

East Whatcom Community Council Clean Air Committee

Meeting summary

December 11, 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); Viktor Vetkov, Slavic Church; Curtis Metz, Gabe Nelson, Jacob Johnson, Whatcom County Fire Marshal; Julie O'Shaughnessy, Northwest Clean Air Agency

Present: Phil Cloward, Jerry DeBruin, Aly Robinson, Mark Schofield, Gabe Nelson, Jacob Johnson, Julie O'Shaughnessy

Agenda items:

- 1. Introductions** – All present introduced themselves and provided a brief summary of their role in Columbia Valley.

The following community members were present: Carl McDaniel and Rebecca Cayen.

Ed Halasz from the Whatcom County Health Department was also present. Ed is primarily involved in the solid waste department and deals with the illegal dumping of garbage.

- 2. Approval of November 13, 2019 meeting summary** – Jerry moved to approve the meeting notes. Jacob seconded the motion.
- 3. Open public comment** – None
- 4. Announcements** – None
- 5. Discussion of new community group as possible committee member – all**

Julie – Asked if the new community watch group, Columbia Valley Watch, should be formally invited to be part of the Clean Air Committee and included in the list of members.

Rebecca – Asked who represents Columbia Valley Watch.

Phil – Columbia Valley Watch has rolling representative for each monthly meeting. Meetings are scheduled for the 3rd Thursday of each month at the East Whatcom Resource Center.

Carl – Columbia Valley Watch will continue to invite the fire department and the border patrol to attend and provide monthly updates. In addition, there will be a different speaker for various topics of interest.

Rebecca – Concerned that with a rolling lead, it is unclear who would attend the Clean Air Committee meetings.

Carl – Will consult with Columbia Valley Watch representatives at the water district meeting to get their input and will report to the committee on how they might participate.

6. Woodstove replacement update

Mark – Just finished quality assurance inspections for three installations. Getting positive feedback from residents, especially from a homeowner with a pellet stove who does not have to haul wood any longer. Residents with new woodstoves are learning how to make appropriate fires in their devices.

In terms of overall projects, there are 24 projects in various stages of completion. Two projects are fully completed and have been forwarded to fiscal for invoicing. Eleven projects are in the works, meaning work orders have been issued for the installation of the device (wood or pellet stove, or ductless heat pump). Eleven additional projects have bids that have been put out to contractors.

We are very close to fully utilizing all available funds for this grant round, which ends June 30, 2021. We are still taking information from residents who are interested, but are putting a hold on these projects until the amount of remaining funding is clear.

Mark and Julie emphasized that change-out funding for both Opportunity Council Programs – Low-income Weatherization and Community Energy Challenge – are from the same source, the Ecology grant. During the intake process, residents are asked if they are also interested in weatherization programs. If so, and if they meet income qualifications, their change-out is referred to the Weatherization Program. If they are not interested in any program, they are routed to the Community Energy Challenge Program.

Next Tuesday will be a ductless heat pump roundtable meeting at the Building Performance Center. The purpose is to discuss best practices, latest technologies and unit installations amongst individuals who are involved in the change-out program.

Julie – For this grant cycle, an estimated 25 households would receive a ‘tier-1’ change-out package that included a new wood or pellet stove and a ductless heat pump at an average cost of \$9,400 per household. However, not all households will receive both units, which will allow more than 25 households to receive a cleaner source of heat. The cost per household was determined by averaging the cost of the units since the inception of the grant. Our grant is the only one in the state that allows for full cost coverage of both units. Prior to this approach, only five households over a ten-year period participated in the incentive-based program.

7. Biomass committee – Phil

Phil – Representatives of the biomass committee are very close to hauling logs. Still working through the final challenges associated with this activity, but very close to having a wood bank.

Will work with the Opportunity Council to determine the type of voucher program to implement.

Julie – Asked if wood might be available this winter-heating season.

Phil – Is hopeful, but considers it a very ambitious timeline.

8. Outreach activities/ideas

Spring cleanup event:

Rebecca – Has been working with Aly to move forward on the “Project Neighborly” grant, funded by the Whatcom Community Foundation. After further review, the chipping event may not be the best fit for this grant or as competitive as other projects. As a result, continue to look for additional funding. Rebecca will bring up the possibility of funding additional chipping days at the Mount Baker Foundation meeting tonight.

Aly – “Project Neighborly” is about building neighborliness and a case may be made for a chipping event, but it may not be as competitive as hosting a community event. However, the project may be viewed as creative and innovative. Would like to see a greater equity in funding and see more projects funded in the east county area.

Rebecca – Still considering other types of material clean-up (appliances, tires), but will keep them separate from the chipping event. Although the events will be separate, all events are targeted for April.

Phil – Commented that the tire cleanup event was very popular and successful.

Aly – Provided the following update: Tire Amnesty Program is a statewide program funded by Ecology and is very popular and competitive. Bill Angel at the Whatcom County Health Department applied for the program with a spring timeline. However, because of the competitiveness of the program, applicants are placed on a waiting list that could be several years.

Carl – Asked about the ability and resources available to address roadside and green belt garbage.

Ed Halasz – Is responsible for organizing “Adopt a road” program for the Whatcom County Health Department. There is a possibility of implementing a similar program in this area if there were “captains” or “leads” who would do the pickup and then have a dumpster under lock and key.

Phil – Speaking from experience, locking a dumpster is not sufficient to prevent illegal dumping. It needs to be behind a fence and locked gate.

Aly – There is currently a pilot project underway in this area. Once completed, can check-in to evaluate the possibility of continuing or expanding the program.

Rebecca – What about the idea of “captains” having vouchers to dispose of material? Exploring all options is important.

Julie – Asked Ed how many cleanup sites Whatcom County Health Department currently overseeing in Columbia Valley.

Ed Halasz – There are approximately 40 active sites overseen by the health department. A site investigation is initiated after a complaint is filed. The county has utilized the voucher program in the past to help residents with a one-time cleanup with their property.

Phil – Suggested checking into the Paul Allen Foundation for possible funding. From his experience, the community cleanup event is in line with the foundation’s objective.

Julie – Will confirm the amount of funding available for a spring chipping event.

Jacob – Checked on the possibility of the fire marshal’s office helping to support a chipping event. The appropriateness of funding such an event is still being considered, as is the trickledown effect it may have on other communities that face the same challenge.

Rebecca – Quantifying the effectiveness of the chipping program, through complaint information or material removed, may help to provide support for additional funding.

Jerry – Reiterated the importance of changing behavior. Many of the complaints received by the fire department are people burning garbage in their wood stoves. Until behavior is changed, the problem will still exist even if there is positive movement overall.

9. Burn ban follow-up, enforcement, penalty discussion

Julie – Asked the committee for feedback and/or comments on what is viewed as appropriate for enforcement and penalties if we go into a Stage II burn ban. During a Stage II burn ban, burning a wood-heating device is not allowed unless a resident has a valid wood-heating exemption (issued annually) and burns cleanly (20% opacity or less).

Phil – Feels that it is NWCAA job to determine the appropriate follow-up for the various scenarios.

Jerry - Asked Jacob and Gabe about the fire marshal's penalty schedule for repeat illegal burners.

Gabe – The fire marshal's office uses an escalating approach. Typically, the fire marshal gets involved on the second incident, which is referred by a fire department. During this contact, the fire marshal attempts to educate the burner on applicable regulations and helps them understand why it is important to change behavior. A \$250/day penalty may be imposed at this time, if egregious. The burner is also informed that if there is a third time, the violation may be referred to NWCAA, which typically imposes much higher penalties.

Carl – Voiced that small fines for recalcitrant burners is not very effective, similar to fines associated with blight properties. Unless there is an enforcement mechanism, fining is ineffective.

Julie – NWCAA has the ability to place a lien on private properties. This means that the lien must be cleared (paid) before a person can sell or refinance their property. It may not occur immediately, but it does not go away with time. Contrarily, the penalty increases with time.

If a Stage II burn ban is called, inspectors will identify households that are burning and their level of smoke (opacity). The appropriate follow-up, including potential enforcement and penalties, will be determined after the history of that household is reviewed (e.g. number of contacts, change-out, moisture meter, etc.). If enforcement and penalties are imposed, a deferred path for correction will be an option made available to the resident. Without enforcement, however, the program is incomplete.

Jerry & Carl – Suggested including the property owner on the second contact so that they are aware of the situation and can act to help abate the situation, if they so choose to.

Ed Halasz – Asked for clarification on wood-heating exemptions.

Julie – Provided a summary of the four types of exemptions: One-time, 10-day; no other adequate source of heat; low-income (as qualified by OppCo); breakdown (of alternative heat source). Heating exemptions are good for one heating season only. If a person has a valid exemption, they must still burn cleanly (20% opacity or less).

Carl – Asked Ed if the health department can provide a higher level of assistance to households with significant solid waste problems via their new disposal program. This might help create a new baseline for the property owner.

Ed – The current program is not set up in that manner and any deviation for a one-time major cleanup would need to be approved by his boss.

Rebecca – Commented on the importance for agencies and associations to coordinate on problematic situations to ensure clarity and transparency. This would alleviate the possibility of entities being played against each other.

10. Air quality and complaint update

Julie – Since our last meeting, there were three exceedances of the health-based standard for PM 2.5. These occurred on November 21st and 22nd, and December 9th. The health-based standard is 35 ug/m3 averaged over 24-hours.

Over this same period, one wood heating complaint was received on the 400 block of Flair Valley Drive. The complaint referenced heavy smoke and wet wood.