

Climate Impact Advisory Committee
DRAFT Meeting Minutes



Date: August 1st, 2019

Location: RE Store, 2309 Meridian St, Bellingham

QUORUM	
Members Present	
Seth Fleetwood	X
Casey Harman	X
Tim Miller	
Treva Coe	X
Eric Grossman	
Ellyn Murphy	X
John Yakawich	X
Sharon Shewmake	
David Kershner	X
Gabriel Westergreen	
Alex Ramel	X
STAFF Chris Elder	X

Meeting Began at 5:35 PM

David made a motion to approve the July minutes with the correction that he abstained from the vote on the April minutes, due to his absence from that meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

The floor was opened for public comment. Eddy Ury from RESources updated the committee on the Cherry Point Heavy Industrial Zone amendments. Cascadia Law Group is reviewing the proposed green house gas mitigation. He said RESources supports language will include requirements of the mitigation to be put into local green energy projects as opposed to carbon offsets. He added that the building trades are supportive of this proposed provision. The amendments will be open for public comment September 12th, and go before the county council in October.

Note: There won't be a planning commission meeting in August.

Wind Energy Systems and Permitting in Whatcom County Follow up discussion

The path forward on the wind energy permitting amendments will require the Whatcom County Climate Advisory committee to provide recommendations to the Planning Commission, which in turn will make recommendations to the county council.

Alex lead the discussion on the progress of the Wind Energy Subcommittee, which consists of CIAC members Alex and Casey, as well as Atul Deshmane and Chris Elder. The group discussed the overall direction of the amendments – the specifics of which will be hashed out in the subcommittee.

First, the group discussed the need for clear definitions of small, medium and large wind installations. It was suggested to consult other counties' wind requirements to see what the typical sizes are.

It was pointed out that Whatcom County does not have a high wind resource. However, it may have a better time coordination between the generating capability and the load required, making the county's wind resource more attractive than other locales. But due to the limited open land and available turbine sites the county may be more conducive to medium wind resource installations rather than very large wind farms.

Noise was the next discussion topic. The county code points to the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) for the noise requirements. The WAC has different noise requirements for different "classes" of locations. For example: Class A locales consist of residential areas. Of noted interest was the different noise requirements between day and night in Class A zones. The major recommendation was to use the existing noise codes in the WAC for local wind turbines and not to require anything above and beyond existing state law.

Along with noise, infrasound was discussed. (Infrasound is the sound created below 20Hz that the human ear cannot hear). The current wind ordinance carries requirements for infrasound. It was suggested that a reasonable literature search be performed, and if nothing is found, remove the infrasound requirement. This requirement is difficult because the wind energy manufacturers typically do not design or characterize infrasound from turbines.

The next point of discussion was on birds, bats and other wildlife. It was suggested to reach out to the Audubon Society for recommendations. Although SEPA covers some wildlife impact, it was pointed out that SEPA is a study in a point in time, not a prolonged study, which might be necessary in order to fully understand the wildlife patterns. A question arose about whether to require permit applicants for small wind turbine to perform a wildlife study – this could be effectively a ban on small wind turbine installations. There was some question whether small wind turbine installations will really help generate significant energy, and may contribute more to bird kills, which may soil the wind industry reputation in the county. Conversely, there likely will not be many small wind installations, so this may be a non-issue. The decision on whether small wind turbine installations will require a wildlife study will be tabled pending a literature investigation on the potential wildlife impacts of small wind.

Shadow flicker, which is the pulsing of shadows due to the rotating wind turbine blades, was briefly discussed. It is believed that there are reasonable guidelines in existence and the county code should use those guidelines.

A lengthy discussion ensued over the zoning of wind turbines in the county. First, there was some concern that the advent of “heavy industry” such as a wind farm could thwart the existing plans for the east county forest lands. It was suggested that creating a permissible “wind turbine” overlay in the Whatcom County code could provide a better compromise than a blanket statement allowing wind turbines in certain zones. This would apply to agricultural, heavy industrial and working forest zones. A lively discussion surrounded putting turbines in agricultural lands – there was lots of concern that some residents in those ag lands would become vocal opponents of the wind ordinance changes, but adding turbines to ag land could help farmers afford to keep open land in ag due to the extra income from a wind turbine.

Discussion then turned to the Whatcom Watershed requirement. The current code has a ban on turbines in the Whatcom Watershed, which removes a large portion of the economically viable wind resource area from development, specifically Lookout and Stewart Mountains. It was suggested that the committee reach out to the City of Bellingham and other organizations interested in the Whatcom Watershed, and determine if a wind turbine installation would affect the watershed. It was pointed out that building roads to the turbines could have a significant adverse effect on the watershed. Both the construction and decommissioning associated with new roads, and possible adverse impacts of additional human activity (forest fire ignition, for example), may be the largest concern with new wind development.

The complaint process was mentioned – it was recommended to look to other community codes for guidance. The complaint process in the current code was highlighted as unreasonable, and again, it was recommended to use existing county processes to make it easier on both the wind farm operators and county staff.

Setbacks, aesthetics, and tower height were briefly discussed at the end. The suggestion was that tower heights and setbacks should be based on safety, not appearance. For example, the setbacks should be, at a minimum, the height of a tower, subject to increases due to noise. The visual appearance part of the current ordinance is vague; it should be based on standard manufacturer’s colors.

Further details will be hashed out in the subcommittee and presented to the CIAC at a later meeting.

Ellyn presented the progress on the Community Research Project. The interviews have all been conducted, and volunteers are working to compile the summaries. Some of the summaries have gone out to the committee members for review Others will be forthcoming.

Update on Climate Action Plan Consultant

Chris updated the committee on the selection process for the consultant to work on the climate action plan. Cascadia Consulting Group, headed by Principals Christy Shelton and Charlie Scott, was selected, based on their experience, presentation methods and efforts on climate impact vulnerability identification. A draft scope of work was provided to the CAIC members– the major tasks include:

- a) 2017 Green House Gas (GHG) emission inventory and “business as usual forecast”.
- b) Conduct vulnerability assessment and prepare a guidance document; and
- c) Review implementation of the 2007 Climate Action Plan and provide additional strategies for GHG reduction

The target completion of the work is early 2020, with a drop-dead date of June 30th, 2020. The final scope of work will need to be approved by the county council, and it was suggested that a written update of the Climate Advisory Committee’s progress be provided at the same time.

Update on the Forest GHG Emissions Policy Paper

Chris updated the committee on the ICLEI Forest GHG Paper. A hard copy summary was provided to the CIAC members. This paper may be useful for guidance on land use policies, particularly those associated with forest land. This also sparked discussion related to the Cherry Point GHG mitigation. It was suggested that land trusts or conservation of land to provide GHG mitigation is problematic, based on the difficulty in determining forest land carbon sequestration and in guaranteeing that emissions are truly being offset.

Discussion on Triple Bottom Line

A handout describing “triple bottom line” philosophy was handed out for the CIAC members to read. Triple Bottom Line will likely be brought up at a future meeting.

Old/New Business

There was no discussion on old or new business. Casey mentioned that Whatcom County is already a major exporter of over 800MW of renewable hydro energy form the Seattle City

Light's Skagit Project and Puget Sound Energy's Upper Baker Dam, making it one of the top western Washington Counties for renewable energy generation.

Meeting Adjourned at 7:35 PM.

Recorded by John Yakawich, edited by Casey Harman

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