

Climate Impact Advisory Committee
DRAFT Meeting Minutes



Date: July 11th, 2019

Location: RE Store, 2309 Meridian St, Bellingham

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

1) Meeting Began at 5:40 PM

2) Minutes

- a. Motions were made to approve the April and May minutes. Both motion passed with none opposed.

3) Public Comment

Kathy Sabel requested some updates from the committee on the RFP contract, the Community Outreach Project, and the committee's actions involving Cherry Point. She informed the committee of the WIRA1 Management Board meeting for the 5 year work plan and also the regional water supply plan, as well as the Nooksack Tribe intention of adjudicating water rights in the Nooksack Basin. Also, the elevator was out of service.

Bob Burr exhorted the committee to recommend having the county council declare a climate emergency, and to not wait on any findings for a formal report but immediately provide information to the county council. He also asked about interactions between the City task force and the County Climate Impact Committee. He also indicated that the minutes for the Whatcom CIAC were not as good as the City Task force minutes:

Wendy Harris expressed her support for Wind Energy, but expressed concern about wildlife impacts such as the effect of the turbines on birds and bats.

Eddy Ury welcomed the visitors to the ReSources facility, went over some housekeeping items, and expressed his support for Wind Energy in the county.

4) Shoreline Master Plan Update – Cliff Strong

Cliff Strong presented on the Shoreline Master Plan. The plan is being updated with staff input and public comments. The draft is currently scheduled to go before the planning commission July 25th, but may be postponed depending on how the current draft looks. There are some questions regarding several issues:

- Whether the county should adopt more flexible strategies for shoreline buffer management. For example, trading shoreline setbacks for shoreline mitigation and enhancement.
- Whether to change the approach to dock standards. Currently dock requirements are very rigid and prescriptive – other approaches could provide more leeway to better site a dock in sensitive areas.
- Whether the county should consider sea level rise due to climate change in the shoreline master plan. Per state requirements addressing sea level rise is not required, but county staff think it is a good idea. The county staff would like the county to address the larger policy issues, and the planning department would confer with the Climate Impact Advisory Committee for specific details.

Seth asked whether there was any effort at the state level to require inclusion of sea level rise in shoreline planning – it did not appear there was. Alex asked whether the planning department looked at how other communities addressed climate in the shoreline master plan. Cliff replied that yes, the consultant the planning department hired is looking at other community plans. The major concern to the planning department in particular is how public infrastructure is being built and where it is being built – this could be affected by sea level rise. Alex asked about the timeline of the master plan. The current timeline is to present the draft in August, which may get delayed until September. Responses from the council will likely keep the consultant busy for 6 months, so there will be plenty of time for the committee to provide input on the details. However, input on the scope of the master plan, particularly the piece on including climate change, should be into the planning department or directly to council by the September meeting. Cliff said he would include recommendation made by the committee in what will be presented to the council.

There was some discussion on what data can be used in the Shoreline master plan – the conclusion was only FEMA 100 year event data can be used to determine the extent of the shoreline, but other data can be used to determine the effects and required mitigation, which could include data from models such as the models Eric is working on.

Alex moved to send a message to the county council to include predicted climate change effects in the Shoreline Master Plan.

5) Wind Energy Presentations

Alex had invited John Bosche from Arc Vera and Mia Devine from Spark Northwest, and Casey had invited Ryan Sherlock from PSE to talk about wind energy and wind energy development in Whatcom County. There has been no wind energy developed in Whatcom County since the wind ordinance passed in 2011, and the committee has taken on the task to review the ordinance and provide recommendations to the council on how to change it to make wind development feasible.

Mia Devine spoke first on small wind development. Her first point was wind energy regulations aren't adapted to one-size-fits-all regulations because of the big differences between small wind installations and utility scale installations. She mentioned there are a lot of financial incentives including net metering, accelerated depreciation and USDA Rural Energy.

Small wind development has lagged behind solar since 2008, mostly due to the reduction in the cost of solar installations while small wind installation costs have increased. Permitting is one of the major barriers to small wind due to the cost and complexity – sometimes it can exceed all the other costs of a project including manufacturing and onsite assembly. Mia provided a wind permitting toolkit to the committee based on her research into other requirements.

Some specific recommendations to the Whatcom Ordinance were:

- Use a 200ft tip height maximum instead of a 100ft hub height. Wind speed increases with height, so the 100' height restriction can reduce the economic viability of a project
- Setback is usually in multiples of the height. She recommended 1.0 times the tower height to the property line.
- Visual appearance – eliminate 20.14.051 (2) because it is hard to enforce, and not prescriptive enough. She suggested using the manufacturer's standard color.
- Regarding sound
 - Instead of requiring specific sound levels for turbines, use the sound levels in the current zoning of the area.
 - Make small wind installations exempt from noise complaints since the cost of a single sound study could make the project uneconomical.
 - Small wind has a voluntary sound certification. This could be utilized in the ordinance language along with standard sound equations to determine property line sound limits.
 - The final thought was small wind integrated with buildings does not seem very practical or economical.

John Bosche presented on large utility scale wind installations. The main point of his presentation was Whatcom County does not have the best wind potential, but it has

sufficient potential to possibly make some wind installations economical. He mentioned that unlike small wind, utility scale wind has come down tremendously – 50% - since 2008. Wind turbines used to have 75m rotor diameters and 30% capacity factors. Now 150m rotors are available with capacity factors in the 50% range.

Some specific issues with the Whatcom County zoning were discussed:

- Currently utility scale wind is allowed in Heavy Industrial (HII) zones, which limits development to Cherry Point area. This was one of the biggest issues brought up.
- ¼ mile setback in the ordinance are much too large
- The sound requirements should be at the nearest residence, and should not include sound below 20Hz. The human ear is limited to hearing above 20Hz, and there are no guidelines, standards or testing performed in that range. Therefore having requirements for that sound range creates risk for the wind developer.
- The current setbacks are around 1000' from the nearest residences to cover icethrow and a turbine tower failure (falldown height). Wind turbine installations, due to changes in FAA regulations, are now mostly exceeding 500' in height.

Ryan Sherlock presented on PSE's wind resources. Some Highlights from the presentation were:

- PSE is the third largest utility owner/operator of wind in the country
- PSE is looking at more renewables as they retire coal in order to meet the new state standards.
- The latest wind addition to PSE's portfolio is their first "west of the mountains" windfarm near Chehalis, WA as part of their "Green Direct" program.
- When asked about specific issues with the Whatcom Ordinance, Ryan mentioned that most windfarms are in agricultural areas, and the new windfarm near Chehalis is in timberland. The heavy industrial requirement is likely too restrictive.

6) **New/Old Business**

Although the meeting was already overtime, a few updates were added.

There were questions earlier in the meeting about how the committee interacts with the Bellingham Climate Task Force. David and Ellyn attend the task force meetings, and Clare Fogelson from the City attends the county committee.

RFP: The RFP for a consultant to help update the climate plan has been released. There have been four separate responses received. Interviews are forthcoming and a consultant should be selected within two weeks. Ideally the consultant will be on-board in September.

Community Research Project: The project is in the documentation phase – the volunteers are writing the summaries of over 100 interviews. CIAC members have signed up to review the summary reports and to provide any feedback. There is a lot of good information, and some possible strategies for the CIAC will likely emerge.

Cherry Point: Changes to the Cherry Point Comprehensive Plan were brought to the CIAC several months ago to provide input on the greenhouse gas section, but was withdrawn without action. The County Council subsequently brought in the Cascadia Law group to review the plan changes, and the CIAC will more than likely be able to provide feedback once the review is complete.

Alex suggested creating a small committee to review the wind ordinance and bring the recommendations to the main committee. Alex, Casey and Atul volunteered.

7) Next meeting

August 1st, 2019 at the ReStore Facility. Some agenda items will include further discussion on the wind ordinance, an update on the Forest Inventory, and some information on Triple Bottom Line. Chris passed out an update on the Forest Inventory and asked the committee members respond in one week with any comments.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:00 PM.