

## East Whatcom Community Council Clean Air Committee

### Meeting summary

April 10, 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, Mark Sniffen, 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, Doug Walker, Nancy Cherry, and Richard Whitson.
- 2. Approval of March 13, 2019 meeting summary** – Mark Schofield to approve the meeting notes. Aly Robinson seconded the motion.
- 3. Open public comment**

**Nancy Cherry** – Voiced concern about smoke and air quality impacts from recent outdoor burning that is typically done by the same people. She asked if additional steps other than calling 911 and the local fire department are available to help stop burning.

**Julie** – Explained that Columbia Valley is an urban growth area and residential burning of yard cleanup material and land-clearing burning are not allowed. Only recreational fires 3'x3'x2' in size are legal and these fires cannot unreasonably impact neighbors. Burning is addressed through the Fire Warden Program (partnership between NWCAA and Whatcom county Fire Marshal's office) and by the local fire department, which addresses safety issues.

The most important thing to do is to call and file a complaint with NWCAA or the Fire Marshal's office with as much information possible at the time the burning is taking place. Without specific information or a complaint, follow-up will not occur. NWCAA has the ability to levy a penalty or ultimately to lien properties as a last resort.

**Mark Sniffen** – Added that there are only two fire marshals for Whatcom County and that their duties include building inspections and fire investigations in addition to complaint investigation. Response can be difficult at times because of limited resources, but if staff observe an illegal burn enforcement action can be taken. Whatcom County is currently in the process of hiring an additional staff person.

**Jerry** – Reiterated that calling 911 is the correct action to take when an illegal burn occurs, but that the fire department does not do enforcement. Jerry also clarified that if residents

tell the fire department to get off someone's property, they cannot enter. Repeat offender cases are forwarded to the Fire Marshal's office for follow-up.

**Rebecca Cayan** – Suggested putting up signs that inform residents that outdoor burning is illegal and to include a phone number to call.

#### 4. Announcements

"Fire hazard reduction" is still an ongoing agenda item and will be added as Item 10.

**Mark Sniffen** – Whatcom County is hiring another fire marshal who should be on staff within a month.

**Jerry** – Added that this spring has been horrible for illegal burns.

#### 5. Change-out update

**Mark Schofield** – The goal of the program is to change out 25 old qualifying wood stoves for a cleaner source of heat – a new wood/pellet stove and a ductless heat pump, potentially at no cost with no income qualification. The current grant cycle ends June 30 so identifying potential clients within the next few weeks is critical because there is still funding available.

Currently, 10 change-out projects have been completed and 11 are in progress. Three additional potential clients have been identified. Please continue to spread the word about the program to other community members who may be interested in replacing their old wood stove.

#### 6. Wood shed status update

**Phil** – The remaining 11 sheds will be delivered Saturday.

**Julie** – Confirmed that nine residents are still interested in a woodshed. Two new applicants are needed.

**Carl, Richard & Phil** – Will work to find two additional applicants.

#### 7. Biomass committee update

**Phil** – The business plan is almost complete. Have a commitment for 150 cords of firewood (maple) and are negotiating the price. The wood will be hauled down and stored for seasoning. Still pursuing a local pellet plant.

#### 8. Outreach update

**Julie** – Eryn Spellman, Opportunity Council Community Outreach staff, attended the Community Connections Fair and identified three potential clients. Mark Schofield and Julie worked at the Foothills Food Bank at the church and will be working at the next Mobile Food Pantry. A flyer promoting the change-out program and the meaning of Stage 1 and Stage II burn bans will be mailed to all Columbia Valley residents on Friday. NWCAA staff wants to work with the fire department to develop signage to address outdoor burning. Julie will also work with OppCo staff to identify the number of stacks in the valley and compare it with baseline information provided by a consulting company approximately 10 years ago.

**Phil** – Stated that the number of stoves identified in the report was part of the sub-area plan. He believes the actual number of stoves is less than 600. Columbia Valley urban growth area has just over 2,000 homes.

## 9. Air quality and complaint update

**Julie** – NWCAA received one complaint regarding outdoor burning since the last meeting. Two days exceeded the health based 24-hour PM2.5 standard in March (the 5<sup>th</sup> & the 17<sup>th</sup>).

**Jerry** – Pointed out that March 17 was over 70 degrees and that outdoor burning was the cause of the smoke.

## 10. Fire hazard reduction

**Rebecca** – The Whatcom County Conservation District is interested in a continuing chipping event in this area, mirroring the Chelan program. The Conservation District has committed \$1,000 for the event and will be handling the advertisement, necessary safety gear and 2-4 staff members for traffic control.

Peaceful Valley has agreed to allow the chipping event to take place in their large parking lot, which is fenced. Only limbs and branches will be accepted. Rebecca found a company that is licensed and bonded and charges \$1,000 per day. Volunteers will not be associated with the chipping activity. The Conservation District is investigating insurance needs.

The remaining costs to be covered are the chipper (\$2,000) and disposal of the chips (up to \$500), if necessary. The hope is that the chips are used by community members and a dumpster for disposal is not needed. Limbs and branches will be accepted on Saturday, but chipping may carry over into Sunday.

Wood chip pickup will be coordinated through Survey Monkey and by calling Rebecca directly. Road traffic concerns have also been addressed.

**Aly** – Suggested having people sign up for a particular time to lessen road traffic.

**Julie** – NWCAA is willing to pay for the chipping and disposal costs.