

**Orange County
Commission for the Environment**

Meeting Summary

August 10, 2015

Richard Whitted Meeting Facility, Hillsborough

PRESENT: Jan Sassaman (Chair), May Becker, Peter Cada, Tom Eisenhart, Lynne Gronback, Loren Hintz, David Neal, Bill Newby, Jeanette O'Connor, Rebecca Ray, Sheila Thomas-Ambat, Lydia Wegman, David Welch

ABSENT: Gary Saunders

STAFF: Tom Davis, Rich Shaw

GUESTS: Elizabeth Zander, Bill Kaiser (Chapel Hill Environmental Stewardship Advisory Board)

- I. **Call to Order** – Sassaman called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm.
- II. **Additions or Changes to Agenda** – Hintz asked to discuss his draft news article about invasive species. Sassaman agreed to add that to the Updates and Information items.
- III. **Minutes** – Wegman motioned to approve the June 8 minutes as written; seconded by Eisenhart. Approved unanimously.
- IV. **Advisory Board Appreciation** – Shaw handed out insulated lunch bags-- a gift from the Board of County Commissioners office to members of Orange County advisory boards. Shaw expressed his thanks to CFE members for their volunteer service to the county.
- V. **Hydrilla in the Eno River Update** – Davis provided an update on results from the initial two months of using herbicide to help control the spread of hydrilla in the Eno River east of Hillsborough. He showed maps of the project area, depicting the progress of the herbicide concentrations at different monitoring stations between Lawrence Road (near Hillsborough) and Red Mill Road (near Falls Lake). Davis showed photos of hydrilla in the Eno River before and after the herbicide treatment.

Davis reported the hydrilla has died back considerably from the treatment, but there has been some chlorosis to native water willow and injury to native riffleweed. A two- to three-week pause in treatment was initiated on July 20 during which the management zone will be monitored for response of natives and remnant hydrilla. Depending on these responses, treatment will either be considered complete or be resumed at a lower injection rate to prevent hydrilla recovery but reduce potential stress to riffleweed.

Davis answered questions from CFE members about the cost of the two year study (\$75K) and what agency has the lead role in determining how to proceed with the project (NC Division of Water Resources). CFE members thanked Davis for his presentation and asked him to keep them apprised as further results become available.
- VI. **Green Restaurant Challenge** – Elizabeth Zander introduced herself as Chair of the Chapel Hill Environmental Stewardship Advisory Board, whose charge is to assist the Chapel Hill Town Council in strengthening environmentally responsible practices that protect, promote, and nurture the community and the natural world through advice and program support. She introduced her colleague and former CFE member, Bill Kaiser.

Zander presented her board's plans for a "Green Restaurant Challenge" for CFE consideration and potential collaboration. She said restaurants would be evaluated based on four criteria: energy consumption, water consumption, waste reduction, and local sourcing. Zander said she has conferred with Brennan Bouma because of his experience with the Triangle Green Business Challenge while with Triangle J Council of Governments. She has also conferred with Blair Pollock and Muriel Williman with the Orange County Solid Waste Management department.

Zander asked whether the CFE would be interested in collaborating with her board, and possibly expanding the "challenge" to restaurants operating throughout Orange County. She noted that one of the CFE's objectives is to increase food composting.

CFE members asked questions and offered their ideas:

- Hintz asked if there would be prizes awarded. Zander said the winners would be recognized with good public relations. She noted Person County had a guidebook to restaurants and highlighted those with sustainable practices.
- Wegman asked if the idea has been discussed with sample restaurants. Zander has spoken with two owners who noted monitoring waste would be difficult.
- Hintz asked staff if there would be any problem for the County to participate, such as listing winning restaurants on its website. Shaw said it should be alright to list the winners based on the contest criteria, but he would need to check.
- Sassaman asked how much variation might there be among different restaurants; and noted a restaurant's size would affect its ability to achieve efficiencies. Zander said they need to find equitable ways to measure success, such as basing on number of patrons, percentage change, or most improved.
- Neal said evaluating energy consumption would also be challenging due to some restaurants using leased space versus owning the building outright and being able to make changes. Gronback suggested dividing them into two categories.
- O'Connor suggested promoting financial incentives, such as rebates.
- Hintz noted a countywide campaign would also include Mebane, Hillsborough, and Carrboro. He asked how the challenge would work. Zander said she envisions a six-week contest, beginning with publicity, baseline measures at the participating restaurants, documenting any changes, and tallying results.
- Cada said the variability of restaurant buildings makes it difficult to make comparisons. It may be better to recognize restaurants for the percent of improvements made for different measures over the time period.
- Neal said this contest should be a positive and educational opportunity that encourages participation. He suggested that "just by playing, you win."
- Shaw said rather than using detailed metrics perhaps the contest could ask participants to simply tell what they have done to reduce waste, or reduce energy or water consumption, or to increase local sourcing. Keep it open and subjective.
- O'Connor suggested introducing some social justice element, such as the percentage of unused food that is donated to another organization.

Zander thanked CFE members for these ideas and asked if anyone wished to help plan for the contest in a smaller group discussion. Wegman, Neal, and Gronback offered their assistance. Sassaman thanked those members and asked Neal to report back.

Sassaman then thanked Zander and Kaiser for sharing this information with the CFE and welcomed their ideas for other opportunities for potential collaboration.

- VII. **Green Building Incentives** – Neal noted that it had been since early 2012 that the CFE, in a memo to the Planning Board, expressed its interest in pursuing potential incentives for energy-efficient construction and renovation in Orange County. He recommends not waiting for the Town of Chapel Hill to complete its pilot study of offering incentives for “green building” in the Ephesus-Fordham district. Neal mentioned a conversation with Commissioner Jacobs in which he wished Morinaga had installed solar panels on its buildings. Neal said he reminded Jacobs the County has authority to offer incentives.

Shaw suggested that he and Bouma meet with one or more receptive members of the County building inspections staff to discuss the potential for green building incentives. He will make the contacts and notify Neal so that he can participate if available.

O’Connor said the Town of Carrboro considered offering green building incentives, but the cost of permits for the relatively small size of projects in Carrboro is not enough to offer much of a rebate. She said a representative from the Homebuilders Association will be meeting with Town staff to discuss other ideas for potential incentives.

Gronback said Green Globes, maintained by the Green Building Initiative, is an alternative to the LEED green building rating system for assessing a building’s water efficiency, energy usage, construction materials, indoor air quality, and building site.

Hintz said one purpose of this effort is to increase education and awareness; even small financial incentives can increase the chance that builders consider the green options. Sassaman agreed, and noted many people in Orange County cannot afford to improve the efficiency of their homes without the availability of financial and technical assistance.

Neal said he wants the County to do what it can to promote green building using the authority granted by the General Assembly. He still considers this “low-hanging fruit” and a worthwhile endeavor for the County—using either incentives or public education.

The CFE discussed the possibility of sending the BOCC a copy of the CFE’s January 2012 memo to the Planning Board, and asking the BOCC for its support and direction.

Shaw suggested waiting on re-sending that memo to the BOCC until he and Bouma has a meeting with County building inspections staff to discuss this matter and identify specific ways the County could design and implement potential incentives. He will arrange a meeting and notify Neal so that he has an opportunity to participate. Sassaman asked to be notified of the meeting as well.

Neal and Wegman indicated that following the meeting(s) with the inspections staff they would be willing to go back to the Planning Board to re-engage them in a conversation on how to make this work. Wegman noted she is now a member of the Planning Board. Wegman suggested they might also involve other advisory boards such as the Economic Development Commission.

Wegman asked staff to check in with the Town of Chapel Hill staff to see if there is any further progress on their pilot program and to report back to the CFE in September.

- VIII. **Photo Contest Winners** – Shaw presented the winning photos from “The Nature of Orange” photography contest, which is co-sponsored by the CFE. Shaw reminded CFE members the goal of the contest is to inspire people to help document the beauty and diversity of our natural resources and our residents connecting to their environment. He displayed the winning photos from the Youth and Adult categories, and reported that the photos will be on display at area libraries, visitor centers, and other public places.
- IX. **Updates and Information Items** – Information on the following subjects was provided in the meeting package; selected items were discussed: a) CFE comments on draft changes to impervious surface rules, b) CFE memo re 2016 bond package, c) CFE news article on native plants, d) Blackwood Farm Park opening, e) solar energy at Rogers Rd Community Center, f) Orange Co. under quarantine for emerald ash borer, g) OWASA Mitigation Tract forestry update, h) EPA’s environmental justice screening and mapping tool, i) 2014 the hottest year on record, j) climate change literacy, k) \$125M for climate change campaign, l) effective insect repellents without DEET, and more.
- Hintz reported that he sent a draft news article about non-native, invasive plants and animals to CFE members earlier in the evening. He asked members and staff to review and comment on the draft.
- X. **Adjournment** – Sassaman adjourned at approximately 9:15 pm.

Summary by Rich Shaw, DEAPR Staff