

## East Whatcom Community Council Clean Air Committee

### Meeting summary

March 13, 2019

**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; Aly Robinson, Whatcom County Health Department; Mark Schofield Opportunity Council (OppCo); Veronica Dearden, Kendall Watch Community Action Group; Viktor Vetkov, Slavic Church; Mark Sniffen, Whatcom County Fire Marshal; Julie O'Shaughnessy, Northwest Clean Air Agency (NWCAA)

**Present:** Phil Cloward, Aly Robinson, Mark Schofield, Jerry DeBruin, Julie O'Shaughnessy

#### **Agenda items:**

- 1. Introductions** – All present introduced themselves. In addition to the committee members identified above, the following community members were present: Carl Isom-McDaniel, Rebecca Cayen, Ivy Little, Rochelle Hollowell and Richard Whitson.
- 2. Approval of January 9, 2019 meeting summary** – Jerry moved to approve the meeting notes. Mark Schofield seconded the motion.
- 3. Open public comment** – No public comment.
- 4. Announcements** – No announcements, but Carl McDaniel voiced concerns about the change-out program. Mark Schofield addressed these concerns in item 7 below.
- 5. Storm debris fire hazard**

**Rebecca Cayen, Peaceful Valley community member** - Is interested in implementing a chipping program for all of Columbia Valley to dispose of their yard and storm debris. Initial interest was as a private citizen, but after initial investigation and discussions with the conservation district, Cayen learned that a lead organization is necessary.

The intention is to have residents bring their yard/storm debris to a designated location for chipping. Ideally, it would be nice to chip material at the end of each resident's driveway, but the area is so large, it is impractical.

Lake Chelan implemented a chipping event available to local residents. Cayen would like to see a similar event made available to all Columbia Valley residents. The Whatcom County Conservation District has grant funding available for a chipping event. A different organization would need to serve as the project lead to handle funds and administer any grants secured through the Fire Wise Program, DNR, Conservation District, etc.

With all of the downed debris from recent storms, residents may choose burning as a disposal method even though it's illegal. Because there is such a large amount of material, the fire danger will increase during the dry season if it has not removed and disposed of properly.

Peaceful Valley held a general clean-up event last year for its residents that had a high participation level and was very successful. The key to success was organization in advance. The hope for this year is hold a similar event for clean green material at a designated location for the entire valley (Peaceful & Paradise).

The goal is to hold the chipping event June 1, two weeks after the Whatcom Conservation District community awareness event, "Wildfire Reduction for Rural Property Owners," at the East Whatcom Resource Center. Cayen will reach out to Peaceful Valley board members to see if they are willing to stage the event since there is a secure, gated area to prevent illegal dumping.

**Phil** – This may be an opportunity for NWCAA to support the event and community by proactively providing a mechanism to deal with clean green material legally and reducing smoke in the community.

**Julie** – NWCAA definitely supports this project, in concept, and will do whatever it is able to do. What does it mean to "underwrite" this program? What exactly are the needs?

**Phil** – Would like to see NWCAA fund two chippers. The manpower and training to operate them would be provided by the community.

**Julie** – Does the Conservation District currently have the funds and manpower available for the chippers?

**Rebecca Cayen** – There is funding available, but not enough to fund the chipper, which is the biggest expense.

**Julie** – Does not believe that NWCAA would view the purchase of a chipper as the best way to support this project because of its expense and ongoing maintenance cost. Perhaps renting a chipper or contracting with a tree service company would be the best approach versus spending \$30,000 on a chipper.

**Phil** – The cost of a chipper on wheels that would satisfy the community's needs can be purchased for about \$20,000.

**Julie** – NWCAA will support this project any way it can, but additional details are needed before NWCAA could make any commitment.

**Rebecca Cayen** – Has two proposals. The first is the chipping event on June 1. The second is the continuation of this project on a regular basis, similar to the Lake Chelan project.

For the initial project in June, the rental of a chipper or the hiring of a chipping company may be the best option. Still checking on rates, liability issues, and insurance issues to determine the optimal approach. Long-term options may be different.

Time is of the essence if this project is to move forward.

**Rochelle Hollowell** – Having the event in June seems late in the season. Many people are already cleaning up their yards, preparing to plant and are making choices on how to handle their green waste by either tossing it somewhere or burning it.

**Rebecca Cayen** – Is not opposed to adjusting the date, but may not be possible since it is currently a single-handed project. Securing grant funding, finalizing cost proposals and balancing other commitments creates a time challenge.

**Julie** – Whatcom County Fire Marshal's office may also be a potential partner.

**Rebecca Cayen** – Has contacted Whatcom County Public Works and a permit would not be required. The actual funding amount through the Conservation District needs finalization as do cost estimates. A non-profit entity able to administer the program needs to be secured.

**Jerry** – Suggested the possibility of hiring a tree service and chipping company that is self-contained for this project to eliminate liability concerns.

**Julie** – Supports the concept of hiring a company that can provide a package deal that provides staff to conduct chipping and hauling of chips to accommodate the limited timeframe and liability and cost concerns.

**Rebecca Cayen** – One estimate obtained for a self-contained tree company to stage at a determined location and chip for an 8-hour day (4-5 employees) is \$1,800. This does not include disposal cost of chips, which is \$50/ton tipping fee at Green Earth Technology. Disposal may not be necessary if WSU Master Gardeners take the chips.

**Rochelle** – Suggested developing a sign-up process for people who cannot haul their own debris, but they are willing to pay a nominal amount to have it picked up.

**Carl** – A state of emergency was declared in Whatcom County and was paid to remove vegetative debris. That contract may still be in place with FEMA and Emergency Management and available to help with this effort.

**Jerry** – Asked Julie how much money NWCAA might be able to contribute to the project.

**Julie** – Responded that \$20,000-\$30,000 is not reasonable, but if it's less than \$5,000 there is confidence that NWCAA can fund the project. With that said, the final decision to fund the project would be the NWCAA Director's decision.

**Richard Whitson** – Called attention to a FEMA email addressing the request for public assistance in response to the emergency declaration. Richard will forward the email to Rebecca.

## 6. Limestone Road fire

**Julie** – NWCAA received several calls about the land-clearing burn on Limestone Road. Callers were upset that burning was allowed at that location, but not within the Urban Growth Area (Peaceful and Paradise). The Fire Marshal's office issued the permit, which included a condition that burning would cease if the air quality monitor measured degraded air quality. During the course of the burn, air quality did decline and the permittee, Nielsen Brothers, was cooperative and shut the fire down.

## 7. Change-out update

**Carl McDaniel** – Several residents interested in the woodstove change-out program have experienced confusion and frustration and have given up. Is there anyone to talk to that can help these residents navigate the program? Two examples are the energy audit fee and a post-1995 stove that is in a state of disrepair.

**Mark Schofield** – Reviewed the qualifying parameters of the program, addressed Carl's concerns and provided an update on woodstove change-out progress.  
Program overview – NWCAA has secured funding from Ecology to change out pre-1995 non-certified stoves in Columbia Valley households that burn at least a cord of wood. If residents qualify, they receive a new wood/pellet stove and a ductless heat pump regardless of

income. If residents are over income an energy audit fee applies, but can be waived on a case-by-case basis. Anyone interested can call OppCo to determine eligibility.

Program concerns – Residents experiencing frustration with the qualifying criteria should call Mark Schofield directly to make sure no one falls through the cracks. Case-by-case evaluation will determine eligibility.

Program progress – The grant cycle ends June 30 and the goal is 25 change-outs, optimally with residents receiving both a new stove and a ductless heat pump. There are seven change-outs completed and four in process through the weatherization program (low-income). For above-income residents participating through the Community Energy Challenge Program, one change-out is complete and seven are in process.

**Rochelle** – Shared that a neighbor who was proceeding with a change-out discontinued the process because she was asked to sign a form eliminating any liability. Rochelle asked if this is factual.

**Aly** – Previously employed by OppCo and involved in the change-out program could not recall any form that asked this of participants.

**Mark** – Told Rochelle to have her neighbor to call Mark directly to address the issue.

Mark also emphasized that there is still plenty of grant funding available so please spread the word.

**Richard** – Provided Mark with a list of potential change-out recipients.

## **8. Wood shed status update**

**Phil** – Community volunteers (Men's Group) will deliver the remaining 11 sheds as soon as weather permits. Julie will call residents to schedule deliveries when notified by Phil or Richard.

## **9. Biomass committee update**

**Phil** – The committee has a business plan and continues to work with the county to resolve permitting issues associated with the wood bank.

## **10. Outreach update**

**Julie** – Eryn Spellman (OppCo) and Julie conducted door-to-door outreach. In addition, Mark Schofield and Julie tabled at the Foothills Food Bank. These efforts identified several additional change-out clients.

OppCo and NWCAA will attend the Community Connection Fair on March 21 at the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center.

Julie will plan to table at the Whatcom Conservation District community outreach event on May 18<sup>th</sup>.

## **11. Air quality and complaint update**

**Julie** – NWCAA received three complaints since the last meeting.

Air monitoring data showed that two days in March exceeded the PM2.5 24hr/average air quality standard.