

East Whatcom Community Council Clean Air Committee
Meeting summary
Jan. 15, 2014

Members Present: Sara Brennan, Rebecca Brown, Phil Cloward, Veronica Dearden, Jerry DeBruin, David Moe, Wain Harrison, Mark Schofield, Katie Skipper

1. Introductions

The group gave a round of introductions for the benefit of Sara Brennan, an intern with the Northwest Clean Air Agency, who was attending her first meeting of the Clean Air Committee.

2. Approval of Dec. 18, 2013 meeting summary

Wain moved to approve the meeting summary. Mark seconded. The summary was unanimously accepted.

3. Open public comment – A Columbia Valley resident named Rainbow stopped in to make sure that the Clean Air Committee was aware that a local group, Friends of the Foothills, was concerned about the proposed Red Mountain development. She suggested the Clean Air Committee contact Friends of the Foothills. Rainbow said the Friends of the Foothills had heard that many community members learned too late about the public comment period for Whatcom County's determination of nonsignificance, and they feel that the county should extend the comment period.

Action item: Contact Friends of the Foothills - **Katie**.

4. Additions/changes to the agenda - None.

5. Review and finalize draft stakeholder committee list

The group reviewed the stakeholder committee list, discussed whether all the right groups were represented, and the different stakeholder's level of involvement.

There was discussion about how best to represent different levels of county government and how to differentiate and categorize council committees, county executive, council, policy staff and operations staff.

The group agreed to add a row for the Whatcom County Council and note (in Column C, "Includes") that council committees are represented by that stakeholder group.

Wain said that he talked to Whatcom County Council member Carl Weimer to get the Clean Air Committee on the county council's agenda for a presentation at the end of March.

The group also agreed to add Friends of the Foothills to the stakeholder list as its own, separate stakeholder group.

At Phil's suggestion, log haulers were included in the wood products industry stakeholder group.

Phil said the group needed to focus some attention on who else was included in the different stakeholder groups (Column C).

Mark noted that the stakeholder group EWRRC staff are Opportunity Council staff, as well. He said he would be the appropriate person to invite a resource center staff person to participate on the committee.

The group agreed the list was final, with the understanding that it was flexible and would change as necessary.

The next step is to identify the appropriate individuals to represent each stakeholder group, and invite that person to participate. For those stakeholders who require consultation or a personal invitation, the group agreed they would assign committee members to contact them.

Action item: Communicate with Carl Weimer about putting the Clean Air Committee on the county council agenda – Wain

Action item: Identify individuals to represent stakeholder groups (or to consult with about who should represent stakeholder groups). Send ideas to Katie. Discuss contacts at next meeting and who will reach out to those who require consultation or personal invitations – **All**

Action Item: Discuss with Veronica and Phil any specific stakeholders they already have in mind – **Katie**

6. Discuss stakeholder messaging/invitations/outreach

The committee discussed the draft invitation letter for stakeholders. The group gave it preliminary approval and agreed to review it more closely and respond to Katie with any comments or suggestions. Katie would make any revisions and send it to Lou for approval and signature.

Veronica asked if the letter intentionally referred to the entire Foothills area, or if the committee was focusing specifically on the Columbia Valley portion. Katie explained that the charge of the committee is the whole thing, however, NWCAA's focus is just Columbia Valley because it's the only area where the agency has a monitor. The agency uses data collected at the monitor to compete for grants. But the group could consider Columbia Valley a pilot area, and eventually, any programs and tools that were shown to be successful there could be applied elsewhere.

Action item: Send edits/suggestions to stakeholder invitation letter to Katie – **All**

Action item: Make changes to stakeholder invitation letter and send to Lou for review - **Katie**

7. Discuss committee next steps, develop "business plan" – brainstorm necessary elements of a long-term strategy, benchmarks and timelines

Phil said the group needs a strategic plan that can be expanded to meet the needs of the committee, outlining clear, definable and mutually agreed upon goals and objectives. He said the group just needs to get a plan set up, get it going, and clean the air up. He emphasized that the group should not attempt to eliminate burning altogether.

The group brainstormed a framework for the plan. Katie offered to organize the brainstormed material and bring a draft back to the group at the next meeting.

Action item: Organize brainstormed business plan framework and bring back draft to the group to consider at the next meeting - **Katie**

8. Committee member reports

1. Proposed Red Mountain development

Katie explained that the Northwest Clean Air Agency submitted a comment letter regarding Whatcom County's State Environmental Policy Act determination of nonsignificance for the proposed Red Mountain development. The agency responded only to the air quality portions of the determination, and only on the agency's behalf, not on behalf of the committee. She said the agency disagreed with the determination based solely on the potential for the development to significantly add to existing air pollution, and identified areas in which the applicant's responses to the SEPA checklist were incomplete. The agency's main areas of concern were that the developer listed woodstoves as one of the primary energy sources for the homes, but

failed to identify them as potential sources of air pollution, failed to recognize the effect of pollution from existing development on the new development, and failed to propose any method of mitigating those issues. The agency detailed its involvement in the community and the investment it has made in trying to improve conditions. The agency recommended that the developer mitigate the impact of the development on air quality by not including any wood burning devices in the homes, instead using, perhaps, high efficiency electric ductless heat pumps with propane inserts as back up.

Katie and agency Executive Director Mark Asmundson met with the developer that morning. The developer was very interested in being helpful and collaborating to find mitigating conditions that are agreeable to the agency and to him.

Wain said he didn't think the Clean Air Agency's comment letter was adequate for the county to change its determination and that the agency would have to formally appeal. Katie said she would check into that.

Phil said he was surprised by the letter. He believes that the letter could have been much more positive. No matter what, there is going to be development. He said we have to be working towards getting the best air quality that we can in the face of the inevitable fact that there will be burning. Wain mentioned that the developer could, in fact, put restrictions and covenants on the land, however, they would not be enforceable by the city or state.

Phil said that he does not want to be super critical. He simply wants to make sure that we are going down the right road knowing what we want in the end. He said there were some very good points brought up in the letter, and he said everyone is entitled to express their opinion.

Katie said she understands where Phil is coming from. With what NWCAA has observed about the effect of poor burning practices, the agency sees the human element as a major factor on air quality, and a development of 84 homes with woodstoves could have a major negative effect.

Phil said that members of the committee are going to be at odds on some things, but we need to make sure, as a committee, that we are always on the same track, and the letter just added a little friction to the track.

Katie emphasized that the agency is not in favor of or opposed to the development, but is proposing mitigation.

Jerry said that he does not want the fire department to get too involved.

Rebecca said that the Washington Administrative Code states woodstoves may not be the primary heat source in new developments or restorations.

Wain stated that there is only so much the developer can do short of creating conditions on the development to compel people to not use wood or use it in the most efficient way, or least polluting way. He is unsure if the developer could ultimately compel people to do that.

Katie emphasized that NWCAA is not interested in taking away people's woodstoves, however, the agency is interested in making it possible for people to switch to alternative sources of heat if they choose to, and giving people the tools to burn cleanly if they choose to heat with wood.

Veronica wondered why NWCAA doesn't call burn bans when air quality is bad. Katie said while NWCAA has the authority to do that, it's not a long-run solution. In order for burn bans to be effective, the agency would have to pursue enforcement. Without community awareness of the problem and providing the community with opportunities for improvement, enforcement won't help achieve clean air. Veronica is concerned because her husband only has one lung, and he had to stay inside when the pollution levels spiked recently. She believes that sort of health effect should factor in to encourage burn bans in the region when needed.

Julie said the agency will eventually call burn bans, once the committee has done all it can do to help people reduce excessive smoke themselves.

Mark told the group that on Thursday, Jan. 30, the Opportunity Council is having a home energy conservation workshop for Head Start families that use the resource center. They will share ideas, strategize about saving money and energy in homes, and he is going to be pitching the woodstove replacement program. His goal is to see who is heating with wood and give them more resources and information about the program. He hopes that this event will engage more participants. Phil said that this is a great example of a community resource that we can use to create avenues to reach our goals.

Katie suggested Mark could use the survey that Rebecca used at the December Wood Heating Workshop to gather more information about why people heat with wood and what some of the issues are.

Action item: Find out whether NWCAA must appeal the county's DNS on the proposed Red Mountain development or if the comment letter submitted during the public comment period is sufficient – **Katie**

Action item: Provide survey to Opportunity Council for Jan. 30 event - **Rebecca**

9. Winter outreach check-in, update

1. Results from surveys collected at December public event (See attached) - **Rebecca**
Rebecca walked the group through the results of the survey collected during the December public event. In order to get a moisture meter, people had to fill out surveys regarding their use of woodstoves and issues related to heating with wood. Overall, Rebecca was not surprised at the responses. The biggest reason people say they heat with wood is that it costs less than propane and electricity. There is a need to figure out how to incentivize using alternative sources over wood for those people who would be willing to switch. People somewhat agree that air quality is an issue during winter months. People mainly get their wood from harvesting the material for themselves, or they get it from friends and family. They usually don't have to purchase it. This is consistent with what Rebecca is learning during the door-to-door outreach work she's participating in. People say they are seasoning their wood. Rebecca and Bob, another NWCAA inspector, were very surprised that on their outreach visits, the wood seemed well aged and dry. Not every house, however, wanted the inspectors to visit them and test their wood.

Julie added that while it is illegal to burn some construction or demolition debris, sometimes it isn't clear what is legal and what is illegal. The intended purpose and use of the wood is critical to know.

10. Action item follow-up:

1. Look into cost of having an air quality sign made – **Katie**
Signs By Tomorrow quoted \$815 for a sign. Katie is discussing placement of the sign with Jerry. Jerry said the fire department was willing to install the sign to save some money.

Veronica, on the topic of media, brought up that on KendallWatch's Facebook page, she has posted the direct link to the Clean Air Agency's Columbia Valley monitor. Prior to doing this, they simply had a link to NWCAA's homepage and were receiving very little activity. Since creating the direct link, however, the links have gotten more hits. Veronica and Jerry said that they would have the link added to the water district and fire department websites respectively.

2. Find someone to test the woodstove retrofit device – **Phil and Jerry (Katie has new information from Ecology)**

Katie said the Department of Ecology informed her that the retrofit device designs still have a number of steps to go through before its ready for installation, even as a

test case. It might be quite a while before its ready. But it would be great to have someone lined up who would be willing to try it.

3. Draft a letter for the committee to consider and discuss, inviting stakeholders to participate – **Katie - Done**
4. Approach county council members to request an invitation for the Clean Air Committee to make a presentation during an upcoming County Council meeting – **Wain – Done**
5. Clean Air Committee members will think about what to ask for from the NWCAA Board, and how best to ask for it – **All - ongoing**

11. Upcoming meetings, 4:30 – 6 p.m., East Whatcom Regional Resource Center:

Feb. 19	May 21	Aug. 20	Nov. 19
March 19	June 18	Sept. 17	Dec. 17
April 16	July 16	Oct. 15	

(meeting ended at 6:32 p.m.)