

**East Whatcom Community Council
Clean Air Committee
Meeting summary
December 9, 2020 - via video conference**

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: Rebecca Cayen, East Whatcom Community Council (newly elected)

Co-chair Outreach: Carl McDaniel, Community Member (newly elected)

Members: Jerry DeBruin & David Moe - WCFPD #14; Aly Robinson - Whatcom County Health Department; Mark Schofield - Opportunity Council (OppCo); Curtis Metz, Gabe Nelson, Jacob Johnson - Whatcom County Fire Marshal; Viktor Vetkov - Slavic Church; Julie O'Shaughnessy - Northwest Clean Air Agency

Present: Rebecca Cayen, Carl McDaniel, Aly Robinson, Mark Schofield, Jacob Johnson, Curtis Metz; Julie O'Shaughnessy

Agenda items:

- 1. Introductions** – No introductions necessary. All present know each other. Rebecca Cayen and Carl McDaniel, community members, were present.
- 2. Approval of October 14, 2020 meeting summary** – Carl moved to approve the meeting notes. Curtis seconded the motion.
- 3. Open public comment - None**
- 4. Announcements** – Phil Cloward, Chair of the Clean Air Committee, passed on November 11. He was a passionate man with a strong commitment to his community. Phil will be greatly missed.

Next meeting date – January 13, 2021

5. Clean Air Committee members & Chair position

Julie – With Phil's passing, the nomination of a new Chair of the Clean Air Committee is needed. Julie's opinion is that the new chair needs to be a community member.

Carl – A benefit that Phil brought to the committee was his involvement with biomass. The challenge in continuing to develop and explore the biomass topic is identifying and connecting with an individual Phil worked with on this topic. There is general knowledge about the objectives (wood bank and pellet mill), but other known person. This may make it difficult to continue further progress.

Carl proposed the possibility of Rebecca Cayen becoming Chair.

Rebecca – Asked what the position involves.

Julie – Historically, stakeholders were identified and a strategic plan to improve air quality by reducing wood stove smoke was developed. Not being involved in the early years of the committee, Julie spoke to what the Chair position currently involves.

The role of the Chair has been to manage meetings and act as a liaison between the community and committee members. The Chair has helped to formulate outreach activities, events and projects and to provide community perspectives. The committee's focus continues to be improving the air quality in the East Whatcom County region through change-outs, outreach, and community involvement.

Carl – Does not mind doing community outreach as he is already doing it and regularly attends the meetings. Carl suggested splitting the responsibility of Chair. He would do outreach and Rebecca would oversee and manage meetings.

Rebecca – Regularly attends meetings and plans to continue coordinating the wood-chipping project.

Curtis – Asked if the Chair could nominate a person for outreach efforts.

Julie – Clarified that there are no secretarial or document management responsibilities associated with the position of Chair. Agenda development, meeting notes and summary documents are the responsibility of NW Clean Air Agency (NWCAA).

Mark – Inquired if the Clean Air Committee was part of the East Whatcom Community Council (EWCC) and if they would have any say on how or who a new Chair was determined.

Rebecca – Is a member of the EWCC, which has not met since the beginning of COVID and is unsure how EWCC would influence this decision.

Julie – Reached out to Rebecca Boonstra, the Chair of EWCC, at the beginning of the pandemic to inquire if it was still appropriate for our committee to meet since it is a sub-committee of EWCC. Boonstra had no issues with our continuing to meet and to stay in-action on smoke reduction efforts.

Summarized that it is the committee's intent to nominate Rebecca as the new Chair. Rebecca then has the ability to designate responsibilities such as outreach to community members, such as Carl. Asked if this decision requires a motion.

MOTION: Carl moved to nominate Rebecca Cayen as the new Chair of the Clean Air Committee. Curtis seconded the motion. The motion passed, unanimously.

6. Wood stove replacement update

Mark – We are currently working with three low-income households on wood stove replacements. Additional grant funding secured by NWCAA allows for these additional change-outs. Once completed and if funding allows, a client will be contacted from the "wait list" which prioritized low-income and high emission households.

Rebecca – Asked if further funding may be available and when the next grant round starts.

Julie – No further funds are available for this grant round (FY19-21), which is July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2021. The next biennium grant cycle starts July 1, 2021 and available funds will be determined by the legislature. It is estimated that \$2 million will be available

state-wide through the competitive grant process. All local air agencies and Ecology offices are eligible to apply for areas where poor air quality has been measured.

Energy power surge:

Mark – In mid-October there was a storm event that resulted in a power surge which blew-out electronics including several ductless heat pumps. PSE, installers and ductless heat pump manufacturers are investigating the situation to determine its root cause and how to rectify the situation. OppCo is working with PSE and the contractors to get the appropriate people involved to prevent this from happening again.

Carl – The power surge affected more than ductless heat pumps. Many electronics including printers, ovens, refrigerators and TVs were fried.

7. OppCo's work status with clients update

Mark – OppCo resumed in-home work several weeks ago including energy audits and weatherization work. Robust COVID safety protocols are in place for staff and clients. Coordination with clients is done up front to ensure safety for all.

8. Biomass

Rebecca – Asked, in Phil's absence, about the future of biomass; is it possible to make contact with individuals who worked with Phil; are there other goals besides the wood bank that are reasonable; is there a community individual who may be willing to continue pursuit of the wood bank; and, if so, who.

Is willing to try to find someone in the community who was working with Phil on the wood bank to see if they would step-up and take it on. Would hate to lose aspects of biomass efforts that potentially add value to the community.

Mark – Suggested reviewing meeting notes for potential contact information associated with the woodland coop and log storage.

Rebecca – Please forward any contact information to her and she will try to reach out to them.

Julie – Dry wood and good burning practices are critical to achieve clean burning.

Rebecca – "Biomass" versus "Biomass Committee" will remain on the agenda, as it is still relevant to chipping events and to potential wood bank progress.

The next chipping event is scheduled for April.

Carl – Asked if anyone has contact with Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff. Over the past few years DNR has not allowed private citizens to harvest wood on DNR property. This has resulted in a reduction in quality fuels for individuals.

Rebecca – Is in communication with several people at DNR and will inquire as to why the change.

9. NWCAA update

Burn ban discussion (all):

Carl – During this last round of smoke, it was so bad early in the morning that it obstructed road visibility. A thread on Nextdoor promoted how to obtain a wood-heating exemption for the purpose of continuing to burn. Not out of need, but for individual interest. How do we foster community commitment to not burn for several days during a ban for the sake of the community instead of continuing to burn for the interest of individuals?

Rebecca – Knew there was a burn ban in effect and tried to research it to provide information to a homebound neighbor, but had difficulty finding any information on the current air-quality (AQ) burn ban. Googled many sites and topics and finally found it on the fire department’s website. Suggested refining and promoting burn ban information so that it is easier to find.

Jacob – Whatcom County had *fire safety* burn ban information on their website, but that was removed several months ago.

Aly – Asked if calling and communicating an AQ burn ban is the responsibility of NW Clean Air Agency.

Julie – Calling and communicating AQ burn bans are the responsibilities of NW Clean Air Agency. The challenge with the recent episode (Stage 2) was that Columbia Valley, with its unique topography and population density, had **extremely** poor air quality while no other area in western Washington was remotely close to even calling a Stage-1 AQ ban. This discrepancy in western Washington air quality conditions made it difficult for the story to make the local news.

Feedback on the difficulty of finding and accessing timely and meaningful messages regarding AQ burn bans was heard. NW Clean Air Agency is committed to improving on the delivery of more meaningful and timely messages to Columbia Valley.

Curtis – Shared that the County is working toward a “Notify Me” feature on their website for different topics. Fire safety burn bans are one of the options that community members can sign up and receive notifications. Wondered if there is a way to include AQ burn bans without confusing fire safety burn bans versus air quality burn bans.

Julie – The NWCAA website has “Alerts” that people can sign up for, but it was not working properly. Rectifying this and enhancing communication are a priority.

Rebecca – Asked if it is possible to add a link on the Whatcom County website to the NWCAA website.

Carl – Fire District 14 posted burn ban information on their website as well as on Nextdoor that burning was not allowed.

Aly – It may be important for community members to know that NWCAA is responsible for calling burn bans. This may require NWCAA to have a presence on social media and deliver the message directly.

From experience, it has been important for the health department to have a presence on social media and deliver direct messages regarding COVID. Aly is a resource for the development of a communications plan.

Conclusion – A refined communications campaign increasing awareness of all things associated with air quality, burning techniques, burn bans and exemptions is needed by NWCAA.

NWCAA update – Julie

- **Outreach efforts** – Progress is slow. Still working with the graphic artist to develop a new fire hall air quality sign and sandwich board “call to action” signs.
- **Stage II burn ban update** – An exceedingly strong and stable weather system moved into the Columbia Valley area on December 1. NWCAA called a burn ban on December 2 specific to Columbia Valley only. Air quality was measured in the hazardous range (hourly average) on multiple days. Burn ban signs were placed at entrances of neighborhoods to spread the message. To date, four consecutive days have exceeded the 24-hour average health-based standard.

Currently, 24 households have applied for wood heating exemptions. Seventeen were low-income, six were “no other adequate source of heat” and one was a “breakdown”.

On December 4th, four NWCAA inspectors observed emissions from approximately 70 chimneys actively burning during the ban. Emissions varied from heat waves to heavy emissions. Contact with each of these households will be attempted, including ten households “new” to NWCAA.

The focus of the outreach will be to determine why someone was burning and if resources are necessary. Appropriate follow-up actions will be determined by the information gathered and the person’s burning history.

In exceptional cases with extension documentation, a ticket and fine may be issued. The penalty may be up to \$1,500, but would allow for a “path-to-zero” which allows for the forgiveness of the penalty in lieu of actions by the resident.

Carl – There was a land clearing burn off South Pass and Heady Road that may have contributed to the smoke accumulation during this ban even though the site is outside of the UGA.

- **Purple Air sensors** – In an effort ensure a comprehensive representation of air quality throughout Columbia Valley, NWCAA is looking to locate ten purple air sensors at households throughout the valley. The sensors are back ordered several months and require wifi and internet service. The operational cost is approximately \$1/year.

Carl – Provided a list of potential siting locations throughout the valley. The current sites are distributed as far south as Dardu Road.