

**Orange County
Commission for the Environment**

DRAFT Meeting Summary

September 8, 2014

Orange County West Campus Office Building, Hillsborough

PRESENT: Jan Sassaman (Chair), May Becker, Peter Cada, Loren Hintz, Donna Lee Jones, Cliff Leath, Bill Newby, Steve Niezgoda, Jeanette O'Connor, Rebecca Ray, David Welch

ABSENT: Judy Miller, David Neal, Gary Saunders, Lydia Wegman

STAFF: Rich Shaw, Tom Davis

GUEST: Rob Pinder

- I. **Call to Order** – Sassaman called the meeting to order at 7:33 pm.
- II. **Additions or Changes to Agenda** – Becker asked to add a discussion of the CFE's November 2013 resolution on the diversion of food waste from the solid waste stream. Shaw asked to add a consideration of whether to hold the October 13 meeting. Sassaman agreed to add both items to the agenda. No other changes or additions.
- III. **Minutes** – Sassaman asked for a motion on the August 11 meeting minutes. Hintz motioned to approve as written; Niezgoda seconded. Approved unanimously.
- IV. **Introduction of New Member** – Judy Miller was not in attendance. Sassaman asked staff to contact Ms. Miller to determine her status for joining the commission.
- V. **Solarize Hillsborough** – Shaw introduced Rob Pinder of "Solarize Hillsborough." Shaw said he had suggested to the Chair that Pinder be invited to the meeting because the project appears to be one that the CFE would find interesting and consistent with its goals and objectives. Shaw added that he had already signed up to receive an assessment of his home for its potential to install solar panels.

Pinder said he represents NextClimate, a non-profit organization. He described Solarize Hillsborough is part of a larger grassroots initiative to bring simple and affordable solar power to homes and businesses in Orange County. He provided environmental and economic reasons for converting to solar energy production and described why this is a particularly good time to do it. Pinder explained the benefits of having several members from a community learning together and earning group discounts for installation.

CFE members provided feedback and asked several questions.

- Hintz asked if there would be outreach directed to low-income homeowners or groups such as Habitat for Humanity. Pinder said the tax credit would not benefit low-income residents, but that NC WARN is partnering with Habitat for Humanity to pursue energy conservation measures.
- Hintz asked if their contractors paid their installers adequately and didn't treat them as independent contractors—a pervasive problem in the construction industry highlighted in this week's News and Observer. Pinder explained the vetting process and said this was not an issue for their contractors, which are certified by the Green Building program.

- Ray asked the status of Duke Energy's purported efforts to limit solar energy installations by its customers. Pinder said it has not been a problem.
- Leath commended Pinder on helping communities to reduce costs. Pinder noted the assessment is free, and 200 homes have signed up so far in Hillsborough.
- Davis asked if the historic commission would object to solar panels in the historic district. Pinder said solar panels should be allowed on the back side of homes.
- O'Connor asked if Solarize Carrboro was still active. Newby asked if Hillsborough's Beckett's Ridge community were eligible. Pinder said the program is open to all county residents, and the more under contract the lower the cost.
- Welch asked if businesses could participate. Pinder said business may participate, but this project is not intended for building commercial solar arrays.
- Sassaman asked what are the downsides to the program. Pinder said he could not think of downsides, however he noted the solar panels degrade over time and are warranted for 25 years.
- Hintz asked if Pinder had encountered any problems with local ordinances. Pinder said many homeowner associations prohibit solar panels, however Chapel Hill and Carrboro don't allow new subdivisions to prohibit them.

Pinder said homeowners are being offered to sign up for a free assessment by November 7, 2014. Assessments will be completed by January 9, 2015, and contracts with homeowners are to be signed by February 13, 2015.

CFE members thanked Pinder and said they would help publicize the program.

CFE Resolution – Diversion of Food Waste (unscheduled item) – Becker reminded commission members of the CFE's resolution concerning the diversion of food waste from Orange County's solid waste stream (November 2013). She noted the CFE has not received a response from the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) nor from the Solid Waste Management Department. Becker asked that the resolution be re-sent to the BOCC for consideration and potential action.

Sassaman noted the BOCC recently appointed the Solid Waste Advisory Group (SWAG)—a multijurisdictional task force charged with developing collaborative solutions for solid waste issues in Orange County. He suggested the matter be forwarded to that group or to the Solid Waste Management Department for developing a plan. Other members felt it would be better for the BOCC to decide how to handle the matter.

Sassaman asked staff to locate the signed resolution and recirculate to CFE members for their information and review. Becker motioned that the CFE review the resolution and, if there were no major objections following that review, direct staff to send another copy of the resolution to the BOCC for consideration and potential action. Hintz seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

October 13 CFE Meeting (unscheduled item) – Shaw asked CFE members whether they wanted to hold their scheduled October 13 meeting or to consider the October 11 Environmental Summit as the October meeting. Sassaman asked CFE members and staff if there were any pressing issues that would warrant holding the meeting. Hearing none, Sassaman agreed to cancel the October 13 meeting.

- VI. **State of the Environment 2014** – Shaw reviewed the status of the draft report. He thanked CFE members and Davis for the work they had done over the past two months. Shaw identified a “punch list” of items needed for completing the report, including page numbering corrections, finalizing the status and trend icons, and adding a dedication to outgoing Commissioner Alice Gordon. He asked CFE members for any other edits or changes, and requested final comments to staff by noon on September 15.

Newby suggested making sure none of the maps were copyrighted. Shaw asked Air and Energy Committee members to provide feedback for the section on energy conservation by Orange County government (pp. 19-20).

CFE members agreed to provide any final comments to staff by noon on September 15. Staff will incorporate those changes into the final report that will be released to the public at Orange County Environmental Summit.

- VII. **Environmental Summit Planning** – Shaw referred CFE members to the draft program and flyer for the Environmental Summit (Attachments 7 and 8). He reported that all speakers have confirmed their participation. Sassaman reported he had met with Norm Christenson, who offered the following title of his presentation: "*Environmental Sustainability in a World of Change: Lessons from the Land.*" O'Connor said she would share that title with Johnny Randall and ask for a title to his invasive species talk.

Shaw reviewed the list of needs for the summit (Attachment 6), and asked for feedback on various matters, including room set up, displays, and invited guests. CFE members decided to invite representatives of area nonprofit organizations to attend the event and to bring brochures, but not to bring displays. Shaw asked CFE members to tell staff which groups to invite to avoid sending out multiple invitations to the same groups. He asked for suggestions by Monday, September 15. Leath said he would publicize the event in the Orange County Voice newsletter. O'Connor suggested publicizing the event in the Chapel Hill News. Niezgoda offered to help transport items to Maple View.

- VIII. **Updates and Information Items** – Information on the following subjects was provided and selected items were summarized by staff: a) “The Nature of Orange” photo contest, b) new transit service to Durham, c) changes to State rules to protect riparian buffers and wetlands, d) the likelihood of shale gas development in NC, e) Attorney General warns company to stop fracking orders, f) Jordan Lake water circulators begin operation, and g) Orange County Board of Adjustment approves PSNC natural gas pipeline.

- IX. **Adjournment** – Hintz motioned to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Welch. Sassaman adjourned the meeting at 9:16 pm.

Summary by Rich Shaw, DEAPR Staff