

East Whatcom Community Council Clean Air Committee

Meeting summary

October 11, 2017

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, Jerry DeBruin, John Wolpers, Mark Schofield, Mark Sniffen, Julie O'Shaughnessy

Agenda items:

1. Introductions

No introductions were necessary, only committee members present.

2. Approval of August 9, 2017 meeting summary

Motion:

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

3. Open public comment – no public comment.

4. Announcements - none

5. Wood-heating event debrief

All – Committee members as a whole viewed the community wood heating event as a success. Ziggy Gadomski did a good job staying focused on the burning demonstration and handling tough questions from the public. Committee members also talked to the vendors who thought the event was very positive and were glad they attended.

A committee member asked if the event is worth hosting again and if it appeared that different community members attended. It was perceived that the majority of the attendees were different, which is very positive. Also, the first-hand demonstration of a certified versus non-certified is hard to replace.

It may be appropriate to hold this event every third year or so, unless a different event of some sort is more appropriate and effective. For any future event, the goal would be to get more community involvement and attendance.

Mark Sniffen – People were participatory and took coloring books and code information.

6. Wood-burning heating exemption

Julie – There are 3 types of wood-burning heating exemptions:

- 1 time, 10-day (emergency)
- Inadequate source of heat

- Breakdown
- Low-income

Julie met with Mark Schofield, Jen Rightsell and Aly Robinson of Opportunity Council to request assistance in qualifying low-income residents for a wood-burning heating exemption. OppCo is willing to qualify residents while doing intake for other programs and will use the previous heating-season's income information to qualify a resident for this year, if helpful.

Phil – Commented that instead of implementing and requiring exemptions, it would be better to leave it to the residents to take responsibility to burn cleanly and assume the consequences if they smoke.

Julie – The intent of calling a ban is to have people use a different source of heat, if one is available to them, so that emissions from continued burning don't further reduce air quality.

Phil – Stated that once the air quality is impaired, it won't improve until there is a shift in weather because the emission will be trapped. Banning burning doesn't help the situation when people are burning cleanly.

Regarding exemptions, the simpler the better. Otherwise, there will be problems.

Mark Sniffen – Building codes don't allow wood stoves to be the only source of heat. For persons interested in installing an additional heat source, the building department will provide assistance to guide them through the required permit process.

Phil – NWCAA has put a lot of energy into the effort of improving air quality and if nothing else, Phil believes that the community will make an effort to help improve air quality.

7. Biomass Committee update

Biomass boiler

Phil – John Millman and Phil met with the Whatcom County Parks operation chief and the Director of OppCo, Greg Winter about how to move forward with the wood-fired boiler to get community input. Whatcom County Parks and Greg Winter agreed that the most logical place to get community input is from the Clean Air Committee and NW Clean Air Agency.

Julie – Summarized her understanding of the project thus far. Jim Jensen, WSU, was tasked with developing a report on the viability of an alternative heating source in a community building in response to legislative action. Jim met with Julie and NWCAA's Engineering Manager to discuss the possibility of locating a wood-fired (pellet) boiler at the EWRRRC. Julie asked Jim for a copy of the report, once complete.

Phil – The report is finished and was cleared for distribution by Whatcom County Parks who paid for the report. Jensen contacted the original committee (John Millman & Phil) and asked who the report should be forwarded to. It was determined to be NW Clean Air Agency, who is viewed as the "check-point" on the potential project. The report now is forthcoming and will be distributed to members of the Clean Air Committee by Jim Jensen.

Julie - Concerned that a substantial amount of work and momentum has been invested in a project that may not be permitted by NW Clean Air Agency.

Phil – Understands that the "blocking" point may be NW Clean Air and that the project needs to be reviewed and cleared by NW Clean Air before the project can proceed. The project is sound and makes financial sense, but there has been no intent to steam roll the project or be anything other than transparent.

The other challenge is that the grant was originally fully funded, but now the State wants the project proponents to contribute \$20,000.

All committee members will receive a copy of the report.

Wood bank

Phil – The wood bank is continuing to make progress. However, someone stole logs that had been downed, but not yet trucked because of delayed funding.

Approval to erect a temporary cover has been obtained and is underway.

8. Strategy for 2017-18 heating season

Julie – Provided an update on the Agency's progress in developing protocol for calling winter-heating burns, when necessary, and how the message will be communicated to the community and when enforcement action will be taken. Agency staff involved in development of this process include monitoring, enforcement, communication and outreach staff.

There are three potential scenarios in which NWCAA will communicate impaired air quality:

- A). An air quality advisory asking for voluntary curtailment of wood stove burning.
- B). Stage 1 where wood burning may only occur if it's your only source of heat, you have an exemption, or it's a certified device.
- C). Stage 2 does not allow any burning of a solid fuel device unless it's your only source of heat or you have an exemption.

Practically speaking, confirming whether or not the stove is certified during a Stage 1 burn ban is impractical because it is very resource intensive. Therefore, the focus will be on excess opacity during Stage 1. For Stage 2 burn bans, opacity will again be the focus in addition to confirming whether or not the resident has an exemption.

Mark Sniffen – The fire safety burn ban was lifted, so now people can burn outdoors again. How does that interplay with air quality and NW Clean Air Agency burn bans because it's a different source of emissions? Does NW Clean Air Agency notify the fire marshal's office when calling an air quality burn ban? Also, is the area affected by the ban identified?

Julie – NW Clean Air Agency, Seth Preston, has a contact list of people, agencies, fire districts, media and other interested parties that are notified when any type of an impaired air quality alert is called.

If an air quality alert was called in Columbia Valley it would apply to the urban growth area.

Jerry – For air quality burn bans, will it be stipulated that outdoor burning is also banned, including recreational fires?

Julie – Yes, burn ban notifications and alerts will also address outdoor burning.

Mark Sniffen – Will there be other parts of the county where burn bans will be called?

Julie – It's not likely. Currently no other particulate (PM2.5) monitors in our jurisdictional area show elevated levels of air emissions on a consistent basis.

Mark Schofield – Wanted to clarify that for a Stage 1 burn ban people can burn if they have an exemption or if it's their only source of heat, but that they still need to burn cleanly.

Phil- Recalled that when his stove was purchased and installed he received a plaque, which is still mounted on the outside of his home, which verified that the stove was certified.

Julie – Although NWCAA’s best efforts are being made to develop a system to call burn bans, we anticipate that refinements and adjustments to the process will need to be made.

Clearly communicating the message and expectations to the public is critical and may take a group effort such as posting to and sharing with other websites and placing a sandwich board at the fire hall and resource center.

Mark Sniffen – How timely will the message get out once it is called?

Julie – Axel Franzmann, our air monitoring specialist, will review PM2.5 monitoring data and call a burn ban or advisory by noon, if warranted. A ban of any kind won’t be called unless meteorological conditions model degrading air quality approaching the 24-hour standard for at least two days.