



COOK COUNTY
ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION
2022 ANNUAL REPORT

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COUNTY BUILDING
118 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL 60602
(312) 603-6380

DISTRICT OFFICE
4253 North Milwaukee
Chicago, IL 60641
(773) 283-7873



BRIDGET DEGNEN
COOK COUNTY COMMISSIONER
12TH DISTRICT

December 7, 2023

Honorable President Toni Preckwinkle and Cook County Board of Commissioners:

In April 2019, the Environmental Commission was established by the Cook County Board via an ordinance I sponsored. The Environmental Commission is comprised of nine (9) members and its purpose is to identify and execute initiatives that reduce environmental damage within Cook County. The enabling Ordinance requires an annual report be completed and filed with the Board every January outlining the Commission's goals and accomplishments. During its February 10, 2020 meeting, the Commission voted on its first three goals: 1) to establish industrial composting in large arenas and government facilities; 2) to increase the urban tree canopy throughout Cook County; and 3) to amend the City of Chicago's weed ordinance to allow for native gardens. In 2021, the Commission advocate for an amendment to the City of Chicago Streets and Sanitation code to allow for native gardens without homeowners risking fines and fees. This resulted in the establishment of a Native Garden Registry. The Commission decided to focus on its two remaining goals. Below are a few highlights of the Commission's accomplishments in 2022:

- I. In April 2022, the Environmental Commission partnered with Openlands and Cook County Facilities Management to plant 41 mature trees at the Maywood Courthouse. Over 70 volunteers assisted in the planting. The planting also served as a training for Openlands TreeKeepers class. TreeKeepers are trained volunteers who work throughout the region to keep trees healthy, administering proper care and promptly recognizing and reporting harmful pests.
- II. In May 2022, the Environmental Commission partnered with Nordson's Green Earth Foundation, the City of Markham, and Cook County's Facility's Management to plant over 310 native plants, including trees, shrubs and perennials, made up of 25 distinct native species at the Markham Court house. The planting efforts led to the creation of Illinois' first "tiny forest" using what is known as the Miyawaki method of planting.
- III. During the summer of 2022, four undergraduate students from DePaul University (2), Northeastern Illinois University and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign worked with Dr. Mark Potosnak as part of the National Science Foundation-funded Metropolitan

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Chicago Data-science Corps to research food waste disposal for the Cook County Environmental Commission. The Commission wanted an assessment of the amount of food waste that is mixed in with residential and commercial municipal solid waste. After researching previous reports from Cook County, the City of Chicago and the State of Illinois, the students discovered that most estimates of local food waste from both residential and industrial sources (restaurants, hospitals, jails, universities) were based on one study conducted in 2014. The student interns extracted the data from the old report and performed some spatial analyses based on census data from ZIP codes. They found there was a small but statistically significant correlation between average household size and food waste: larger households had less food waste when considered on a per person basis. On the other hand, there was no significant relationship between median income for an area and the percentage of food waste in municipal solid waste. In addition to considering this bottom-up approach to the question, the students also considered top-down techniques based on the number of producing units (households, restaurants, food-service facilities) and survey data. But they found that such studies required extensive surveys and that data was systematically lacking. The students did conclude the county is responsible for a large amount of food waste and that industrial composting programs would provide significant environmental benefits.

Pursuant to Chapter 2, Sec. 2-547, the ordinance establishing the Environmental Commission, the Environmental Commission was set to be repealed November 30, 2022. The ordinance was written to include this automatic sunset provision to ensure the Commission did not become dormant, while remaining in our Cook County Code of Ordinances. In November of 2022, the Board approved an amendment to the Ordinance extending the repeal date for an additional four years. Thank you to the Board of Commissioners for supporting the work of this Commission.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bridget Degnen". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid, with a long, sweeping underline.

Bridget Degnen

Chair, Cook County Environmental Commission

COOK COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

2021– 2023 MEMBERS

Commissioner Bridget Degnen – Chair, County Representative

- Commissioner of the 12th District

Commissioner Dennis Deer – Vice Chair, appointed by County Board President

- Commissioner of the 2nd District

Appointees

Alderman George Cardenas – City Representative/Mayoral Appointee

- Alderman of the 12th Ward, Chair of the City Council’s Environmental Protection and Energy Committee
- As Alderman Cardenas was elected to the Board of Review and is now serving as Commissioner Cardenas, he will be removed from the Commission. The Mayor’s Office is working to appoint a new City representative.

Chelsey Grassfield – Non-Profit Representative

- Policy Manager at Friends of the Chicago River

Margaret Schneemann – Environmental Economist Representative

- Water Resource Economist at the University of Illinois Extension Sea Grant College Program

Mark Potosnak, PhD – Higher Education Representative

- Associate Professor and Chair of Environmental Science and Studies at DePaul University

Robert Mead – Corporate Representative

- Environmental Manager at Ingredion Incorporated

Michael Badame – North Triad Representative (Pending Board Approval December 2021)

- Facilities Operations Specialists at the Chicago Department of Aviation

Victoria Wilson -- South Triad Representative

- Environmental Specialist & Sustainability Consultant and Executive Director of Naturally Urban Environmental

COOK COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

2023 CALENDAR

All meetings to be held at 10:00 am.

February 15th

April 12th

June 14th

August 9th

October 11th

December 6th

COOK COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

2023 GOALS

- 1) to establish industrial composting in large arenas and government facilities; 2) to increase the urban tree canopy throughout Cook County; and 3) to amend the City of Chicago's weed ordinance to allow for native gardens.
- I. Draft a green tax incentive Ordinance and bring to the Board for approval
- II. Follow up with Illinois Department of Transportation Regarding the use of compost in its project side work
 - a. Bring policy to Chicago Department of Transportation
 - b. Bring policy to Cook County Department of Transportation
- III. Work with the Housing Authority of Cook County (HACC) to plant trees on HACC properties
- IV. Write letters to Federal Representatives to ask for Inflation Reduction Act funding for tree planting
- V. Draft amendment to Cook County Zoning Code preventing polluters from disproportionately operating in low income neighborhoods

COOK COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION ORDINANCE

Sec. 2-540. - Short title.

This Division shall be known and may be cited as the Cook County Environmental Commission (Commission).

Sec. 2-551. - Purpose.

There is hereby created an Environmental Commission to serve the following purpose:

- (a) Ensure Cook County is a leader in combating global warming.
- (b) Create a working group of environmental professionals from Cook County's public and private sectors working together to devise and implement initiatives to combat global warming.
- (c) Promote sustainable legislation and policy aimed at reducing the carbon footprint within the geographic borders of Cook County.
- (d) Serve as a model for other governments by proactively combatting climate change with innovative and practical environmental initiatives.

Sec. 2-542. - Cook County Commission on Environmental Sustainability Membership.

- (a) The Commission will be composed of nine members including the original sponsor of this bill, who shall serve as Chair. The Chair shall be responsible for designating a successor if she ceases to serve as a Commissioner.
- (b) Six members shall be appointed by the Chair. These members shall represent the following:
 - (1) One member of the Commission shall be a representative from the north triad of Cook County.
 - (2) One member of the Commission shall be a representative from the south triad of Cook County.
 - (3) One member of the Commission shall be a representative from a not-for-profit.
 - (4) One member of the Commission shall be a corporate stakeholder with experience working on environmental initiatives.
 - (5) One member of the Commission shall be a representative from higher education or academia.
 - (6) One member of the Commission shall have a background in environmental economics.
- (c) The President of the Cook County Board of Commissioners shall appoint one member of the Commission. This person shall serve as the Vice Chair of the Commission.
- (d) The Mayor's Office of the City of Chicago shall appoint one member of the Commission.

- (e) All appointments shall be confirmed by the Cook County Board.

Sec. 2-543. - Term and vacancies.

- (a) Each member shall serve two-year terms.
- (b) The Chair shall serve for the duration of her term as a Cook County Commissioner. The Chair may serve consecutive terms.
- (c) Commission members may be reappointed for consecutive terms.
- (d) Vacancies on the Commission shall be filled in the same manner that original appointments were made and shall be filled for the unexpired term of the member whose appointment has become vacant.

Sec. 2-544. - Qualifications of members.

- (a) All members shall have like-minded goals stated in the Purpose section of this Division.
- (b) All members shall have subject matter knowledge, experience and/or education in environmental sustainability matters.

Sec. 2-545. - Meetings.

- (a) This Commission shall hold a meeting at least once every even numbered month, and meetings shall commence the second even numbered month following creation of the Commission.
- (b) Meeting dates shall be set for the following year, in December of the preceding year.
- (c) Should a member of the Commission miss three consecutive meetings, the Commission may choose to remove the member, and the original appointing member shall appoint a new member pursuant to subsection 30-976(c).
- (d) This Commission shall be subject to the Open Meetings Act, 5 ILCS 120/1 et seq, and the Freedom of Information Act, 5 ILCS 140/1 et seq.

Sec. 2-546. - Powers, duties, and responsibilities.

- (a) The Commission shall serve as a working Commission and in an advisory role to the Cook County Board on matters relating to environmental sustainability, reduction of greenhouse gases and reduction of environmental impacts in Cook County. The Commission shall be responsible for:
 - (1) Considering environmental impacts on surface water, groundwater, air and land in Cook County and making appropriate recommendations to the Cook County Board, local municipalities and the Chicago City Council to mitigate harmful impacts and promote positive change;
 - (2) Creating an annual work plan in furtherance of the Commission's goals and solicit input from stakeholders via its members.

- (3) Beginning in January 2020, creating an annual report and presenting it to the Cook County Board via the Environment and Sustainability Committee; and
- (4) Collaborating in regional environmental associations and with other local environmental stakeholders.

Sec. 2-547. - Division scheduled to be repealed on November 30, ~~2022~~ 2026.

- (a) *Repeal of division.* This Division is repealed on November 30, ~~2022~~ 2026.