



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.