



CITY OF NOVI
Environmental Sustainability Committee Meeting
March 19, 2025, 5:30 p.m.
Mayor's Conference Room | Novi Civic Center | 45175 Ten Mile Road
(248) 347-0445

CALL TO ORDER: 5:31 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Council Members Gurumurthy, Heintz, and Smith

STAFF LIAISON: Danielle Mahoney, Assistant City Manager

ALSO PRESENT: Katherine Oppermann, Recording Secretary

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion: Gurumurthy; Seconded: Heintz; Approved 3:0

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – February 3, 2025 Minutes

Motion: Heintz; Seconded: Gurumurthy; Approved 3:0

REMARKS FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

Chairperson Smith shared that friends from the local Srinergy business are joining today. He noted that while this may be jumping the gun slightly on a larger scale project it also checks a lot of boxes the Committee is looking at. He likes that a program such as Solarize is a “carrot” rather than a “stick” as far as encouraging people to move to solar power, an incentive. Such a move could also improve energy resilience.

MATTERS FOR COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

1. Solarize Novi

With solar energy company Srinergy joining

Prasad Gullapalli, CEO of Srinergy, introduced himself and his two daughters who also work for the company. Srinergy had its 15th company incorporation anniversary today and they have learned a lot through their time in the industry. Srinergy is a project developer, they design, engineer, obtain permits for solar installations – in essence a “one-stop shop.” In the beginning there was a long approval process for any installation, but they now do installations across the United States and Puerto Rico. The technology offers energy resilience and backup when normal power fails. One thing that has helped immensely is the increased consumer knowledge/education regarding solar power.

One note he made regarding solar energy is that not all homes are fit for/qualified for solar installation. It is important that they have the correct roof pitch, presence of trees, orientation of homes, etc. That said Novi is a newer city and it is therefore likely that a higher number than average would be qualified for solar installations. As a Novi business they can offer an assessment to determine how many homes, and

what subdivisions would be most able to benefit from solar installations. This service would cost the City approximately \$20,000. Ideally the home should have a south-facing roof, though east-facing also works. Srinergy does not perform installations on north or west-facing roofs as it would not be best practice.

Mr. Gullapalli then spoke on some of his business insights and lessons that have been learned about solar power including:

- Solar Installation typically has payback in 10 years (IE the upfront cost of the installation is now made up for in savings for energy that the installation has produced)
- Solar batteries are still a very new technology and at this stage do not have a payback
- Traditional energy costs such as those from DTE are continuing to see an increase both in cost and billing complexity
- Insurance Companies are increasingly providing coverage for solar installations (especially compared to 15 years ago) but homeowners should still check individually with their providers to be sure they would offer coverage

Mr. Gullapalli also shared that Srinergy is currently working on a “resilience shelter” example in Novi, the goal of this project is to be able to provide 3 days of power in the event traditional power were to go out.

Councilmember Heintz asked about other types of solar installations such as ground mounted. Mr. Gullapalli stated that roof installations are ideal since they are based on existing infrastructure that can be built on without incurring the additional costs of steel fabrication but that they have also had success in installing on car ports and ground installations. He also noted that solar is good for money savings but also excellent for positive promotion/branding of going green and reducing carbon footprints. Solar is a fairly political industry, but everyone is interested in an improved bottom line, which solar power can offer. The life of a solar system is about 25 years and with the excellent conditions in Michigan, the payback is typically nine years. Chairperson Smith asked that, to clarify, you don’t need fully clear blue skies in order to generate energy to which Mr. Gullapalli stated no, it is not a necessary condition.

Mr. Gullapalli then spoke briefly about the Traverse City Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities Non-Profit and Access MI Solar which is a small city example of a program offering opportunity for solar installation consolidated purchases for both residential and commercial clients. Consolidated orders reduces the overall cost of installations to both the company and the consumer, it also offers a streamlined process that allows for faster permit turnaround. In Ann Arbor they offer both the current NEW as well as any further city zoning/code requirements to Solar Installation companies so that they know the best “cookie cutter” to offer through their in-house engineers.

Chairperson Smith asked how home value is impacted by a solar installation. Mr. Gullapalli said that he cannot really speak on the topic as it is not something that is considered in Michigan yet as far as assessing goes but that it can appeal to potential buyers.

Assistant City Manager Mahoney asked where Srinergy sources their panels. Mr. Gullapalli stated that China is currently the number one source as they are far beyond anyone else in the field currently. That said the United States market is coming up but is susceptible to political disruptions.

Councilmember Gurumurthy asked that, when Srinergy worked with Ann Arbor, what did the City do and what did the company do? Mr. Gullapalli replied that Ann Arbor would collect interest and then assign a group of approximately 50 interested parties to a given installer and hold a Solarize event (while also allowing a window for shopping alternates on the consumer end). A 15% discount was given for the group with an established threshold of buy-in, and actual money and the execution of the installation was handled by the company. He also noted that Ann Arbor had a special combined building and electric permit for solar installations an "accelerated electrical permit" wherein the inspection of the electrical permit gave the green tag rather than the building permit inspection.

Overall, Srinergy recommends the following to the City of Novi:

- a. Streamlining of the permit process for solar installations (the company can provide additional data on this point)
- b. Setting up a website where interested individuals can sign up for a consolidated order process
- c. Focus on both residential and commercial consumers

Councilmember Gurumurthy noted that making the business case for the project will be important, as well as education about the benefits/process. Mr. Gullapalli stated that Srinergy is here, local, and ready to help with anything they can.

2. Next Steps/Goals

Chairperson Smith stated that they should plan to go through a draft for the next Committee meeting and rate items for viability/cost/prioritization. He has also stated that he had pulled the trend cards from the "Big Sort" work that related to the environment/sustainability for further consideration and discussion. Councilmember Gurumurthy agreed that they should be rating on difficulty, impact, and cost (not short term/long term) and that will drive prioritization for the group. She also noted that we may want to reevaluate the list as a whole and determine if there should be additions or subtractions. Councilmember Heintz stated that he would like to emphasize that the public should be involved in this prioritization. Chairperson Smith agreed that community input should be considered but at the point that they are organized enough to have a community meeting or poll.

Councilmember Gurumurthy thinks that the group should also be sure to note what has already been done regarding environmental sustainability within the City, and establish clear short- and long-term goals. She also agrees with Councilmember Heintz regarding community input and that, once prioritization takes place, the Committee should establish clear steps towards their goals. Some of these items may depend on it they decide to bring on a consultant and they should also make sure to use opportunities to sync with the new Community Strategic Plan process as well.

Chairperson Smith agrees that they should take every opportunity to give input on the Strategic Plan.

3. Revisit Environmental Strategic Plan Consultant Option

Chairperson Smith noted that he likes doing things by himself, but he also recognizes the time cost of plan development. Councilmember Heintz stated that he doesn't have an appetite for the quoted cost for an EAP process from AECOM and would be more interested in utilizing the talents of Committee members and a dedicated staff person. Councilmember Gurumurthy thinks that the Committee should pursue creating the plan themselves and only consider a consultant if they hit a bottleneck. The Committee itself needs to align though before bringing in any additional people and define their scope.

Chairperson Smith stated that he thinks sorting will be an important first step to prioritization and goal creation. He also noted that the approach and difficulty of implementation may differ between the City administration, residents, and commercial businesses so we'll have to determine measurability. FlashVote could be an option on that.

Councilmember Gurumurthy further spoke about creating direct action on quick, easy, and low-cost goals. They could then approach the community about larger and/or costlier goals and ideas. Councilmember Heintz agreed that unless there is buy-in from Novi residents the project will be a failure. Councilmember Gurumurthy agreed and noted that education itself will be an important short-term goal.

REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS

Ms. Mahoney asked if there was a clear understanding of what City Council, as a whole, is expecting from the committee. Chairperson Smith stated that he will need to have that conversation with Mayor Fischer. Ms. Mahoney emphasized that there is a lot happening with limited resources at the City right now (Public Safety Building Bond, Strategic Plan, etc.). Councilmember Heintz suggested it may be helpful, at the next meeting, to have it explained more clearly what the City has already achieved. Councilmember Gurumurthy suggested that they have a post-it session. Chairperson Smith agreed but also encouraged working on their individual prioritizations outside of the meeting sessions.

PUBLIC COMMENT: none

ADJOURNMENT: 7:22 p.m.