

**City of Bloomington
Environmental Commission**

The mission of the Environmental Commission is to advise the City of Bloomington on how its actions and policies may preserve and enhance the quality of Bloomington's environment, including the life-supporting processes that natural ecological systems provide to humans and other organisms.

DATE: Jan. 31, 2024
TO: Mayor Kerry Thomson
Bloomington Common Council
Interim Director Jackie Scanlan, Planning and Transportation
FROM: Chair - Carrie Albright, on behalf of the Environmental Commission
RE: 2023 Annual Report, Bloomington Environmental Commission

MEMBERSHIP:

Active: Carrie Albright (Chair), Megan Murphy (Vice-Chair), Karena Tankersley (Secretary/Treasurer), Linda Thompson (staff liaison, ex-officio), Matt Caldie, Donald Eggert (through January 2024), David Parkhurst, Mitchell Owens, Shannon Gayk, Megan Bankowski, Connor Wright (through January 2024), Mike Litwin

Transitioned Off/Resigned: Sam Armstrong, Dedaimia Whitney, Luke Swain, Kristen Mann, Betsy McCleery

Interns/Fellows: Alauna Keeley

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2023 was a year of focus for the Environmental Commission (EC) that targeted promoting the Habitat Connectivity Plan and revamping Outreach Programs and Activities in the community. As we gained new Commissioners, renewed energy began to grow around existing projects as well as additional (or previously paused) initiatives. Among the top accomplishments were the annual Eco-Heroes Art Contest, an Air Quality Report published on the EC webpage and presented to the City Council, and a refresh of the Bloomington Habitat Connectivity Plan.

GOALS

During the first meeting of 2023, the Environmental Commission held a “bucket list” meeting, where members discussed environmental initiatives to consider for the year to come. The members discussed the merits of each proposed idea and then voted on the top priorities. These

topics typically become the main focus for the EC throughout the year. Starting in February the Commission proceeds to produce action items for these goals.

In 2023, the Environmental Commission’s top three “bucket list” items were to: Promote the Bloomington Habitat Connectivity Plan, revamp Outreach Programs and Activities, and create or sponsor a volunteer event for the public.

MEMBERSHIP

The EC ended the year 2023 with one vacancy, due to resignation for personal reasons, to be filled by the Bloomington Common Council. Our current membership boasts scientists, university students and faculty, and environmental policy hobbyists.

COMMISSION PROJECTS

Unified Development Ordinance

In the interest of benefiting the community as a whole, the Environmental Commission continued its 2023 work of submitting revision recommendations to the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) to the city staff, the Common Council, and the Plan Commission. Our membership read the various modules and drafts of the UDO and then held working sessions wherein members proposed, debated, and considered amendments to the documents.

Eco-Heroes Art Contest

Each year the EC holds the Eco-Heroes Art Contest, which focuses on encouraging students and residents to think environmentally through a piece of art. The EC targets local K–12 schools (including homeschools) to encourage environmental education in a fun, artistic way. Adult members of the public are also encouraged to participate in our “adult” category.

For the 11th annual Eco-Heroes Art Contest, the theme was “Trees: Let It Grow! What Trees Give Us,” which received over 30 submissions. The awards ceremony was held in City Council Chambers at City Hall, during the regular Bloomington Farmers Market. During the ceremony, Mayor Hamilton awarded the winners of the contest with their prizes. Our Commission intern and staff liaison helped gather 20 sponsors for prize bags for the participants.

Environmental Commission Outreach

The Outreach working group coordinated support for the following initiatives:

Monroe County Master Gardener Association's Garden Fair: Commissioners tabled at the Garden Fair, sharing information about natural landscaping, habitat corridors through the Habitat Connectivity Plan, and pest & pollinator resources.

IU Bug Fest: Commissioners tabled at Bug Fest, sharing the above materials as well as engaging with children and adults through a hands-on insect collection. Visitors were able to touch, ask questions about, and share their knowledge of some of the local insects they saw.

Weed Wrangle: In March, the EC paired with MC-IRIS in a Weed Wrangle focused on removing invasive plant specifics in Winslow Sports Park. This was a rewarding experience for the group and we anticipate collaborating on future Wrangles.

Urban Forestry: In 2023, the EC wrote two letters of support for funding further investment in the Bloomington tree canopy. The first letter, submitted in May 2023, accompanied a USDA grant application focused on improved resilience to the effects of climate change in Bloomington. The second letter, sent in December 2023, supported the City of Bloomington Tree Assistance and Tree Re-Inventory Grant application (IDNR) to fund hazardous tree removal and tree planting and improved tree canopy within the city. Both of these letters of support align with the Environmental Commission's mission to improve the quality of life for Bloomington residents, visitors, and biodiversity.

INTERN PROJECTS

The Environmental Commission was lucky enough to have the Graduate Research Fellow, Alauna Keeley, for the full 2023 year. Alauna contributed to work behind the scenes on events, data analysis, and City projects concerning the environment.

Eco-Heroes Art Contest

Alauna assisted Linda Thompson, our staff liaison, in putting on Eco-Heroes, which included outreach to local schools/teachers for participants, local businesses for prize sponsorships, and arranging logistics for the day of the event.

Website Update

Alauna was also responsible for reviewing materials on the website, updating them as needed, and reorganizing the functionality of the EC webpage. As we contribute more documents and send more community members to the EC's page for shared resources, the ease of accessing and navigating the City website, and EC page specifically, is of growing importance. Alauna (with the support of Commissioner Matt Caldie) updated the page layout and navigation.

EC Management

On multiple occasions in 2023, Alauna volunteered to take minutes for the EC, submitting both minutes and memos to the City website.

WORKING GROUPS

ECPC (Environmental Commission Planning Committee)

The Environmental Commission Planning Committee meets as needed to address petitions coming before the Plan Commission and the Board of Zoning Appeals. Along with our staff liaison, Linda Thompson, members of this Committee review the petitions and environmental surroundings of the parcel in question. The ECPC then produces a memo outlining our concerns/wishes for the parcel. In 2023, one memo was sent to the Plan Commission, and one memo was sent to the City Council.

Biodiversity Working Group

The Bloomington Habitat Connectivity Plan, an initiative of the Biodiversity Working Group started in 2020, was determined to be a top priority for 2023. Before the working group could promote and further implement the Habitat Connectivity Plan, the existing database and resources needed to be updated. Over 2023, Fellow Keeley and the working group members made an effort to revisit the map and the website.

Water Quality Working Group

The Water Working Group was resurrected in late 2023 to assess local storm, drinking, and general water quality. At this time, the working group is interested in stormwater pollution and treatment, specifically reporting on water quality, flooding mitigation solutions, and collaboration opportunities with Bloomington Utilities.

Outreach Working Group

The Outreach Working Group was a priority for 2023. Creating or sponsoring a local event was a 2023 priority, but because the Commissioner behind this suggestion resigned shortly after the January meeting, this initiative was not fulfilled. Further outreach ideas included connecting with the community about easy, tangible ways to become more environmentally friendly. The Outreach Working Group created an outreach kit, renewed the EC's use of social media, and agreed to seek out tabling opportunities in the community. In 2023, the EC was present at the Master Gardener's Garden Fair, IU Bug Fest, and a Weed Wrangle hosted by MC-IRIS.

Air Quality Working Group

The Air Quality Working Group completed its goal of creating a City of Bloomington Air Quality report which can be found on the EC webpage. Matt Caldie, working group lead, compiled the data and analysis, drafted, and delivered the Air Quality report at the City Council meeting in August 2023. The report was also submitted to the Herald Times as an editorial piece in June 2023.

Guest Presentations

The Commission’s dedication to lifelong learning includes occasional presentations on subjects of interest.

February 2023	Gillian Fields, Parks and Recreation Department	Adopt a Greenspace Program: To Make Connectivity Work You Must Have Management.
August 2023	Kamala Brown-Sparks, CAPS Commission Nejla Routsong, BCOS and CAPS Commissions, Member	Department of Community Safety & Resilience.

Liaison with other Commissions and Committees

To allow the EC to focus on the work of the City as a whole, the membership of the EC attends various other meetings to gather information and, when asked, to provide input.

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| 1. Bloomington Tree Commission | David Parkhurst |
| 2. Environmental Resources Advisory Council | David Parkhurst |
| 3. Monroe County Environmental Commission | Megan Murphy |
| 4. Bloomington Commission on Sustainability | Donald Eggert |
| 5. MPO Citizens’ Advisory Committee | Donald Eggert |

Thank you for your continued support of the Environmental Commission and all it does to serve the future of Bloomington. We look forward to our continued work in 2024.

Respectfully submitted,

Carrie A. Albright
Chair, Bloomington Environmental Commission