per billion action level, allowing the City to qualify for reduced monitoring (every three years). However, she explains, treatment changes, such as the addition of the membrane water treatment plant in 2019, triggered a return to annual testing. She said since 2014, Fargo's 90th percentile lead levels have remained at three parts per billion or less. She said to reduce lead exposure before service line replacement, residents are advised to flush the pipes each morning, use cold water for drinking and cooking and consider using a pitcher filter certified for lead removal. She said in 2027, the EAP will mandate a 10-year replacement timeline for all lead service lines in public water systems. The estimated cost per home ranges from \$8,000.00 to \$12,000.00 or more and speculates this could discourage voluntary participation from Fargo residents. She said the City secured a \$35 million State Revolving Fund loan, which includes 66 percent grant forgiveness, and the City committed to covering the remaining 34 percent local cost share, contingent on a successful post-replacement water sample, as required by the EPA. Fargo is a finalist for an environmental and climate justice grant, she stated, potentially awarding up to \$350,000.00 for lead service line remediation in a designated disadvantaged neighborhood, specifically the Jefferson and Carl Ben areas. She stated the City's goal is to maximize lead service line replacements within available funding.

Mr. Christensen said with homeowner financial obligations removed, the City requires homeowner permission for service line replacement. A \$1,000.00 fee will be applied post-replacement; however, that fee will be waived upon successful water testing 3-6 months later, ensuring program compliance. He said the City will conduct extensive public outreach through the website, media and community meetings to inform residents about the replacement plan and identify affected properties. He said funding requires historical and environmental reviews, dictating a phased, neighborhood-focused approach. The Water Treatment Plant will coordinate with Engineering to align replacements with street and water main projects, and the goal is to complete all replacements by 2030.

In response to a question from Commissioner Strand asking about how the plans include apartment building in replacing the lead pipes, Mr. Hall stated all lead service lines, both residential and commercial, qualify for grant funding. He said the Water Treatment Plant is developing alternative lead mitigation strategies for commercial properties, as pitcher filters are not suitable. He said complete service line replacement is required for eligibility. The City-owned portion will be replaced separately, outside of grant funding, he said.

In response to a question from Mr. Grubb asking if the map shows all the lead service lines including the commercial residents, Mr. Christensen said it does.

In response to a question from Ms. Gramig on how the Department was able to determine where the lead pipes are installed, Mr. Christensen said each building had hand drawn tab cards and when homeowners in older neighborhoods replace water lines, they need permits and inspections and that is how records are kept. The Public Works Department checks the work and there has been a lot of old paper records that staff went through. The idea is to also take pictures of the pipes inside homes during meter replacement, which helps find unknown pipes.

In response to a question from Ms. Gramig asking whether the Water Treatment Plant intends to test the water before treatment to show impact, Ms. Sahr explained the

current monitoring of 100 sites across Fargo provides a representative overview of the distribution system and the efficacy of the corrosion control measures. She stated the Water Treatment Plant monitors 100 sites to check the quality of the water in the City and the testing is expensive; therefore, testing after replacement is the most important given that is when the pipes are disturbed and people are at the most risk.

Discussion on SRC Meeting Frequency:

Commissioner Strand said he would like to address the frequency of the Sustainability and Resiliency Committee meetings moving forward. The meeting currently takes place bi-monthly; however, quarterly might be more efficient. He said there has been some public concern about the perceived pace of the Committee's work and it is important to acknowledge the need for a balance between budgetary limitations and the need to prioritize the Committee's efforts. He said it is crucial the Committee address climate resilience and related issues effectively, without overburdening resources.

It was decided that quarterly meetings, held on the second Tuesday of the designated months, would be the new meeting frequency.

In response to a question from Commissioner Strand about topics to discuss in future meetings, James Hand suggested that grant availability updates become a regular agenda item. He said this information is vital for funding sustainability projects, and staying informed about these opportunities is essential.

Public Comment:

Dr. Madeline Luke spoke.

Next Meeting:

The tentative date for the next meeting is June 10, 2025.

Adjourn:

The meeting adjourned at 3:40 o'clock p.m.