



## Environmental and Energy Stewardship Subcommittee

200 College Street, Room 404

March 17, 2023

### Meeting Minutes

#### Subcommittee Members Present

Chairman Newman, Commissioner Sloan, Commissioner Wells, Councilperson Ullman, Chris Link

#### Staff Members Present

Sybil Tate, Jeremiah LeRoy, Jennifer Harrison, Dane Pederson, Max Taintor, Ashley Featherstone, Jackie Hamstead, Lillian Govus

Commissioner Sloan called the meeting to order at 10:04 am.

Motion to approve the March agenda and the February meeting minutes passed unanimously.

#### Public Comment:

No public comment.

#### New Member Introduction

- Chris Link is the Community Farm Manager for Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy
- He has a background in landscape architecture with a focus on agriculture, land access, farm education, water quality
- Project experience includes stream mitigation and educational workshops

#### Solid Waste Updates

- Convenience Sites
  - Recap of focus group feedback: Overall enthusiasm for convenience sites but didn't want to pay on tax bill. Pay as you throw model preferred.
  - Capital costs of recent projects in other counties:
    - Vary between \$1-4 million per site
    - Depends on multiple factors: land cost, services offered, grading, paving, etc.
    - Capital investments can improve ingress/ egress, customer safety, operational efficiency, staff comfort/ safety
  - Operating Costs of other counties:
    - Vary from: \$340K- \$2.4 million (for all sites in operation)
    - Depends on multiple factors: distance to landfill, employee salary, disposal services, security, in-house vs contracted services, etc.
    - Staff salaries ranged from \$9.25/ hr - \$19/ hr
  - Convenience site payment option examples
    - Collecting payment at transfer station inhibits flow of traffic
    - Prepaid punch cards (Gaston County)
    - Supported by tipping fee funds (New Hanover)
    - Pay based on size of bag/ bulky item with discounts for recyclables (Cabarrus)
    - \$165 annual tax (Durham and Haywood)



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- Staff recommends focusing on the Waste Hauling RFP/ Contract, the reconfiguration of the transfer station right now, and exploration of new payment models at the transfer stations
- Waste Pro Contract Extension
  - Waste Pro Contract Residential survey
    - Expect similar level of high engagement as the Let's Talk Trash Survey
    - External survey rollout to include: press releases, social media, text messages, public input site, website
    - will go live March- April
    - 3 surveys: Current subscribers, former subscribers, never subscribers
  - RFP Timeline:
    - June 2023- BOC decision to renew/ renegotiate contract
    - Jan 2024- Issue RFP
    - If the County chooses to extend the contract, it would be for 2 more years, with option for another 2-year extension
  - Subcommittee members noted that negative feedback from residents has decreased

### Water Quality Study and Discussion with Mountain True

- Hartwell Carson is the French Broad Riverkeeper
- French Broad River has highest E.coli pollution in the state. Routinely fails water quality standards set by EPA.
- E.coli is coming from sewer, septic, animals but is also strongly connected to sediment
- Mountain True is using DNA to identify sources of E.coli. Cows are biggest contributor according to their study.
- Limitations of data:
  - Tests produce false positives.
  - Human waste can continue animal DNA.
  - Highly impacted by rain events. High fluctuations in E.coli levels are typical.
- Mountain True has ~80% confidence in the data, which is why they are replicating it
  - Sampled in areas with known E.coli issues
  - Will be adding a Bent Creek sampling site and another location on Cane Creek
- Mountain True has found that septic is more problematic than sewer
  - Hendersonville study shows that drain fields aren't working very well
  - Mountain True has state-awarded money for septic repair.
    - \$400K for Henderson, Buncombe, Cherokee counties
    - Have 4 applications in, struggling to get word out
    - If County gets any interest, they should forward to Mountain True.
- MT attempted to combine their data with partners to generate a more robust water quality metric
- Water quality issues have not been linked to specific farming operations to start corrective action, but this is a good next step.
- Key takeaways
  - Improve stormwater ordinance
  - Continue good work with failing septic



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- Add requirements for septic systems to be inspected upon sale of home.
- Start with lowering hanging fruit (willing farmer partners)
- Sediment pollution is biggest problem, from construction, need more enforcement

### Water Quality Staff Discussion

- Increase Cost share funding
  - Proposed cost would get folks to the 75% level on projects that chose not to move forward with the current levels of cost share available
  - The 42K proposed would support 5-10 projects
- Defining timing of actions proposed in the memo:
  - Short-term= almost immediately once we have the funding
  - Long-term= 6-12 months to get off the ground
- Unanimous support for utilizing interns to join WNC Rec Water Quality Monitoring Program and Cost Share Program
- Clean Water Fund discussion
  - Support shovel-ready projects vetted by the WAPs
  - Discussion around need to additional staff
    - No opposition to Watershed Coordinator position long-term however there is interest in starting work prior to bring on new staff
    - The Watershed Coordinator would do more than administer the \$. They would support comprehensive accountability/ tracking impact.
    - The EESS could vet project proposals to decrease admin burden. Commission Sloan and Commissioner Wells volunteered to develop the criteria.
    - Focusing on 1-2 projects would ease admin burden
    - Short-term contractor to help with admin (\$25K) could be a strategy
  - Assisting community partners is the appropriate role for the County
- Motion made by Commissioner Wells to pursue partnership with state in monitoring water quality using interns, increase cost share funding at recommended level of \$42K, and create the Buncombe County Clean Water Fund with \$100K to support projects identified in watershed management plans, create subcommittee to develop criteria, and bring criteria and future applications back to the EESS. Motion passed unanimously.

### IRA Air and Climate Updates

- Update on EPA Climate Pollution Grant- Buncombe County doesn't qualify for planning grant. If BC wants implementation funds, we need to engage with the state to make sure our priorities are included in their plan.

### Adjournment

Motion made by Commissioner Sloan at 12:05 pm.