

East Whatcom Community Council Clean Air Committee
Meeting summary
April 6, 2016

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.

Chair: Phil Cloward, East Whatcom Community Council

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

Present: Phil Cloward, Mark Schofield, John Wolpers, Jerry DeBruin, Julie O'Shaughnessy

Agenda items:

1. Introductions – No introduction necessary. Only committee members present.

2. Approval of March 2, 2016 meeting summary

Motion:

- John Wolpers moved to approve meeting notes.
- Mark Schofield seconded the motion.

3. Open public comment – No public comment.

4. Announcements

Julie – Ordered appreciation awards for the Mount Baker and Nooksack Valley High School teachers and students who are building 100 woodsheds as part of the community effort to improve air quality in the Columbia Valley area. Julie contacted both school districts to request attendance at an assembly, board meeting, or perhaps both, to say thank you for their efforts. NWCAA's Director or Deputy Director will present the award and all Clean Air Committee members are invited to attend.

5. Cord wood vendors and vouchers

Mark – Last meeting a question came up as to whether or not dry wood could be delivered prior to October 1 of each year. Because the cord wood voucher program is part of the federal LIHEAP program (energy assistance), which runs from October 1 – March 31, it is not currently possible. Lorena Shah, of Opportunity Council, said that in the future there may be a way to purchase dry wood and make it available prior to October 1.

Julie – Asked if cord wood recipients could be pre-qualified prior to October 1 for the current heating season to help expedite delivery.

Mark – There is not a way to pre-qualify recipients prior to a particular heating season since current information is used to determine eligibility annually.

Phil – Suggested that similar to the State Department of Commerce grant received by the Biomass Committee, the Washington Wood Co-op may be able to pursue a grant from the State Department of Commerce to buy cord wood and make it available earlier than October 1. Phil encouraged the consideration of creative solution to address this challenge.

Mark – A second question from last meeting was whether or not qualifying wood vendors outside of the Columbia Valley could participate in the program. The original RFQ was intended to focus the positive economic impact on the Columbia Valley, if the vendors could meet the wood demand. Shah is open to soliciting wood purveyors outside of the valley and will leave it up to the committee to recommend the criteria for expansion. She will include the expanded criteria in the RFQ if submitted by mid-July.

Phil – The original wood bank program limited wood vendors to vendors in the valley. Of the four potential vendors, two participated. Phil recommended that eligibility be expanded to vendors outside of the Columbia Valley area to meet the demand.

Jerry – Received a question from a vendor about the amount of liability insurance necessary to participate in the program.

Mark – Insurance requirements are included in the RFQ.

Julie – Asked how long it takes to qualify residents for heating assistance once applications are received by Opportunity Council staff.

Mark – Once a residence comes in for their appointment, their reward is fairly immediately. For example, for electric it's sent right then to PSE. For wood the slowdown may be scheduling the delivery to the house. Realistically, clients could start receiving wood by mid-October. Mark will work with Lorena to see if wood can be delivered outside of the LIHEAP timeframe to help prepare for the following wood-heating season since program qualification is good for a year from the approval date.

Phil – Reminded the committee that the overall intent of the wood bank program is to be multi-faceted and provide wood to all residents, not just residents who qualify for the LIHEAP program.

Jerry – Supported the concept of a wood bank that helps to provide a broader public service. Fire department call-outs where residents are found to be freezing with no available fire wood are an example of a broader need. FYI, the fire department provided 3 cords of wood this winter to residents in need. Several suppliers were contacted and none had wood available for that purpose. Vendors will need to make sure that they have adequate supply to satisfy the demand if they want to participate in the program.

Mark – Asked if the committee wanted to discuss additional vendors today or at our next meeting. The committee as a whole responded that it is open to adding vendors and engaging in further discussion.

Phil – Said that gathering names and information about potential additional vendors and discussing the topic at the next meeting may be most beneficial.

6. Biomass committee update

Phil – The biomass committee has morphed into the Washington Woodland Cooperative which currently has an appointed board until an elected board is in place. The purpose is to promote value-added forest products. Still need to meet with Wain Harrison regarding structure permitting requirements. Also met informally with Lehigh representative about leasing the light industrial area located off Limestone Road, inside Columbia Valley UGA.

7. Residential woodsheds; construction & delivery update

Julie – Complimented Phil and the delivery crew for their excellent job in delivering woodsheds to Columbia Valley residents. Approximately 65 applications have been submitted and 50 woodsheds have been delivered.

Phil – Said that last weekend, they delivered 6 sheds within 45 minutes!

Julie - The woodshed application and program description were translated into Spanish at the request of EWRRRC Opportunity Council staff after experiencing the need with a Spanish speaking resident. Translation of the application and program description into Russian also seems prudent to ensure accessibility to all Columbia Valley residents.

Jerry – Offered help with translating documents, via Russian-speaking fire district staff. He also delivered to the Slavic Church, the English-to-Russian translated post-cards that included promotion of the woodshed program.

Phil – Said that he would contact Viktor Vetkov, Pastor of the Slavic Church, and ask for his assistance and/or suggestions on how to reach his church community about the woodshed program.

8. NWCAA enforcement/education efforts

Julie – Two teams of NWCAA inspectors conducted enforcement/educational outreach on February 25. Inspectors followed pre-determined routes and were able to cover most of the Columbia Valley.

Five written warnings were issued for excessively smoky chimneys. In addition, contact was made with approximately 20 residents about burning techniques, opacity, potential enforcement, and available resources.

NWCAA's next focus and outreach effort will be on air pollution burn bans to fully inform residents about; what they are, when and why they are called, what implications they have on residents, and how they can potentially be avoided.

Phil – Expressed that focusing on burn bans has a negative connotation. The actual number of consecutive days in which prolonged air inversions resulting in poor air quality during winter-heating months are few and typically occur in November. In most cases, thermal lift provides for particulate emission dispersion by mid-morning. When this happens, the high level of particulate indicated on the sign in front of the fire department does not correlate with what people visibly see and the meaningfulness of the gauge is lost.

Jerry – Inquired about the possibility of a voluntary burn ban that may help to minimize emissions proactively when a prolonged air stagnation period is forecasted. Curious about the potential effectiveness of a voluntary curtailment and how it may abate a burn ban.

Phil – NWCAA's message regarding burn bans should be focused on the timeframe (November) in which air quality is the worst and ask residents to exercise their utmost restraint with burning. Garbage burning in woodstoves is also an activity that needs attention.

Jerry – Success would be that through education, all residents learn how to burn cleanly. Perhaps the message should focus on how to properly burn dry wood, especially in light of the woodshed effort.

Mark – Shared recent social science research on messages that compel people to change their behavior, the most effective being comparison of their behavior with their neighbor (peer pressure). Since there are multiple people in the valley that pride themselves on clean burning, perhaps the use of this approach when developing "the message" may be effective in helping to achieve the objective of burning cleanly.

Jerry – Suggested a picture of two homes, one with a very smoky chimney and dollar bills going out and the other with no smoke, or very little.

John – Asked if through our committee discussion an idea of how to proceed with educational outreach is clear.

Julie – Will work with staff to develop a draft sketch, character, and/or tagline to help deliver the message of burn cleanly and avoid a burn ban. Any resulting drafts will be shared with the committee for review and comment.

9. Strategic plan

All – Agreed that a dedicated strategic plan work session would be useful. The June meeting was identified as the work session date.

10. Air monitoring data and complaint update

Julie – There were no exceedances of the 24-hour, 35-micrograms-per-cubic-meter (ug/m³) average standard, and there were no woodstove complaints during the last month.

2016 meetings, 4:30 – 6:00 p.m. – East Whatcom Regional Resource Center, 8251 Kendall Road (starting March 2016)

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