Appleton Sustainability Advisory Panel

July 2026 Monthly Meeting Summary

July 14, 2026

The Appleton Sustainability Advisory Panel reviewed current City sustainability initiatives, discussed opportunities for improved public communication and committee reporting, and received updates from several initiative teams.

Administrative and Communication Updates

The Panel discussed the need to keep the Sustainable Appleton webpage current. The Clean Energy Initiative information has been updated, while revised materials are still needed for the Sustainable Ecosystems, Alternate Transportation, and Biochar initiatives. Initiative leaders will review their existing work plans and either update them for 2026 or remove date-specific references where the content remains current.

The Mayor's Communications Office has expressed interest in developing regular sustainability communications. The Panel supported preparing monthly social media or website updates highlighting City projects, Panel activities, and opportunities for community participation. Members emphasized the value of using photographs and examples from actual City projects.

The Panel also discussed providing more frequent updates to the Parks and Recreation Committee. Members generally supported quarterly reports focused on individual initiatives or significant accomplishments, rather than relying solely on one comprehensive year-end presentation. The reporting approach will be coordinated further with the Committee Chair.

Sustainability and Resilience Master Plan

Planning team meetings for the Sustainability and Resilience Master Plan have been scheduled to begin in August. Four facilitated meetings will be held at the Appleton Public Library from 2:00 to 4:30 p.m. Staff are confirming participant availability and will work to fill any vacancies resulting from scheduling conflicts.

The planning process will review municipal and community greenhouse gas emissions, climate risks, City operations, transportation, land use, natural resources, and implementation strategies. Panel members will participate in the planning process and receive meeting materials through the consultant's calendar invitations.

The Panel also discussed the recent coordination meeting between the Sustainability and Resilience Master Plan and the Wastewater Treatment Plant Master Plan teams. This

coordination is intended to ensure that sustainability considerations are consistently incorporated into both planning efforts, particularly for biosolids management, renewable natural gas, biochar, carbon management, and future facility improvements.

The planning process will include two phases of community input. The first phase will gather public ideas regarding potential goals and actions, while the second phase will provide an opportunity for community members to review the draft plan.

The first Community Input Session is scheduled for **August 27, 2026, from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.** in the **Mary Beth Nienhaus Community Meeting Room C at the Appleton Public Library, 200 N. Appleton Street**. Participants will learn about the planning process and key findings to date and will have an opportunity to provide input to help shape the Sustainability and Resilience Master Plan.

Clean Energy and Municipal Projects

A potential solar installation at the Water Treatment Plant remains under consideration in conjunction with a future roofing project. Additional technical and financial evaluation will be needed before the project can advance.

Sustainable Ecosystems and Native Landscapes

The vegetation survey of City-owned properties has been completed, and the collected information is being organized and evaluated. The next phase will include working with Parks and Recreation staff to identify appropriate locations for mowing reduction, native plantings, prairie restoration, invasive species management, and other habitat improvements. Operational input from grounds maintenance staff will be incorporated before recommendations are finalized.

As part of the Wastewater Treatment Plant truck-scale paving project, the central area of the new traffic loop will be restored with a native prairie seed mixture rather than turf grass. This will convert an area that would otherwise require regular mowing into native habitat.

The Panel discussed the long-term maintenance needs associated with expanding native plantings. Members expressed interest in coordinating volunteer invasive-species removal and prairie maintenance activities with community organizations, neighborhood groups, and Root Force. Planning could begin for a volunteer event in 2027, with timing based on appropriate invasive-species control periods.

Community Education and Engagement

The Panel discussed developing a series of four ASAP-hosted lunch-and-learn sessions to provide practical education on sustainability topics. Sessions could be held during the workday at City Hall for City employees, with opportunities to offer similar programs to the public at the Appleton Public Library. Potential topics include electric vehicles, bicycling and alternative transportation, native plantings, and an additional sustainability topic to be determined.

The Panel also discussed adding sustainability-related activities to the Parks and Recreation Department’s existing Discover Appleton program. Potential activities could include identifying native plants and invasive species, visiting renewable energy and environmental project sites, and learning about City sustainability initiatives. Members recommended exploring integration into the existing program rather than developing a separate platform.

Staff will continue discussions regarding the lunch-and-learn series and possible sustainability content for a future Discover Appleton program cycle.

Biochar and Wastewater Resource Recovery

The Biochar Initiative provided an update on potential opportunities associated with converting wastewater biosolids into biochar. The Panel discussed possible environmental and economic benefits, including:

- Long-term carbon sequestration and potential carbon-credit revenue
- Use as a soil amendment to improve soil structure and nutrient retention
- Potential incorporation into concrete and other construction materials
- Possible use at landfills to reduce odors and absorb volatile organic compounds
- Reduced transportation and disposal requirements for wastewater biosolids

The initiative team will continue researching markets, carbon-credit values, verification requirements, and potential partnerships with universities, agricultural organizations, and technical experts. These concepts will also continue to be evaluated through the Wastewater Treatment Plant Master Plan.

Expanded Polystyrene Recycling

The Panel discussed the underutilized expanded-polystyrene recycling equipment available through the county recycling system. Although equipment is available to densify the material for recycling, staffing and operational limitations have restricted broader collection and outreach.

Members discussed the possibility of supporting a volunteer-based collection and education program. Additional coordination with Outagamie County, community partners, and potential volunteers will be needed to determine whether a sustainable operating model can be developed.

Alternate Transportation

The Alternate Transportation Initiative reported ongoing work to improve bicycle education and bicycle access. Recent activities have included collaboration with the Appleton Public Library and youth bicycle programs.

The Panel discussed barriers to east-west bicycle travel, including routes with frequent stop signs and difficult arterial-road crossings. The initiative will explore potential bicycle-priority routes and other improvements that could provide safer and more efficient connections across the City.

The City's Bicycle Friendly Community designation will also be added to the City website alongside its other community recognitions. The Alternate Transportation work plan will be updated for the Sustainable Appleton webpage.

Future Discussion: Data Centers

The Panel identified data centers as a potential topic for a future meeting. Discussion would focus on energy and water use, land-use considerations, infrastructure demands, potential economic benefits, and sustainability-related policy options. Staff are compiling background information and may invite subject-matter expertise to support the discussion.

Next Meeting: August 11, 2026 - 3:30-4:30pm 1819 E Witzke Blvd Appleton, WI.