

**Orange County
Commission for the Environment**

Draft Meeting Summary

November 11, 2013

Solid Waste Management Administration Building, Chapel Hill

PRESENT: Jan Sassaman (Acting Chair), Lucy Adams, May Becker, Peter Cada, Loren Hintz, Donna Lee Jones, Steve Niezgoda, Jeanette O'Connor, Tom O'Dwyer, David Welch

ABSENT: David Neal, Terri Buckner, Susie Enoch, Gary Saunders

STAFF: Rich Shaw, Tom Davis

- I. **Call to Order** – Sassaman called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm. He thanked Hintz for running as a candidate for Chapel Hill Town Council. He congratulated Jenn Weaver (Neal's spouse) for being chosen to serve on the Hillsborough town board.
- II. **Additions or Changes to Agenda** – Becker asked to present a draft food waste resolution that she shared with CFE members earlier. Sassaman recommended adding this item to the agenda prior to the State of the Environment report. The CFE agreed.
- III. **Approval of Minutes** – Sassaman asked for comments on draft September 9 meeting summary. Hintz recommended adding a sentence on Page 2 to explain the bulleted comments were some of the issues that were raised during the discussion. O'Dwyer motioned to approve as amended; Niezgoda seconded. Approved unanimously.
- IV. **Industrial Hemp Film** – O'Dwyer discussed his ongoing continued interest in the CFE sponsoring a screening of a documentary film ("Bringing it Home") that advocates for the legal production of industrial hemp in the United States. He said some CFE members watched the film at his home and others are welcome to borrow it for viewing. He noted several states now support hemp production, which could be regulated and taxed like tobacco to help support other public needs.

Sassaman asked what concerns people about hemp. O'Dwyer said aside from the myth that hemp is similar or equivalent to marijuana, the problem is there is not a marketplace for this product although there is enough demand to establish a system. China and Canada sell hemp products in the US; they also sell bales for manufacturing goods.

O'Dwyer said a few years ago North Carolina passed a law allowing NC State University to experiment with hemp, but there is currently a hold on that research. He said many farmers in Orange County are looking for a better large-scale crop to replace corn. O'Dwyer added that hemp can improve soil by adding beneficial nutrients while removing heavy metals. Jones recalled that "phytoremediation" is one of the beneficial qualities discussed in the Congressional Research Service white paper ("Hemp as an Agricultural Commodity") that O'Dwyer provided earlier.

Hintz supported having a constructive dialogue about hemp production. Welsh said the CFE should identify potential environmental benefits rather than purely economic considerations. O'Dwyer said he would enlist other boards to examine the other issues, such as Agricultural Preservation Board and the Economic Development Commission.

CFE members identified questions about hemp's effects on the environment:

- What are the net effects of hemp on the soil, including soil nutrients? (Cada)
- What effect does hemp farming have on native wildlife? (Cada)
- Could hemp serve as a fast-growing wind break? (Cada)
- Could hemp be considered an invasive species? If so, what affects could hemp have on native plant species? (Adams)
- What else does hemp remove from the soil besides heavy metals? (Adams)
- Is it true that hemp does not require herbicides or pesticides?

O'Dwyer motioned that the CFE authorize him to find answers to those environmental questions, and if he can answer the questions satisfactorily he would then ask CFE members to decide on whether to sponsor a screening of the film. O'Connor seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

CFE Resolution on Food Waste Diversion [Added to agenda] – Sassaman asked Becker to introduce the draft resolution she shared with CFE members via email.

Becker said her proposal follows up on the presentation by Gayle Wilson and Cody Marshall (Orange County Solid Waste Management) to the CFE in April, and on the Solid Waste Forum that the CFE co-sponsored with the Chapel Hill Sustainability Committee in May. Becker said she discussed how the County could improve its food waste program with Gayle Wilson, Blair Pollock and others.

Becker thanked CFE members for their comments thus far and asked if there were other questions. O'Connor suggested the County look at other successful programs around the county, including curbside composting in New York City. She asked whether the resolution aimed to expand only commercial composting or to include residential too.

CFE members discussed the merits of including residential compost collection along with the larger, commercial establishments. Most members suggested focusing the current push on commercial collection of food waste. Shaw said his notes from the April presentation was that Orange County currently diverts 2,000 tons of waste from the landfill each year rather than 4,000 tons as stated in the draft resolution. He recommended the CFE check that figure.

O'Dwyer motioned to approve the resolution with the noted changes. Cada seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously. Sassaman asked staff to send the signed resolution to the BOCC and the towns with the CFE's April 2013 memo on Orange County's Integrated Recycling Program.

- V. **State of the Environment 2014** – Shaw provided an overview of the report progress. He and Davis described the changes made to the Land Resources and Water Resources sections respectively since the last meeting. Shaw asked CFE members to provide critical feedback on the format and contents, and to help staff assess the current trends and identify what the County can do to improve in the different subject areas. Shaw reported that he had not received edits to the Air and Energy section. He recalled that members of the Air and Energy Committee had offered to simplify some of the technical narrative and to reformat the section for CFE consideration. He thanked all CFE members for volunteering their time toward this project, but noted staff still needs a lot of assistance to complete the report on schedule.

Hintz noted that some of the Internet links do not work properly and recommended that they all be checked before final report publication.

Sassaman asked for volunteers from both committees to work closely with Shaw and Davis on identifying specific findings and recommendations to highlight in the report from the CFE. Cada and Becker offered to work on the Water section; Welsh, Hintz and O'Connor on the Land section. Niezgoda offered to read the document for clarity, flow and content. Jones recommended putting complex tables in an appendix.

Sassaman suggested a fourth draft be sent to CFE two weeks prior to the next meeting.

The CFE members agreed that at this stage it is too late to consider wholesale changes to the basic report format. Doing so would require re-editing all sections again.

- VI. **Updates and Information Items** – Sassaman introduced a topic that will be placed on the December meeting agenda. He said the University Methodist Church in Chapel Hill recently purchased eight acres for an urban garden along Bolin Creek. He has invited representatives to describe the project and its potential environmental impacts.

Information on the following other subjects was included in the meeting materials and summarized by staff: a) CFE meeting calendar for 2014, b) OWASA forest management at Cane Creek Mitigation Tract, c) wood pellets being used for fuel, d) Carrboro's energy and climate action plan, e) the relative certainty of climate change, f) new guidance for permitting of solar projects, g) Orange County's recycling of oyster shells, h) a legislative scorecard from the NC League of Conservation Voters, i) Fracking wastewater study findings by Duke researchers, j) US Forest Service water quality BMP newsletter, and k) the winners of "The Nature of Orange" photography contest.

O'Dwyer urged CFE members to continue paying attention to plans for future forest management activities on OWASA's Cane Creek Reservoir properties.

- VII. **Adjournment** – Sassaman adjourned the regular meeting at 9:07. He asked members to meet with staff members of their respective committee to discuss sections of the State of the Environment report.

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Committee Meetings – Members of the Water and Biological Committee met with Davis and Shaw to discuss the draft State of the Environment report and to decide on how they would provide edits and other feedback.

Summary by Rich Shaw, DEAPR Staff