

East Whatcom Community Council Clean Air Committee (CAC)

Meeting summary

February 4, 2015

4:30-6:00 pm

CAC Charge: The charge of the East Whatcom Community Council Clean Air Committee 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.

Committee Guidelines:

1. Listen to understand, not to respond; seek clarity.
2. Voice opinions and questions openly in the meeting and not after; speak for yourself; everyone's opinion is valuable and worthy of attention.
3. Conflict over a topic is healthy; take nothing personally; engage in debate.
4. Do not expect consensus or certainty.
5. Explain why you don't agree with a proposal, but when a decision is made, buy in.
6. If people look like they have something to say, encourage them to speak.

Chair: Lou Piotrowski (excused)

Acting Chair: Phil Cloward

Members: Jerry DeBruin & David Moe, WCFPD #14; John Wolpers, Whatcom County Health Department; Mark Schofield & Kyle White, OppCo; Veronica Dearden, Kendall Watch Community Action Group; Kurt Thompson, community member; Viktor Vetkov, Slavic Church; Wain Harrison, Whatcom County; Rebecca Brown & Julie O'Shaughnessy, NWCAA

Present: Phil Cloward, Jerry DeBruin, David Moe, John Wolpers, Mark Schofield, Wain Harrison, Rebecca Brown, and Julie O'Shaughnessy

Agenda items:

1. **Introductions** – No introductions necessary. Only committee members present.

2. **Approval of January 21, 2015 meeting minutes**

Rebecca – Clarified that in the outreach portion of the minutes, no woodstove enforcement action has occurred for the Columbia Valley area.

Mark – Identified a typo on Page 4 under Phil's comments. Change "than" to "that."

Motion:

- Mark Schofield moved to approve minutes, as amended.
- Wain Harrison seconded the motion.

3. **Open public comment** – No public comment.

4. **Announcements**

Mark – Updated the committee on Opportunity Council's efforts to connect with residents who may qualify for the woodstove replacement program. Opportunity Council met with people at Misty Mountain Realty. Outreach was slow, but Opportunity Council staff was able to follow-up with several residents on their paperwork. Staff will be at the resource center again tomorrow morning and Misty Mountain Realty in the afternoon.

5. Burn ban

Phil – Agenda item added to address talk in the community that a burn ban would be called next wood-heating season. Talk has died down, but there is still concern that sufficient time needs to be provided to allow the wood bank to be established and provide residents with dry wood. Several people (Port Commissioner, Whatcom County Council member, and resident) were interested in attending this meeting to voice support for the wood bank. It may be worthwhile to address NWCAA’s Board of Directors again to update them on the proactive plan (wood bank) to improve air quality.

Julie – Clarified that her burn ban comments made last meeting were driven by internal budget planning conversations. NWCAA’s intention is to start calling burn bans after everything that can, should, and would be done to help the community succeed is complete. If all these things, especially the wood bank, are not complete by next wood-heating season then burn bans would likely not be called. It’s critical that all efforts are congruent in supporting the overall effort of clean air. It is also critical that details of the wood bank progress are provided to the committee. Julie also emphasized that burn bans are not continuous once called, but are intermittent based on projected and existing air quality.

Rebecca – Stressed the importance of dry wood even when the wood stove is certified. A recent complaint response found that a person with a certified stove was admittedly burning wet wood. Rebecca provided help to obtain dry wood via Opportunity Council.

Jerry – Asked if there was anything more that could be done to address repeat offenders who are known to put out a lot of smoke and cause impacts to neighbors. Complainants who have contacted the fire department regarding wood stove smoke have been directed to the NWCAA to file a complaint.

Rebecca – Reiterated the need for complaints, but said that people are tired of registering complaints because no enforcement action has occurred. That’s why, in her opinion, burn bans are a good thing because they open the door for NWCAA to take enforcement action. Overall, complaints in the Columbia Valley area are lower than in other communities and complaints are not always filed on houses that continue to smoke.

Phil – Said he sees a difference between repeat offender that constantly violates and the need for a burn ban.

Julie – Acknowledged the need to develop strategy to “reach” people who have been contacted on an educational basis and continue to smoke, but for whom no complaints are filed. Perhaps a targeted educational effort after general outreach, for those homes who continue to smoke, is appropriate.

Rebecca – Said that the threat of enforcement can be productive and that people are frustrated that they are identified as smoky when their neighbor is not.

Phil – Disagreed.

Wain – Said that a combination of both is good and that it’s sometimes difficult to change behavior.

Julie – Reiterated that NWCAA will be imposing and enforcing burn bans, it’s just a matter of when. The agency already can and will take enforcement action in response to complaints about verifiable sources of excessive smoke. .

Phil – Acknowledged that there is no question that enforcement will occur at some point in the future.

Rebecca – Stated the need to get residents set up with a clean, alternative source of heat (electric, for example) so that when a burn ban is called, they are ready. She also emphasized the health impact that residents are currently experiencing during poor air quality days and that some of the residents are new to the area and are impacted by smoke.

Phil – Reflected on the 1950's when air quality was extremely poor and the improvement made since then and that many of the same people still live here.

John – Supported the two-stage approach of education and enforcement. A similar approach is used in programs administered by the health department.

Phil – Said that although much outreach and education effort has been put forth, additional outreach and dry wood (wood bank) need to be completed prior to implementing a burn ban. He asked if a motion that provides sufficient time to establish the wood bank prior to implementing any bans would be useful.

Julie – Provided an overview of the varying levels of curtailed burning and burn bans: 1) Poor Air-quality Advisory (may be renamed) that asks people to use another source of heat if possible; 2) Stage 1 ban (no outdoor fires and no burning in fireplaces or uncertified woodstoves; and 3) Stage 2 ban (no burning of any kind unless it's your only source of adequate heat). The optimum approach is to implement the advisory to prevent air quality from worsening, thus avoiding Stage 1 and Stage 2 bans. Rebecca is working on the NWCAA committee to develop burn ban implementation protocol which includes how advisories or bans will be communicated to the public. NWCAA commits to clearly communicating to the committee and the public the implementation of burn bans in a transparent and predictable manner.

Jerry – Reiterated the need to keep up the educational outreach and wood bank efforts through this fall and winter, regardless of when NWCAA implements burning restrictions.

7. Biomass committee update (wood bank)

Wain – Asked if it's realistic to have the wood bank in place by next fall because the wood bank may have a positive effect on air quality.

Phil – Said that he is confident that the wood bank will be in place by September 15th and will have approximately 150 cords of wood. People receiving wood will have to store the wood in a manner that keeps it dry. Phil proposed the consideration of a motion that would delay the imposition of burn bans until the impact of the wood bank can be observed.

John – Stated that the committee as a whole appears to be in agreement in providing sufficient time to establish the wood bank prior to imposing burn bans.

Wain – Commented to Phil that it's important and not too early for him to consult with the County Planning & Development Services office to determine what is required to locate the wood bank on specific parcels. Wain checked and found commercial zoning, but no light impact industrial zoning. Not sure if a conditional use permit or some other discretionary permit, which could take months, would be required. Wain does not want permitting to be an obstacle in establishing the wood bank. Wain will look into the zoning on his own.

Phil – Said conditional use permits or discretionary permits are not desirable and that current zoning (commercial) allows for the location of the wood bank adjacent to the resource center. The wood bank would be Phase 1. The Opportunity Council prefers this location as well. Phil acknowledged the need to meet with the County and with the Parks Department who manages this site.

Julie – Asked for clarification on the motion.

John – Requested additional discussion prior to making the motion to ensure that zoning issues are ferreted out and compatible for the intended use.

Phil – Said that the wood bank needs a secure place to store (keep dry) and distribute the wood. A hoop building, 30' x 60', at the resource center site would accomplish this. Currently, there are matching funds from the Port of Bellingham and the Department of Commerce and a firm commitment from the Opportunity Council. The Economic Development Institute of Skagit County is also willing to contribute \$10,000 so there is now money to buy the building (cost of \$18,000). Wood purveyors have been contacted and will be providing dry wood for startup. The program will include an educational component on how to keep the wood dry. Packaging the wood on pallets is being investigated for ease of handling and delivery. The biomass committee continues to develop the specific details of the project and secure available funding.

Jerry – Suggested the idea that picking up garbage might be considered labor credit for the wood bank.

Rebecca – Proposed that wood bank recipients pledge to burn properly.

John – Furthered the expectation that wood bank participants investigate the possibility of obtaining a certified stove via the change-out program.

Phil – Expanded expectations to include mandatory garbage pickup or proof of proper disposal. Participants will also be educated on how to burn properly and woodstove change-out will be highly encouraged via the Opportunity Council.

John – Voiced concern as to whether or not one wood-heating season is sufficient to determine the impact of the wood bank on air quality.

Julie, Wain, and Phil – Said that although we may not have multi-year data, an extension past next wood-heating season is not realistic. At that point in time, all practical pro-active measures will have been taken and the imposition of burn bans would be appropriate if air quality warrants it.

Motion:

Jerry – Moved that the Clean Air Committee supports the delay of burn ban(s) implementation during the 2015-2016 wood heating season (November 2015-March 2016) to allow for the establishment and operation of the wood bank to provide Columbia Valley residents with dry wood and potentially improve air quality.

Wain – Seconded the motion.

In favor – Phil Cloward, Jerry DeBruin, David Moe, John Wolpers, Mark Schofield, Wain Harrison Phil, Wain, Jerry, Dave.

Opposed – None

Abstained – Rebecca Brown and Julie O'Shaughnessy (NW Clean Air Agency staff)

10. Air monitoring update

Julie – Clarified that missing monitoring data for the Azure station shows up as a gap in the graph and in the spreadsheet. A chart of annual exceedances since 2010 and a monthly summary of November and December exceedances was provided. The correlation between the air quality index (AQI) which “normalizes” all criteria pollutants and PM2.5 data was made. As an example, 35 micrograms per cubic meter is equal to 100 on the AQI scale.

2015 meetings, 4:30 – 6:00 p.m. - EWRRRC, 8251 Kendall Road, Maple Falls, WA:

Jan. 21	April 1	July 1	Oct. 7
Feb. 4	May 6	Aug. 5	Nov. 4
March 4	June 3	Sept. 2	Dec. 2