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December 2019 SSMN News

Think globally, work locally for a cleaner, greener, more livable Stillwater future.

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In this issue: Transportation Survey, Bird City, Rep. Shelly Christensen, Will Steger, GreenStep Sign, Bumblebee Corridor, Our New Chair, EV Show, Exciting 2020 Projects & More



Survey Results: Downtown Needs Work

Drum roll please! The results of our long-awaited Summer Transportation Survey are in, and as expected, Stillwater is sharply divided on a number of issues -- but we speak with one voice on a few. Namely: downtown truck traffic, motorcycle noise, crosswalks, and parking issues.

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83% were Stillwater residents, 8% were Stillwater business owners or employees, and 13% were visitors. Responses were from in-person interviews and via an online Google poll by SSSMN's Active Transportation Workgroup.

Heavy Construction Trucks Seen as a Negative

The public was asked if the volume of the large tractor-trailer and construction trucks on Main Street is positive or negative to downtown. A whopping 73% said the trucks are negative and 7% said positive. 77% wanted fewer big trucks downtown and only 10% were happy with the way things are. The vast majority (75%) of survey-takers said they would be in favor of a truck bypass route that allows trucks to avoid downtown altogether. Just 11% disagreed.

Heavy construction truck traffic travels on Main Street between rock quarries located north of Stillwater and the new St. Croix Crossings bridge throughout the day.

Unsafe Crosswalks

The second biggest negative was unsafe crosswalks. Asked if Stillwater should have better crosswalks with safer, more modern features, most people surveyed - 60.4% - said yes and 25.8% said no. There are at least four crosswalk areas on Main Street north of Myrtle that have no traffic lights nor electronic signals available to pedestrians. A similar situation exists at the crosswalk near the corner of Olive Street and Main Street near Lolo's restaurant. Parked vehicles often block sightlines of pedestrians as they step into the street, making it necessary for people to wave down traffic before they are noticed.

Shuttle Service

The majority of survey-takers also said they want better public transportation in Stillwater -- a shuttle service to handle tourist traffic as well as regularly scheduled bus service. Asked if Stillwater should create a seasonal weekend shuttle service so visitors can park their cars a distance away from downtown and take a shuttle into the city center, 61.4% said yes, 19.8% said no. A majority were also in favor of better public transit options to get around within Stillwater and get to other areas of the metro. 54% said yes and 26% said no.

Noise Still a Problem

A majority -- 48% -- said loud traffic noise is still a problem and needs better enforcement —

while 34% did not think motorcycle noise is a problem.

Bicycling Mecca Needs Work

When it comes to an expected influx of new bicycle enthusiasts flocking to Stillwater with the opening of the St. Croix Loop Trail in May 2020, Stillwater overwhelmingly is enthusiastic about this prospect — 80% think this will be good for the city. A majority of respondents, however, also felt that the city is not entirely safe for bicyclists outside the Brown's Creek/St. Croix Loop Trail. 47.1% said no, it is not safe, while 30% believe it is.

Paid Parking

The public was asked if they would favor paid metered parking downtown if the money is used for downtown pedestrian and bike safety improvements, but that prospect received mostly thumbs-down. Some 60% did not want paid parking while compared to 29% who were in favor.

Speed Limits

There was no consensus on questions related to speed limit reduction from 30mph to 25mph nor speed enforcement, sidewalk widening, bike lanes, or electric car charging spaces. However, on questions regarding the removal of parking spaces for bike lanes or sidewalk widening or the creation of a downtown parking-free boulevard, most said they were not in favor of such measures until downtown parking problems are solved.

Overview

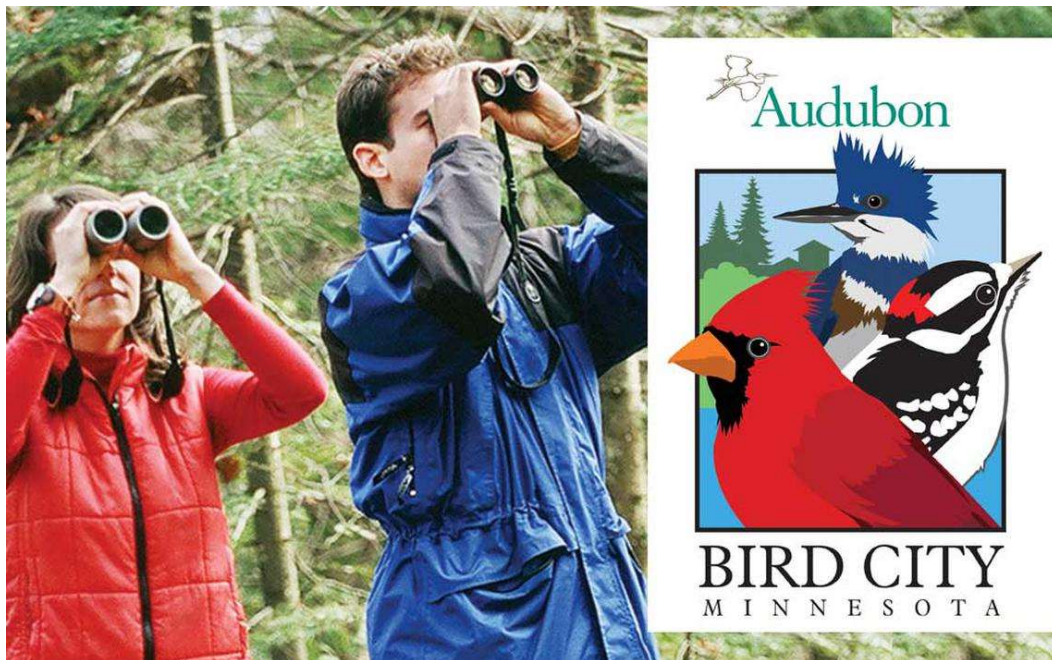
Sustainable Stillwater MN's downtown transportation survey was designed as a general, initial survey within Stillwater to capture themes about transportation preferences within the community and as a guide to create a dialog with city leaders and residents.

Responses may have been influenced by how much time survey-takers actually spend downtown, whether they park downtown, and whether they personally use bicycles. The survey did not intend to dive into complex issues and discussions like "how to" solve the parking issue.

The Active Transportation Workgroup aims to increase active transportation like cycling and walking to reduce the use of carbon-emitting vehicles. Recent initiatives include successfully working with the city to install the speed radar sign and to road striping on North Main Street.

Congratulations to Our New Chair!

Congratulations to Roger Tomten as our new Chair. Roger was co-chair with Louise Watson. Louise has stepped down but remains on the Board of Directors. Roger is a designer at Tomten Environmental Design in Stillwater and has served on the SSMN Board of Directors for several years. All of Roger's projects involve respect for the natural environment and a desire to create a sense of community. We appreciate his dedication to SSMN's work going forward and we're happy to have him!



Despite City Delay

First Meeting Scheduled

Our neighbors to the south and west, Hastings and St. Paul, are Audubon-certified Bird Cities, but not Stillwater ... yet. Despite a resolution on the agenda at the November City Council meeting to endorse Stillwater as an Audubon Bird City, the City Council did not bring it up for a vote, asking Community Development Director Bill Turnblad to take a closer look at what's on his plate already before committing to this new project. The City hopes to have that report from Turnblad at the December Council meeting. The city must pass the resolution as the first step to being certified by Audubon as a Bird City.

Once the city approves the resolution, the next step is to hold a Migratory Bird Festival. We are planning to hold it Saturday, May 23, 2020, at Washington Square Park in Stillwater from 10am to 1pm. This is planned as a family-friendly event featuring educational exhibits about birds, especially migratory birds, and how to protect them. International Migratory Bird Day will have children's activities at covered tables in the Park. We hope to have a bird "guest" and are in touch with the Raptor Center and Carpenter Nature Center about this. Local birders will be enlisted to lead bird walks before and during the festival. We hope to have materials and "tablers" on bird safety, including window safety and habitat. As part of our fundraising effort, at least \$1300 is to be raised for bird "rental," printing, art supplies, and posters.

Contact Sheila to join the Bird City team

doher4@comcast.net

The first SSMN Bird City Meeting will be held Dec. 4 at 6:30pm

Sunfish Lake Park, Lake Elmo [Click here for directions.](#)

The location of the Park Entrance road to the nature center is very close to 10000 Stillwater Lane North, Lake Elmo, MN. On Google Maps the nature center location is shown correctly in Sunfish Lake Park on "unnamed road" and the directions are correct.

Bird City helps birds by:

- Restoring, protecting and improving bird habitat
- Reducing threats such as window collisions, toxins, and harmful human activities, often due to a lack of understanding of birds' needs
- Engaging people in learning about, enjoying, and helping birds thrive

Being a Bird City would help Stillwater grow our community's environmental reputation by participating in this state-wide conservation program and displaying our Bird City status proudly. One in four Minnesotans considers themselves a birdwatcher – part of a \$40.1 billion dollar annual industry in the US. Wild birds pollinate flowers, disseminate seeds, and keep insect populations under control. Robust, diverse bird populations reflect the underlying health of the ecosystem in which they – and we – live. What affects birds affects people too. Birds can be seen almost anytime, anywhere, making them a perfect gateway to the natural world. Finding birds is a great way to get out and explore new places with friends and family. Birds help open our eyes to the diversity and interconnectedness of nature. Outdoor recreation reduces stress, improves creativity, increases fitness and promotes social connections and community pride.

Permalink: <https://www.sustainablestillwatermn.org/blog/bird-city-planning-starts>



Will Steger Urges Churches to Lead on Climate

Shocked to See Polar Melting Firsthand

The good news is that the youth today are a remarkable generation with the tools to organize. And we have a governor, Tim Walz, who is a role model in fighting climate change, said polar explorer and activist Will Steger. The bad news is that "three billion people at the bottom of the economic rung, who live in areas that will flood, will suffer the most." Will Steger spoke November 21, 2019, at St. Andrews Lutheran Church in Mahtomedi.

The world has less than a decade to stop the rapid pace of climate change and Steger knows first-hand what the burning of fossil fuels has wrought. In the 80s and 90s, his dogsleds traveled across ice 12 feet thick and even back then, melting was apparent as his sleds often faced standing water and sudden deep crevices during Antarctic winters. He was shocked, he said, to recently find thousands of miles of open water in those same places. The term "glacial pace," he said, no longer applies.

Since the 1990s, the earth's climate went from 350 parts per million (ppm) of carbon in the atmosphere, a layer on the earth "as thin as a sheet of paper on a basketball," to 415 ppm today.

Steger heads up the [Steger Center for Innovation and Leadership](#) in Ely, Minnesota, and its mission is to create the changes needed in society and technology to put fossil fuels back underground where they belong.



J. Drake Hamilton

Science Policy Director for [Fresh Energy](#), J. Drake Hamilton, gave reasons for hope. The US has reduced carbon emissions in the energy sector by 29% in the last ten years while the economy grew by the same percentage, she said. "This shows that wind and solar are up to the job."

By 2030, carbon emissions must be reduced by 40% according to the Paris Climate Accords, and the US is on track for that milestone. By 2050, however, we need to get to net-zero carbon, which means both an end to carbon-based fuels and implementation of the technology to remove the carbon that's already there. "Don't lose hope," said said. Even though Washington DC is doing nothing, "we have 50 state and local governments, not just the federal government."

She said that Minnesota, fortunately, is a clean energy leader. The state's 200 utilities, led by its largest utility, Xcel Energy, are on a path to 60% of our power from renewables by 2030, she said. Wind energy is already cheaper than fossil fuels, and solar is on track to be the same by 2021. She added that electric vehicles are emerging in Minnesota: 10,000 EVs are now on the road and 1.5 million are expected by 2030.

Diane Jacobson, a professor of the Old Testament at Luther College, said churches must not stand by silently but must be active participants in the solution. "Creation is standing as a witness against us, showing our sin. This world is not ours, but we are given the privilege of living here. We have a job to do."

Those sentiments were echoed by Buff Grace, formerly the pastor of Stillwater's Trinity Lutheran Church and now the director of the [Climate Justice Congregations of Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light](#). "Faith communities have a vital role to fight climate change. That is my calling. We are not just people of faith, but people of hope if we work together." He added, "You think this mass migration from Syria is something -- wait till you see what's coming. (Climate change is) a moral challenge, not a belief."

Permalink: <https://www.sustainablestillwatermn.org/blog/will-steger-urges-churches-to-lead-on-climate>

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(l to r) SSMN Board members: John Siekmeier, Kelsey Depew, Louise Watson, Roger Tomten, Wendy Gorski



Roger Tomten, SSMN Chair, Rep. Shelly Christensen, and Kelsey Depew, Board Member

Rep. Shelly Christensen Will Try Again to Pass Landmark Climate Legislation in 2020

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and is among the few lawmakers to be directly responsible for writing climate-related bills for Minnesotans.

It was a busy year during the last session. A wide variety of energy and climate-related bills passed out of her committee but unfortunately died in the Republican-controlled Senate that characterized them as "too extreme." Bills that were killed in the Senate included the Governor Walz-backed measure to mandate 100% renewable energy production by all of Minnesota's utilities 2050; the Clean Energy First bill that would have required utility companies to use clean energy to meet all increased demand going forward; the Community Solar Gardens bill that would have allowed solar gardens to increase in size from the current one megawatt to three megawatts; an electric vehicle bill providing rebates of \$2,500 and \$500 to buyers of new and used EVs, respectively. There was also a \$2.5 million grant program aimed at creating electric vehicle charging stations in public places, and there was \$5 million for the Prairie Island Indian Community to develop renewable energy systems.

Shelly's committee also created a Solar at Schools provision to allow the state's school districts to convert their buildings to solar energy. Energy is a school district's second-highest annual cost. That bill also died.

Minnesota is one of the states with the fastest rising average temperatures in the country, which has an impact on agriculture and our forests. Rep. Christensen vows to continue her work to get these bills passed in the next session that starts February 11, 2020.

Permalink: <https://www.sustainablestillwatermn.org/blog/rep-christensen-climate-legislation-in-2020>

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GreenStep Sign is Up!

Stillwater made it to the big leagues of sustainability by being recognized as a Minnesota [GreenStep City](#). The state sign is visible to all who drive into downtown from the south. What is Minnesota GreenStep Cities? It's a voluntary program to help cities achieve their sustainability and quality-of-life goals in areas like transportation, clean energy, green business practices, protection of our environment, and more. Sustainable Stillwater MN is the citizen advocacy group that is essential to making these GreenStep goals a reality, and it was our advocacy that helped to convince the City of Stillwater to join the program.



Stillwater Agrees to Create Bumblebee Corridor

Remember those furry bumblebees that were everywhere up until a few years ago? The rusty patched bumble bee has declined by 87 percent in the last 20 years. Sustainable Stillwater MN's Lawns to Legumes campaign is working with Greenstep Coordinator Graham Tait to change that. He agreed to administer the Lawns to Legumes state grant to cities that will pay property owners to convert their front yards and other open property to pollinator-friendly gardens. This is designed to enable the rusty patched bumblebee and other pollinating insects to thrive in an inviting corridor for their survival. The money is available from Minnesota's Board of Water and Soil Resources. To help in this effort, contact Mary Russell at russe021@umn.edu.

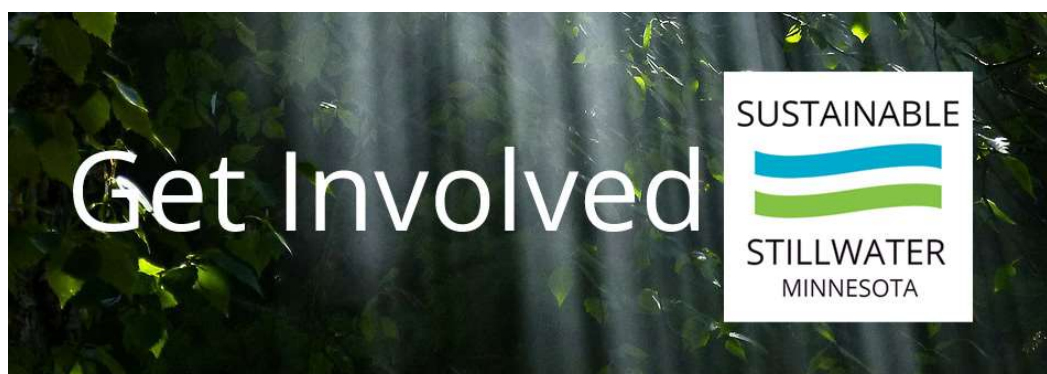
December Meeting Calendar

>>>The Active Transportation Workgroup will meet Dec. 9, 5:30 pm at the Stillwater Public Library, Third Floor Conference Room. We are moving ahead with directives from the survey results: public transit, crosswalks, the big truck problem in Downtown, and bike-friendly improvements. Join us as we make Stillwater more livable and walkable!

>>> Our Board of Directors meetings take place every first Wednesday of the month - the next one is December 4 -- and is open to the public at Community Thread, 2300 Orleans St. W, from 6.30-8.00 pm. For updated details or to get on the agenda contact Roger Tomten, chair, at sustainablestillwatermn@gmail.com.

>>> The GreenStep steering team meets the third Wednesday of the month 6:30pm – 8:00pm -- The next one is December 18. Stillwater Public Library, third floor. For updated details contact us at sustainablestillwatermn@gmail.com.

>>> The Bird City subgroup meets the evening of December 4. 6:30pm at Sunfish Lake Park Interpretive Center in Lake Elmo. [Click here for directions](#). Contact Sheila at doher4@comcast.net with questions and to let her know you can attend.



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we're in the initial stages of planning an EV show downtown on Earth Day, 2020. Are you an electric car owner? Have an interest in being part of it? Contact kevintholenminn@gmail.com

Recycle/Reuse/Reduce/Compost

Our recycling group is teaming up with Washington County to coordinate waste reduction/composting plans for Stillwater businesses in 2020 and residences in 2021. We expect a meeting of stakeholders at the start of the new year. If this is your interest or area of expertise, please get in touch at sustainablestillwatermn@gmail.com

Green Business Push

A Leadership in the Valley team, a project of the Greater Stillwater Chamber of Commerce, is working with Sustainable Stillwater MN's Chair Roger Tomten, and Communications Team and Board members, Kelsey Depew and Wendy Gorski. Our mentors are Kelly Stenerson of United Way, Trish Sisson of Stillwater Motors, Fire Chief Stuart Glaser, and Kevin Johnson of Forward Accounting. You'll be hearing more about our Green Business initiative soon.



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If you are already enrolled in [Smile.Amazon.Com](https://www.amazon.com/smile), sign in and click "Your Account," then, in the box at the bottom right of the screen in the section titled, "Go to Other Programs," select the first option: "Change your Charity." Type [Sustainable Stillwater MN](#) in the search box. We will appear on their list of eligible nonprofits.

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And a final request to read this great [reminder from Angie Hong](#) on salt use this winter.
How to reduce your salt use and still melt the ice!

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Stillwater MN 55082

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The editors are Wendy Gorski and Kelsey Depew.

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