

Village of La Grange, IL
Environmental Quality Commission
2019 Annual Report
February 2020

The Environmental Quality Commission (EQC) works to protect the health, safety, and welfare of La Grange residents by identifying environmental threats to the village and recommending environmental programs. The EQC directs its efforts based on the needs of residents, staff, and the Village Board as well as the expertise offered by the individual commissioners. In 2019, the EQC researched several environmental issues, including waste hauling, recycling, composting, air pollution, sustainable communities, and municipal operations. The EQC also partnered with many organizations to host events and provide resources to residents seeking to reduce environmental impact. Additionally, the EQC made recommendations to the Village Board regarding solar initiatives and waste hauling services.

The EQC currently has twelve commissioners and requests three additional commissioners to reach its full capacity of fifteen members. A full commission is needed if the EQC is to address the diverse environmental issues related to health, safety and welfare of residents. Research and outreach activities of the EQC require a significant time commitment beyond that devoted to meetings. A full commission will help members manage the workload most effectively.

2019 Projects and Achievements

Coordinated recycling at a community event

West End Arts Festival (September) – In partnership with the La Grange Business Association (LGBA), the EQC worked with the Village Manager and the Public Works Department to provide recycling totes for the festival. The EQC provided recycling receptacles to vendors in the wine tent for recycling of wine bottles and corks. The EQC also created a recycling station where commissioners assisted visitors and vendors with recycling of glass bottles, aluminum cans, #1 plastic cups, and cardboard. The combined efforts of the EQC, LGBA, and Village of La Grange resulted in the recycling of three 96-gallon totes of cardboard and two 96-gallon totes of cans, bottles, and cups. Several vendors and visitors expressed appreciation for the recycling station. One vendor suggested that, next year, all vendors purchase the same plates, cups, and cutlery to facilitate recycling, composting, and a greater reduction of waste.

Co-hosted events with the Village of La Grange Park (LGP) Sustainability Commission

Native plant tour (September) – The EQC worked with the LGP sustainability commission to identify homeowners for the tour, create a map, and advertise the event. The goal of the tour was to inform residents how to create and maintain a native plant garden. Native plants absorb more stormwater than grass, filter pollutants, require little to no watering, and attract pollinators. During the native plant tour, 326 visits were made to 8 gardens.

Pumpkin composting (November) – The EQC created a flyer and advertised the annual collection of pumpkins, also known as the Pumpkin Smash. EQC commissioners attended the event which takes place annually at the La Grange Park Public Works Department on the Saturday morning following Halloween. Over 800 pumpkins were collected and transported to a large-scale composting facility. Composting food scraps and organic material benefits the environment by preventing the release of methane, a potent greenhouse gas created when organics break down in a landfill. Composting also creates a nutrient rich soil amendment.

Holiday light recycling (November and December) – The EQC created a flyer, delivered recycling receptacles, and coordinated with local organizations to recycle holiday lights. Public Works Departments in La Grange and La Grange Park collected the lights and transported them to the La Grange Public Works Building, where the lights were stored until the end of the collection period. In La Grange, lights were collected at Village Hall, the parking garage, Park District of La Grange Recreation Center, La Grange Public Library, La Grange Rd train station, Stone Ave train station, and St Francis Xavier parish. La Grange Park locations were Village Hall, La Grange Park Public Library, and Plymouth Place. Recycling holiday lights saves not only landfill space but also significant amounts of energy. Recycling the copper wire reduces the mining of copper ores, an energy intensive process that damages ecosystems and releases toxic gases. Additionally, copper is a valuable finite resource that warrants conservation.

Connected with the community at local events

Peace Camp La Grange (June) – EQC Commissioner attended Peace Camp and taught kids how to recycle items that are Empty, Clean, and Dry.

140th Village of La Grange Birthday celebration (August) – EQC commissioners attended the event at Village Hall to celebrate the Village's history and support its continued health and prosperity.

Park District of La Grange board meeting (September) – Upon invitation from a park district commissioner, the EQC chair and an EQC commissioner attended a regularly scheduled park district board meeting to present an overview of the EQC and describe current activities, including the Village of La Grange's participation in the Greenest Region Compact of the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus.

Peace & Justice Meeting at St. Francis Xavier (October) – Upon invitation from the Director of Community Outreach, the EQC chair attended a peace and justice meeting to report on upcoming collections and ongoing environmental initiatives of the EQC.

Ribbon cutting for permeable pavement parking lots (October) – To show support for green infrastructure, EQC commissioners attended the ribbon cutting ceremony. The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD) and the Village of La Grange partnered to construct two permeable parking lots using permeable pavers at 53 S La Grange Rd and 20 W Harris Ave. Between the two installations, a total design retention capacity (DRC) of 94,974 gallons of stormwater per rain event was created.

Halloween Walk (October) – In partnership with the La Grange Business Association, the EQC distributed candy and provided information about composting pumpkins.

Holiday Walk (December) – In partnership with the La Grange Business Association, the EQC distributed cookies and provided information about waste reduction and holiday light recycling.

Reported recommendations to the Village Board

Increasing access to and adoption of solar energy in the Village of La Grange (April) – In a written report to the Village Board, the EQC recommended that the Village of La Grange support access to solar energy by waiving fees for solar installation projects, removing regulations that strictly prohibit solar panels from facing the front lot line of a home, and sourcing energy for parking and street lights from renewable sources.

Recommendations for waste hauling services in the Village of La Grange (August) – In a written report to the Village Board, the EQC recommended features for the village's next waste hauling contract. The EQC researched the issue by hosting a public meeting, consulting several waste haulers, and visiting a local recycling center. The EQC recommended a volume-based waste hauling program that charges households according to the amount of waste produced. A volume-based system is fair and encourages waste reduction, which has health and environmental benefits. The EQC also recommended several additional program features, including food-scrap composting, recycling education, elimination of free recycling and trash amnesty days, and waste auditing by the hauler.

Received education and/or training on environmental issues

Metropolitan Mayors Caucus Greenest Region Compact (GRC) – EQC commissioners became more acquainted with the goals of the GRC, which is a collaboration of Chicago communities, including La Grange, that are working together to make our region more sustainable. Several EQC commissioners attended Metropolitan Mayors Caucus workshops that help communities reach the goals outlined in the GRC.

Ethylene Oxide emissions – EQC chair attended public meetings to learn about emissions of ethylene oxide and the effects on the local community. In February 2019, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency closed the Willowbrook Sterigenics facilities because of concerns about emissions and the associated risk of developing cancer from breathing toxic air pollution over a lifetime. Sterigenics announced in September that it was ending operations in Willowbrook.

Urban forest – At the December EQC meeting, the La Grange Public Works Director gave a presentation on the management of the urban forest, highlighting issues specific to La Grange. He provided data on trees in La Grange, related the goals and tasks of the Forestry Division, and discussed tree preservation and removal policy. He also demonstrated how the department is using technology to manage tree maintenance and the inventory of trees.

Quarry blasting – Three EQC commissioners toured the local quarry and learned about the techniques currently used to mine limestone from the quarry, including the move to underground mining. La Grange Village Manager provided the EQC with a brief history of the quarry blasting and reported that progress has been made in working with the quarry to address resident concerns.

Public Works Department operations – At the July EQC meeting, the EQC toured the Public Works building and learned about several environmental issues routinely addressed by the department, including water main breaks, lead service lines, streetlight replacement, fleet efficiency, and best management practices related to road salt. The Public Works Director demonstrated how the department tracks water systems, streetlight functioning, and vehicle idling through the use of computers and GIS applications.

Edgewood Ave reconstruction – At the October EQC meeting, the La Grange Public Works Director gave a detailed presentation on the options being considered for reconstruction of Edgewood Avenue between 47th Street and 52nd Place.

Residential waste hauling – Three EQC commissioners toured a local materials recovery facility to see how items from single-stream recycling are sorted and prepared for sale to recyclers. They also learned how contamination impacts the recycling process.

Recycling at local businesses – Two EQC commissioners surveyed several local business owners about their recycling practices and needs. The EQC continues to explore options for helping business owners recycle more items with greater ease.

Conclusion

To protect the health, safety, and welfare of La Grange residents, the EQC will continue to strengthen its relationships with residents and organizations in the community and assist them in conserving natural resources and preventing pollution. Commissioners remain committed to identifying environmental threats, pursuing education on environmental issues, and recommending policies and practices that protect the environment for current and future La Grange residents.

Respectfully submitted,
The Village of La Grange Environmental Quality Commission