

**Orange County  
Commission for the Environment**

**Meeting Summary**

**October 12, 2015**

**Richard Whitted Meeting Facility, Hillsborough**

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PRESENT: Jan Sassaman (Chair), May Becker, Tom Eisenhart, Lynne Gronback, David Neal, Jeanette O'Connor, Gary Saunders

ABSENT: Sheila Thomas-Ambat, Peter Cada, Loren Hintz, Bill Newby, Rebecca Ray, Lydia Wegman, David Welch

STAFF: Rich Shaw, Tom Davis, Brennan Bouma

GUESTS: David Stancil (DEAPR Director), Curt Farmer (DEAPR Parks Division)

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- I. **Call to Order** – Sassaman called the meeting to order at 7:38 pm.
- II. **Additions or Changes to Agenda** – None.
- III. **Minutes** – Sassaman asked if there were any comments about the meeting summary for September 14 meeting. There were none; approved by acclamation.
- IV. **Herbicides & Pesticides Used at County Facilities** – Shaw reported that the BOCC asked the CFE to look over a list of herbicides and pesticides used by County staff to manage the grounds at Orange County buildings and facilities, and for the CFE to provide any feedback or recommendations to the staff or to the BOCC.

Shaw referred CFE members to the memo and attached list of herbicides and pesticides that was prepared by Tom Davis with input from other staff responsible for the use of those chemicals on County-owned property. Shaw introduced Curt Farmer who oversees athletic fields at the County's soccer complex (Soccer.com Center) and at other County parks. Shaw also referred members to DEAPR's sustainable landscaping policy, which states that pesticides and herbicides should be used no stronger than directed and only when no other alternative exists. He said the policy also recommends using organic fertilizers including compost.

CFE members asked questions about the list of pesticides and herbicides.

- Sassaman asked how long people are kept off the fields after herbicides are applied. Farmer said each chemical is labeled with guidance on the proper time interval for re-entry. Sassaman asked which is the most common herbicide used. Farmer said it is glyphosate ("RoundUp"); he uses 15 gallons annually.
- O'Connor asked whether the staff has used organic compost as a fertilizer. Farmer said he has tried compost, but there were problems with it containing unwanted materials, including nails and glass. He prefers using sand.
- Becker asked if the staff would be willing to use organic alternatives. Farmer said he is certainly willing as long as they perform well and not too expensive. He welcomed any information or guidance from CFE members. He intends to phase out the use of 2-4-d products as alternatives for killing weeds become available.

- Eisenhart asked how much of a role does cost play in the choice of products used. Farmer said when using public funds price matters quite a lot.
- Gronback asked if Farmer uses a mixture of turf grass. Farmer said yes, especially those that can outcompete the unwanted weeds.
- Stancil noted that many of the users of County fields—especially the Soccer.com Center—demand high-quality fields that require special maintenance. He said the center hosts many tournaments and college soccer showcase events.
- Bouma said he had performed a quick search for viable alternatives to 2-4-d, but could not find anything suitable on line.
- Sassaman said he expects there is a fairly high level of safety and control for the application of herbicides and pesticides on County sites by licensed staff. He said he is more concerned about the use of these products by homeowners in residential areas throughout the county. O'Connor and said she would like to see more guidance targeted toward residential users of these chemicals. Stancil noted that during the 2008 drought period the County held public meetings to educate people about water conservation and the proper use of fertilizers.
- Becker cautioned that just because a product is EPA-approved and regulated there may be alternatives that are better for the natural environment. O'Connor agreed, but also noted that natural compost can also pollute streams.
- Gronback asked Farmer about the use of pre-emergent weed control products. Farmer said he loves them because they often have a one-time application rate.

Bouma said he expects County staff would be welcome to a periodic review of its use of herbicides and other chemicals, including the examination of alternatives. Farmer said this discussion is helpful and timely because this is the time of year to identify product needs for the coming year.

Bouma suggested the staff of DEAPR and AMS (Asset Management Services) meet periodically to discuss potential alternatives to some of the more caustic substances. He said there are some non-profit organizations that monitor these issues and might have some helpful suggestions.

CFE members thanked Davis, Farmer and Stancil for sharing this information.

- V. **Green Building Incentives** – The CFE continued its discussion of potential incentives for energy-efficient construction. Bouma provided an update on the Town of Chapel Hill's early experience with the pilot commercial green building incentive in the Ephesus-Fordham planning district.

Bouma reported that he had spoken with Jesse Freedman who, along with John Richardson, had briefed the CFE on this program in April 2015. Bouma said the town had only received three or four building permits for this district thus far, but only one of those—an apartment building—is under construction. The town anticipates the developer of that building will be applying for some kind of green building certification; however it's unclear whether he would have done this regardless of the town's incentives. Bouma explained that developers often choose to apply for such certification as a marketing tool despite the high cost of applying and obtaining the certification.

Bouma said it may be years before the Town of Chapel Hill has enough of experience with this incentive program to determine the effectiveness of the program. He answered questions from CFE members.

- O'Connor asked if developers are required to take the incentive. Bouma said no, they are not. Neal said it may be unlawful to require that.
- Neal asked if the town staff knew how large a project needed to be to justify (or pay back) the cost of the green building features. Bouma said he did not know, but he noted he and other County staff are looking at potential green building practices for the construction of the planned new County jail in Hillsborough.
- Sassaman asked if there are any guarantees that future operators of the green buildings will maintain them properly. Neal and Bouma said they did not think so. Neal said he attended a recent conference and learned that human error accounts for many failures in the operation of green building features. He noted, however, there are new technologies for monitoring the performance of energy-saving devices in buildings.

Neal suggested the CFE inform the BOCC that although there has not been enough time to assess the effectiveness of the Town of Chapel Hill's commercial green building incentive program it may be worthwhile for Orange County to establish a similar incentive program for large commercial development projects. Bouma suggested the County may also want to include some large-scale residential development projects. Neal and other CFE members agreed with that idea.

Sassaman asked if Neal was suggesting the CFE write another memo to the BOCC. Neal said he thought it may be better to craft a CFE resolution, and that he is willing to prepare a draft resolution for CFE consideration at the November meeting.

Sassaman thanked Bouma and Neal for the report and the proposed next steps.

- VI. **Collaborative Energy Conservation/Management Projects** – Saunders and Bouma reported on the third meeting of the interagency committee working to collaborate on projects to address energy conservation and management projects of mutual interest and where there may be opportunities for collaboration among the entities, OWASA, Orange County, UNC, and the towns of Carrboro and Chapel Hill.

Saunders reported the group selected five projects, and for each one the group has identified a "champion" and some initial next steps. The five projects are as follows:

- Biogas to energy at OWASA wastewater treatment plant
- Technical evaluation of solar PV opportunities at public facilities/land tracts
- Street lighting coordination (particularly lighting under direct control of agencies)
- Fleet management opportunities
- Joint energy and carbon tracking and reporting

Saunders said the next meeting will be October 28, during which the group will discuss the five projects and determine where to go next. Bouma said the group members seem to be collaborative and the meetings have been productive thus far.

Sassaman thanked Saunders and Bouma for their report.

- VII. **CFE Outreach / News Articles** – Shaw presented an updated schedule for new articles to be prepared by staff and CFE members. Bouma said he would work with Neal on the next article summarizing the recent activities of the Solarize Orange initiative. Bouma said he would be meeting with Rob Pinder (Next Climate / Solarize Orange) the next day and would ask for summary information to include in the article. Shaw reported that the article about fracking that the CFE approved at the September meeting was submitted to the newspapers on September 19; however he heard back from Mark Schultz (Chapel Hill News) that it might not be published until after the Chapel Hill elections. Shaw said he has not yet seen the article in The News of Orange County.

Bouma reported that three ideas for public service announcements (PSAs) that CFE members offered in September have been prepared for airing on WCHL radio during the month of October. He thanked the CFE for their input on that initiative.

- VIII. **Annual Report and Work Plan (2015-16)** – Sassaman reminded CFE members that each year the BOCC asks its advisory boards to prepare a report of their activities, accomplishments, new issues, and concerns. He referred members to the 2014-15 report in the meeting materials. He noted the 2015-16 will be due December 18.

Shaw suggested he would work with Davis and Bouma to prepare a draft 2015-16 report for the CFE to discuss and revise in November. The CFE agreed with that plan.

- IX. **Updates and Information Items** – Information on the following subjects was provided in the meeting package; selected items were discussed: a) Green Restaurant Challenge, b) solid waste/recycling/food waste, c) Orange County support for small solar, d) Nov 2016 bond package, e) OWASA biosolids management, f) Forest Service advice for ash trees, g) Raleigh streetlights to be switched to LED, h) Changes to state environmental laws/rules, i) EPA's environmental justice efforts, j) NC House and Senate pass industrial hemp bill, k) Fine particles linked to early death, i) Haw River Trail

- X. **Adjournment** – Sassaman adjourned the meeting at 9:00 pm.

Summary by Rich Shaw, DEAPR Staff