

East Whatcom Community Council Clean Air Committee
Meeting summary
April 16, 2014

Members present: Jerry DeBruin, David Moe, Rebecca Brown, Julie O'Shaughnessy, Katie Skipper, Phil Cloward, Lou Piotrowski, Veronica Dearden, Wain Harrison

Others present: Paul Schissler

1. **Introductions** – Members present introduced themselves for the benefit of Paul Schissler. Opportunity Council Executive Director Dave Finet asked Paul to attend the meeting to learn about it and see if he might be able to help the Opportunity Council in its work with the Foothills communities and the Clean Air Committee. Paul is a community development planner.
2. **April 7 subcommittee meeting** – Lou said a subcommittee met to discuss a business plan framework. In attendance were Dave Finet, Port of Bellingham Commissioner Mike McCauley, Paul Schissler, Lou and Phil.

Lou said the subcommittee had not approved and reviewed the notes from the meeting, so he wasn't comfortable sharing them with the group.

3. **Approval of March 19 meeting summary** – Katie missed the previous meeting, and asked for clarification on the part of the notes that talk about a business plan and a strategic plan. She wanted to know if the business plan in the notes was meant to be a business plan for the work of the Clean Air Committee, or if it was meant to be a plan to actually develop businesses.

Phil said the business plan and the strategic plan are different. He feels the strategic plan is the framework for the group's work. Within that framework, he said the group needs to create a business plan that discusses positive outreach and obtaining wood, managing wood as a resource, where the money is going to come from to start the business, and other standard items.

He said the businesses that need to be developed are the wood bank and possible other ancillary businesses.

Katie said she thought it was a good time to revisit the committee charge. She read it aloud, and said she felt like the group was taking some actions that didn't seem to be clearly related to the charge. She was uncomfortable with putting the Northwest Clean Air Agency in a position to develop and help fund a business.

Phil objected, saying he and the agency really are not on the same page, and that's been concerning him all along.

4. **Business planning subcommittee** -- Lou turned the discussion to the subcommittee meeting. He said he made a point during the meeting to focus on the committee charge and started the meeting by reading the Clean Air Committee charge. He said the subcommittee was 100 percent in agreement with staying within the charge of the committee. Lou gave the history of the committee and read the charge. He said everybody understood that the purpose is to improve the air quality of the area.

Lou said Phil talked about the wood bank. He talked about the potential for a biomass business. Phil and Lou both served on the subarea advisory committee about seven years ago, and had a light industrial business zone written into the county comprehensive plan. The possibility of light industry is something the Foothills area hasn't had before. It's about 40 acres on Limestone Road. One of the things they talked about was to provide wood that's dry, or perhaps manufactured logs. They haven't settled on any of these things. Phil said the idea was that they would pursue some business plan and business development for pellets, or logs, or possibly some other light industrial development as part of the Clean Air Committee strategic plan.

Lou said one thing that has become an interesting perspective for him is that pellet stoves are really quite clean. He thought the group should consider making pellets and selling them in the valley.

Lou said Dave Finet from the Opportunity Council talked about the Energy Assistance Program and woodstove change-out program. The Opportunity Council purchased the equivalent of 240 cords of wood for people in the Columbia Valley who cannot afford wood to burn. He said to get manufactured logs is inconvenient because they have to go down to the Whatcom Farmers Co-op in Nooksack.

Lou said there was an interest on Dave Finet's part to provide something like a dry wood bank or other wood product industry to get dry wood in the area. He felt there was a real connection for the Opportunity Council with the wood bank. The reason the Opportunity Council has gone away from firewood was that they didn't want to cope with people complaining about the quality.

Lou said Mike McCauley from the Port of Bellingham didn't think the port would be interested in the wood bank. He thought the port could be interested in a program to make use of biomass – pellets or logs or any kind of solid fuel. He also said he would get back to them and had a lot of questions about whether there was enough biomass in our area, and Phil was quick to answer that there is plenty.

5. **Clarifying NWCAA role** – In the interest of wrapping up and making any necessary changes to the summary notes of the last meeting, Katie reiterated her discomfort with involving the agency in such a business-heavy process. The agency does not have a business development component, and it could create a conflict if the agency was providing financial assistance to residents to purchase products from a business the agency helped pay for and develop. The agency also would find it difficult to throw so much support behind solid fuel-burning, generally, because improper burning contributes so much to the air quality problems in the valley. Katie was concerned that the group had gotten ahead of itself a little, diving into a business plan without a strategic plan that outlined what solutions the group had agreed to pursue.

Katie also said she disagreed with – as a portion of the notes from the last meeting describes – moving the strategic planning out of the full committee and into the subcommittee, which the Clean Air Agency was not able to participate in. The committee charge is to “work jointly with the Northwest Clean Air Agency to develop a comprehensive, community-based, long-range plan designed to improve the air quality in the East Whatcom County Region.” The strategic plan should be the core work of the full committee. She was concerned that the true purpose of the committee, to improve the unhealthy air quality, was becoming secondary to local economic development.

Phil said he could not agree with the Northwest Clean Air Agency’s support of fossil fuels. He said the agency’s position was obliterating what the committee is trying to do for the community. He said Columbia Valley has a ready source of affordable heat, and it’s well within the charge of the committee to develop those businesses.

He said he had wasted his time with the group for the last year and left the meeting.

Wain said he was surprised to hear Katie’s discomfort with the direction the group was taking. He said this is something the committee had been talking about from the start. He said the group had agreed they weren’t going to eliminate woodstoves or solid fuel burning appliances, so they should be looking at ways to make cleaner solid fuel sources available. Now they’re looking at taking advantage of the fact that there’s a light industrial zoning. The natural extension would be not just to make that fuel available, but it would make it locally manufactured.

Julie said that light impact industry could potentially add to the air pollution that would trigger permitting by the agency. That would create a conflict. When we’re thinking about developing clean, dry alternatives to wet fuel, we have to be thoughtful and ask ourselves: How does this look? Do we need to tread lightly in how and to what degree we were to get involved with a business of wood production?

Katie asked Wain how he felt about supporting business development on behalf of the county.

Wain said the pressed log facility on Grandview is actually on property within county jurisdiction, and he believes it’s outright permitted in that zone. He’s not sure how the solicitation of that business might occur. But it doesn’t mean he couldn’t participate in facilitation of the larger strategic plan of this committee.

Lou said there were a lot of similarities in planning for the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center building. Some people could do some things, and others could not. Different groups had to work together to make it happen.

Lou said Phil’s concept of a wood bank has always been a business concept. People have to get paid, and his idea has always involved the concept of sweat equity and that would be tracked. He said the Opportunity Council got out of the business because it didn’t want to work with wood purveyors. But he said there’s still an opportunity for that kind of a service locally.

Wain said he thinks it’s fair if the Northwest Clean Air Agency sits down and reviews its charter and looks closely at the committee charge and decides it can’t participate in some activities. But

the group agreed that getting people to abandon solid fuel culture wasn't practical, partly because of power outages, and even if gas was available, the agency still can't compel people to connect to it, and propane is expensive.

Katie said she agreed they weren't going to eliminate woodstoves and said the agency isn't interested in that. But she said she also had been talking from the start about developing a multi-faceted strategy for people who were interested in options besides wood burning. Not everyone wants to burn wood to stay warm, but some feel like they have no choice. She said the entire reason the agency was involved was because the agency's air quality monitor shows a particulate pollution problem. Air quality is bad enough to violate the health-based standard, and particulate comes from burning wood. She recognizes and appreciates Phil's bias for wood, and, although the agency promotes curbing fossil fuel use to address global climate issues, the problem that needs to be addressed locally, in Columbia Valley is particulate pollution, and solutions that reduce wood-burning will address the particulate problem. So, in this case, the agency is open about its preference for electricity and fossil fuels for heat.

Rebecca said that in the course of her outreach work this winter, she had only talked to a few people who really like burning wood for heat. She said most would embrace another option if they felt they could afford it.

Julie said a lot of the debate could come down to a matter of semantics. The agency is just saying it needs to stay in its own lane, and that businesses could be one of the spokes that lead back to the same hub.

Jerry asked if we should work together anymore. Maybe the business development should become a separate group.

Veronica and Rebecca said they thought that might be best.

Veronica said Laura from the Northwest Clean Air Agency approached KendallWatch eight years ago, and it was all about health then, especially the health of children, and reducing smoke emissions. The community has seen the progress. The agency has been monitoring it, the woodstove exchange program went in. She thinks it should be two committees: health and welfare could be one committee, and building of business another committee.

Lou went back to Julie's analogy of spokes of a wheel. He said there is more than one way to get to an issue. He and Wain go way back. There are certain things he knows he can't ask Wain to do. That doesn't mean they can't work together. They can cooperate and actually have a greater impact, and Lou hopes that's what the group is trying to do.

Jerry said maybe Phil and others could develop the businesses to provide dry wood, and the agency could figure out on its own how to help people pay for their heat when they can't burn.

Wain said he has spent his whole career being hypersensitive to conflict of interest. He understands that concern. He said he can see possibilities to make that a clean and a direct line. We haven't abandoned the idea that people are going to burn wood and one of the solutions is to get dry wood to people. It doesn't do them any good if they have to drive far and get it back here. There still will be some business component, even if it's nonprofit. He thinks that's a

defensible stance – even if it’s doing business with a for-profit company. Part of the broader picture was to bring jobs to this area. Brining local jobs to Columbia Valley is a primary concern and a very difficult obstacle to overcome. Giving people the ability to raise their income will give them the opportunity to operate on a different level, not burning garbage or anything they can get their hands on.

Lou said he has a bias, too, to try and keep the committee together as it is. It takes more than one way to get at this to develop a solution. He thinks the business things are going to be a requirement if they’re going to make a wood bank operate effectively. They’re going to need some way to monitor expenses. He think co-ops are a possibility in both of these businesses that the group has talked about. He said he would never advocate for a light impact industry that would mess up the situation there, given the topography. He thinks the group can accomplish more and come at this issue if they are very careful not to ask the agency to do things it shouldn’t do.

Julie said it’s important to hear different opinions to get the best product. She doesn’t think the two priorities are exclusive, especially after seeing the level of commitment people have shown in the community for projects like the community center. She said she thinks the group can find solutions if everyone is committed to the process and being clear about differing roles.

Katie said there should be a clear distinction – it should be clear that the subcommittee is developing businesses to support the work of the clean air committee, which is developing a long-term strategy to reduce air pollution.

Paul said he thinks that’s a good distinction.

Wain said, as the Fire Marshal, his concern is that a pressed log facility has a good sprinkler system.

Jerry was concerned that as the process develops, the different interests are going to create friction.

Julie used the white board to clarify the areas that might be appropriate for the Clean Air Committee and the subcommittee:

Clean Air Committee	Subcommittee
Clean air	Utilization of biomass
Education and outreach	Job creation
Stakeholder involvement	Stakeholder involvement

Paul said he liked that clarification. He also suggested another way to think about it might be a circle with spokes, or the pieces of the pie, with the division of labor and which agencies get involved in implementing the different strategies as the pieces.

Lou saw similarities to the work he did with another group on the capital facilities plan. He said it took three years to get that done. Sometimes the group met weekly. Sometimes it was two

weeks, but never less than two or three times a month, and it took three years. He said that's one of the things that he wants to keep in the back of his mind. He'd like to keep the full Clean Air Committee group together once a month, but he thinks there are going to have to be other groups that have to be doing some work to make this thing happen. He said it's not an effort to take away from the charge of the group. The Clean Air Committee would be the guiding group at the top, and other groups can come up against the line between the appropriate areas for the committee and subcommittees to work on.

Katie asked Lou if he really wanted to meet more than once a month.

Jerry said he thought Katie might be underestimating the commitment of people in the community. He said they'll do what it takes to get things done.

The group agreed that Phil's participation was valuable, and it was important to reach out to him to see if he would be willing to come back to the table.

6. **Air quality sign** - Lou thanked Katie and NWCAA for making the new air quality sign happen. Katie thanked Jerry and David for framing and installing it, and for their willingness to update it. Veronica said she announced it on the KendallWatch Facebook page.
7. **Winter outreach program evaluation** – Lou said that he was working with Rebecca on some evaluation tools. He said that if the group was going to make a difference, it wasn't going to be in a day. It's going to be a mean difference. We'll have to dig deeper into the data. At this point, it will be helpful to include anecdotal experiences. He's going to put together some questions to use in the evaluation process and send them out for people to consider. He hopes we can talk about them at the next meeting.

Action item: Lou will put together winter outreach evaluation questions and send them out for people to consider before the next meeting.

Action item: Katie and Lou will finalize the draft invitation letter.

Action item: Carry remaining agenda items forward to next meeting.