

East Whatcom Community Council Clean Air Committee

Meeting summary

September 12, 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, Jerry DeBruin, Aly Robinson for John Wolpers, Mark Schofield, Julie O'Shaughnessy

Agenda items:

- 1. Introductions** – Committee members and three community members introduced themselves. Community members were Carl Isom-McDaniel, Ivy Little and Rachelle Hollowell.
- 2. Approval of August 8, 2018 meeting summary**
Motion – Jerry DeBruin moved to approve meeting notes. Phil Cloward seconded motion.
- 3. Open public comment** – No public comments.
- 4. Announcements (evolved into discussion)**

Julie – Expressed appreciation to the community members for taking time to attend the meeting and for their curiosity and interest in the committee's efforts and actions. Julie will share a chronological summary of the committee's actions with interested attendees (Carl and Aly).

Carl – Asked what level of outreach has been done for Spanish speaking residents. He knows of four families that are prime candidates for the change-out program, but the language barrier prevents communicating the program's details. If the program information was translated into Spanish, it would be very beneficial. Carl will try to provide addresses of these families so that translated program information can be provided.

Julie – Historically, publications and outreach have been translated into Russian with minimal translation into Spanish. However, NWCAA acknowledges the need to also provide translation into Spanish and is committed to translate all material into Spanish and Russian.

Phil – Stated that this is the first time he's become aware that a household does not speak any level of English, but that it's good to know. This identifies the need to further translate information so that all community members can be helped.

Aly – Suggested the Opportunity Council Energy Assistance line as a resource for Spanish speaking residents because OppCo staff who answer the phones are bi-lingual and can help direct residents to the change-out program.

Rochelle – Asked Mark Schofield to explain how the Community Energy Challenge (CEC) program works.

Mark S – Explained that the program offers a low-cost energy audit which looks at a home's energy performance and what steps can be taken to make the home more energy efficient and comfortable. The audit provides a full report and recommendation on actions that can be taken in addition to a list of contractors who can perform the work. The CEC program provides rebate incentives on top of utility incentives. The base level of incentives is 20 percent. However, that can go up to 45 percent for moderate income qualifying families. Mark will provide the three community members with additional program information.

Julie – Provided information on two recently acquired grant programs; one through the CEC and one through NWCAA. The CEC program provides funding for the installation of ductless heat pumps in moderate income households that don't have wood as their primary source of heat. Funding through NWCAA provides for the change-out of a qualifying wood-heating device for a new pellet or wood stove in addition to a ductless heat pump, potentially with no income qualifications.

Jerry – Suggested to Rochelle, who has community members asking he about the different program, that she refer people directly to the program contact so that things don't get lost in translation.

Carl – Some of the initial ductless heat pumps installed through the program were not optimally sized and residents had a less than favorable view about heat pumps. Now, however, by working with the vendors to properly size the units, heat pumps are viewed positively and have reduced wood burning.

Rochelle – Asked if wood stoves can be installed in new home construction.

Phil – Wood stoves cannot be installed in the Red Mountain and Balfour Development in accordance with covenants recorded with Whatcom County. The exception is for new home construction in the valley, outside of the boundaries of the two new developments.

Rochelle – Offered to include CEC and the woodstove change-out program information in the packets to be distributed to neighbors during the door-to-door "Hello Neighbor" outreach with the Whatcom Family Community Network. Outreach is currently underway and will also occur in November so please provide any information before then (50 count is recommended). Brochures can be mailed to Rochelle's business address at Roosevelt Neighborhood Center, 2303 Moore Street, Bellingham, WA 98226 or dropped off with Jessica at the resource center.

5. Wood shed status update

Phil – Intend to move the remaining wood sheds from Mount Baker High School to the resource center in one day, then finish deliveries on two different weekends. It is still challenging coordinating volunteers and access to a trailer, but the project will be completed. An update will be provided at the next meeting.

Carl – Asked if there is any possibility of continuing the program. Also, offered the possibility of providing access to a twenty foot trailer.

Phil – In the absence of further ideas for funding, no.

6. Biomass committee update

Phil – There is a need for living-wage jobs here in the community and with the locally available biomass, the committee is making progress on the establishment of a local pellet mill. The advantage of pellet stoves is that they burn much cleaner than wood stoves and can take the place of wood stoves by modifying the exhaust stack slightly. A market analysis of three counties shows that the mill can be competitive with the Oregon and B.C. pellet market. Continuing to work with the Port of Bellingham to establish a mill in the light industrial area on Limestone Road. Feedstock for the pellet mill will not interfere with private citizen's ability to harvest their firewood.

Also, continuing efforts to secure permits for a hoop building that will house the wood for the wood bank which will provide dry fire wood to local residents. The intent is to be up and operational prior to Thanksgiving.

Rochelle – Asked Phil for an estimated timeframe of the pellet mill completion.

Phil – Estimates five years.

7. Focused outreach update

Julie - Had hoped to conduct door-to-door outreach this morning with Eryn Spellman of OppCo, but cancelled due to inclement weather. The objective of the outreach is to outfit priority households with cleaner heating appliances including a new pellet or wood stove, a ductless heat pump and weatherization through OppCo for qualifying households. The Ecology funding will provide cleaner heat sources to approximately 25 homes. Outreach has been rescheduled for next Wednesday.

Asked community members what their impression was of how and when NW Clean Air has conducted enforcement during burn bans. NWCAA has tried to approach burn bans and potential enforcement in a transparently escalating manner so that residents know what an air quality burn ban is, that burning is not allowed during those periods (except for residents with exemptions) and that enforcement action may occur if burning occurs. Julie has received feedback that significant time and effort has been put forth to inform the community of clean air expectations and that enforcement is now a necessary component to ensure that people are complying.

Community members – Stated that the enforcement that NWCAA conducted last year was effective and that residents understood that it was a necessary and timely component. There were a few smoky chimneys, but for the most part there was a shift to complying with the ban. The heat pumps were very beneficial during the ban.

Asked if NWCAA issued any tickets with fines, because the word within the community is that NWCAA did impose penalties.

Julie – NWCAA did not impose any penalties associated with violations. The "tickets" required the resident to contact our office to engage in a dialogue to identify the cause of the violation and what action can be taken to correct the problem. Corrective action can be connecting the resident with additional resources (stove, moisture meter, etc.) or further instruction on clean burning practices.

8. Air quality and complaint update

Julie – No wood stove complaints have been received since last meeting. So far, summer fires have not been an issue.