

East Whatcom Community Council Clean Air Committee

Meeting summary

June 13, 2018

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; Viktor Vetkov, Slavic Church; Mark Sniffen, Whatcom County; Julie O'Shaughnessy, NWCAA

Present: Phil Cloward, John Wolpers, Mark Schofield, Aly Robinson (OppCo), Eryn Spellman (OppCo), Mark Sniffen, Seth Preston, Julie O'Shaughnessy

Agenda items:

1. Introductions – The committee introduced themselves to Eryn Spellman and Aly Robinson of OppCo. Eryn was previously a Conservation Educational Specialist for OppCo, but recently accepted Mark Schofield's position and is now the Conservation Program Coordinator. Mark Schofield is now serving as the Community Energy Challenge Manager. Aly Robinson is also an OppCo Conservation Educational Specialist, but will leave at the end of the month to serve as a Community Health Specialist for the Whatcom County Health Department, with focus in east Whatcom County. Aly's presence at future meetings is yet to be determined.

2. Approval of April 11, 2018 meeting summary

Motion:

- John Wolpers moved to approve meeting notes with two changes on page 3: Spelling error (replace "report" with "rapport") and a clarification in paragraph 5 that "Any future debris ~~can then~~ will then be properly disposed of on a regular basis by the residents."
- Mark Schofield seconded the motion as moved.

3. Open public comment – None – only committee members present.

4. Announcements

CEC program changes

Mark Schofield - Provided an update on the Community Energy Challenge (CEC) which is a program that helps people improve home energy performance through weatherization and other measures. The program serves Whatcom, Island, Skagit and San Juan counties. OppCo just received their big grant from WSU through Department of Commerce for staffing and incentives which help buy-down the cost of doing energy upgrade projects in homes by approximately 20 percent. There is currently a backlog of homes that have been audited throughout their service area and are now ready to start energy upgrades.

As part of this new grant cycle the incentive structure has been updated and will have a bearing on Columbia Valley. For residents who participate in an audit, the standard incentive for project costs is 20%. Income guidelines have expanded to include residents who are up to 275% of federal poverty level income. This change will help moderate-income residents qualify for home improvements through the CEC program and will

provide a much higher incentive (rebate), typically an additional 25% on top of the initial 20%.

For example, a family of four with a monthly income of \$4,404-\$5,731 would qualify for the additional incentives. This gets back to a previous discussion by the committee regarding why there isn't more of a tiered system that helps residents who don't meet the low-income guidelines, but who may not have disposable income to participate in the incentive program.

The change was mostly driven by WSU's and the state legislature's desire to help hard-to-reach households to make their homes more energy efficient and higher performing. Another hard-to-reach area is rural households. OppCo is providing HVAC incentives, specifically ductless heat pump incentives for moderate income and for rural areas where there are other leveraged funds.

The program will also provide \$2,000 towards a wood stove change-out in addition to whatever NW Clean Air Agency is able to provide. The focus of the change-out is to switch to ductless heat pumps (DHP).

Phil – Asked why the focus is from a wood stove to a DHP and if CEC funds could be used to change-out a wood stove to another solid fuel burning device.

Mark – Replied that the way in which the program is currently structured, CEC funding would be available only for the change-out to a DHP. The CEC funding could be in conjunction with NW Clean Air Agency funding to ultimately provide a residents with both.

Julie – Is hopeful that Ecology grant funding for change-outs, which is not yet available, will provide for a DHP and a new solid-fuel burning device, potentially with no cost to the resident. Suggested to Mark Schofield that they meet and coordinate the best way in which to utilize the funds so that what NWCAA views as a tier-1 package (DHP, new solid-fuel heating device and weatherization) can be installed in as many homes as possible.

Aly Robinson – Clarified that residents participating in CEC energy saving projects must pay up front then receive reimbursement through a rebate.

Phil – Stated that as he understands the programs, anyone wanting to change out to a pellet stove is on their own although a pellet stove is much cheaper than a DHP.

Ecology wood smoke reduction grant update

Julie – Provided an update on the Ecology change-out grant, which again includes pellet stoves as an eligible replacement device.

Ecology has \$2 million available through a competitive Ecology grant for wood smoke reduction programs throughout the state. Unofficially, NWCAA anticipates receiving \$275,000.

NWCAA's grant application provides for income qualifying of households for change-outs and participation in the CEC program, but also provides for a top-tier package potentially at no cost to the resident. A top-tier package includes a new wood/pellet stove AND a DHP in conjunction with weatherization for qualifying households through OppCo. NWCAA considers this combination necessary to address wood smoke emissions.

NWCAA's approach for change-outs, whether tier-1 packages or not, will be determined when a contract is executed with Ecology. All grant funding will need to be utilized by June 30, 2019.

Aly Robinson, OppCo, has reviewed and edited all program forms to emphasize the option of a wood stove OR a pellet stove. In addition, emphasis has also been made on the importance of proper wood storage.

John Wolpers – Asked if the funding will be retroactive and if previous participants who received a new wood stove would now be able to receive a DHP.

Julie – As of this point in time, Ecology has not mentioned that the grant will be retroactive.

Initial focus for this grant is on residents who have not previously participated in the program.

Mark Schofield – Residents who qualify as moderate income would be eligible for a DHP through CEC funding. A family of four with a gross monthly income of \$5,751 would be considered moderate income.

Phil – The one potentially negative impact on the installation of DHP is that Governor Inslee is pushing hard for a carbon tax which will impact the cost of electricity (DHP's power source). A large portion of PSE's power generation is dependent upon coal.

The change-out initiative is positive, but there is a negative impact with the carbon tax and electricity usage. It would be beneficial for valley residents to be "masters of our own destiny" and be independent. The initial push was for new heating devices, now it seems like its shifting and there may be less support for this approach. There are a lot of local resources for heat source (pellets) and converting from wood stoves to pellet stove would clean up the air and could also mean a lot of jobs.

Mark Sniffen – Understands that pellet stoves burn cleaner than wood stoves by a large margin. Suggested monetarily incentivizing pellet stoves higher than wood stoves.

Aly – This year's program emphasizes all replacement options including pellet stoves. Also, residents can keep their stove in addition to a heat pump.

Julie – It's important that residents participating in the program, which is not mandatory, have the ability to choose their heat source, whether it's a pellet stove or wood stove and that they experience the program and change in heating source as value-added to their property and quality of life.

Because of perceived challenges associated with pellet stoves, it's important to continue to talk about how power outages, which affect the auger and blower system, can be resolved in order for residents to see pellet stoves as a desirable option.

Mark Sniffen – The cooling aspect of a heat pump is good selling point, but it may also increase energy usage since it may be used year-round.

Mount Baker Chamber of Commerce "Welcome Neighbor" packets

Julie – Informed the committee that she was contacted by Jan White, representing the Chamber, who asked if NWCAA would like to provide a packet to new community members. As a result, NWCAA has put together a "Clean Burning" packet that includes information on local air quality, burn bans, EPA "Burn Wise" information, cleaner burning techniques, fire starters, an activity book and a wood stove thermometer. The packets will be part of a larger packet provided to new neighbors who are interested in learning more about their community.

Aly – Asked if distributing the packets to change-outs recipients would be possible as a teaching tool.

Julie – Said Aly’s suggestion was great and that additional packets will be assembled and distributed to change-out recipients.

July’s meeting cancelled

The committee as a whole agreed to cancel next month’s meeting because of vacations.

5. Wood shed status update

Phil – Since school is out, the last of the 10 sheds at Mount Baker High School will be delivered sometime in September when school starts back up. Phil will coordinate with the teacher to stage the sheds at the community center so that they can get delivered.

6. Biomass committee update

Phil – Continuing to focus on the wood bank and are working with a person in Snohomish County who has a fire wood processor. Also, determining how volunteers will participate and how people may be able to “work” for their wood.

7. Highlights of the “Engaging Stakeholders” training

Seth – Attended training with Julie a few months that focused on different way engage hard to reach audiences. Traditional outreach doesn’t necessarily reach everyone so it’s necessary to develop new techniques such as the “Clean Burning” packet mentioned earlier in the meeting. We are reviewing outreach materials and simplifying messaging and creating visuals when possible and realizing that we need to be flexible and creative as audiences change.

The burn ban application is getting is in its final review by staff and should be launched soon. It will provide notification of when air quality burn bans are in place and when fire safety burn bans are called by fire districts. It will also have information on air quality health impacts and wood heating exemptions. People can choose the county and the monitor they would like to receive information on. We will advertise the app when it is complete and available.

8. Outreach/community event ideas

Julie – Has nothing to add on this topic. Outreach updates were provided earlier in the meeting.

The committee, in general, commented that the “Clean Burning” packets are a great way to reach people.

9. Air quality and complaint update

Julie – One complaint was received about a habitual garbage burner. NWCAA staff has followed up with the burner.