

East Whatcom Community Council Clean Air Committee

Meeting summary

November 8, 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 October 11, 2017 meeting summary

Mark Sniffen requested clarification of the building department's role on page 2, Item 6. The minutes now read, "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."

Motion:

- Mark Schofield moved to approve meeting notes with the above change.
- Mark Sniffen seconded the motion.

3. Open public comment – no public comment.

4. Announcements

Julie – Shared that NW Clean Air Agency Director, Mark Buford, was asked by NWCAA board member, Carl Weimer, to provide an update on Columbia Valley smoke reduction efforts at the WC Natural Resources Committee on November 21 at 9:30. Buford would like to extend an invitation to all CAC members who are interested and able to attend.

Julie will send out an invite to all CAC committee members. Several committee members voiced interest in attending.

Phil – Jim Jensen, WSU, provided NW Clean Air Agency with the final air quality report on the proposed wood-fired boiler and review is currently underway by NWACA engineering staff. Inadvertently, CAC committee members were omitted from the email.

Julie will forward a copy of the report to committee members.

John Millman and Phil have received requests from WC Parks for additional information on operation and maintenance costs. Phil will provide the information requested.

5. Wood shed status update

Phil – Phil will provide Julie with a list of material(s) needed to finish the last few wood sheds being constructed by Mount Baker High School list. Although there has been community interest to pick up their wood shed, deliveries will be done by volunteers once all wood shed construction is complete.

6. Air quality & complaint status update

Air quality

Julie – Air quality exceeded the 24-hour average, 35 microgram standard at the end of October due to cold and stagnant weather conditions. More stagnant weather patterns are predicted this winter.

Phil – Observed that the air cleared up quickly once the sun came up.

Jerry – Added that a strong northeast wind came in and quickly cleared up the air.

Mark Schofield – Asked how NWCAA’s calling of the voluntary burn ban corresponds with the poor air quality.

Seth – Commented that it was called on Friday in anticipation of the projected stagnant weather pattern.

Mark Schofield – Shared an OppCo employee’s concern, that a person in an influential position is verbally minimizing the possibility of burn bans being called. Mark shared so that CAC committee members can provide accurate information to avoid miscommunication.

Complaints

Julie – Two air quality complaints were received since our last meeting. Both referenced outdoor burning.

7. Biomass Committee update

Wood bank

Phil – A lease has been secured for the location of the wood bank. Working to secure the type of building to be used for wood storage. In the meantime, approximately 350 cords of wood have been purchased for next wood-heating season. The wood bank has started and some dry wood has been brought in, but it won’t be enough for this winter.

8. NWCAA air quality burn ban communication strategy

Seth – Provided an update on the voluntary ban that was called at the end of October. The notification process is essentially the same process that will be used to call a burn ban. The first step is to send out a notification email that included CAC members. The second, is to send out a news release to different media folks, update NWCAA website, post on Facebook, tag WCFD #14, KendallWatch and the resource center. Seth also did an interview with the Bellingham Herald.

A few refinements are necessary, but overall the process went well. Received positive feedback and also had a citizen share the importance of burning responsibly and of clean air on Facebook.

Shared Jessica Bee’s observation that community members are being more careful with their burning practices and that local wood vendors are aware of the air quality concerns and are providing fully seasoned wood.

Phil – Mentioned that people were sharing the message by phone as well. Also, commented that the message was clear and prevented confusion as to whether or not it was a “ban”.

Julie – Asked committee members for additional ways in which to reach the community.

Jerry – Mentioned that sandwich previously brought up by NWCAA was a good way to communicate.

Phil – Thinks it’s important not to overload the community with too many different methods of electronic communication. Supports the sandwich board approach.

Mark Sniffen – Suggested putting the message out on scanner, if appropriate.

Julie – NWCAA has new “Burn Wise” posters that will be put up in the community. The message is simple; burn the right wood, in the right appliance, in the right way. They will be laminated and posted in strategic locations (EWRRC, library, post office, chamber office, etc.).

Mark Schofield – Suggested including NWCAA’s website address on the poster as an additional resource.