

Climate Impact Advisory Committee



Meeting Minutes

Date: November 4th, 2021

Location: Zoom

QUORUM	Y
Members Present	
William Bethel	x
Ginny Broadhurst	
Kaylee Galloway	x
Sue Gunn	x
Steve Harrell	x
David Kershner	x
Katherine Kissinger	x
Ellyn Murphy	x
Imran Sheikh	
Phil Thompson	x
Eddy Ury	x
STAFF Chris Elder	x

1) Call to Order/Roll Call

2) Review and approval of Minutes from October

-no comment was brought forward

Sue motioned to approve the minutes

William seconded

3) Public Comment

-Public in attendance

Ander Russel (they/them)

Jed Holmes, County Executive's office

Jack Wellman, PSE

David Hostetler

4) Process for Nov 9th Council Meeting/Draft Resolution – Chris and Ellyn

Chris reached out to the county council's office and the recommendation was to send the resolution straight to the Council

Ellyn and **Chris** said they will both be at the council meeting on the 9th

Sue asked about the template for the CAP

Chris said that we can still work on the template since the strategies and actions will not change

5) Office of Climate Action, Location Discussion – Eddy

Eddy introduced a proposal from some of the other Whatcom County Advisory Boards to establish an office of strategic initiatives the goal is for this office to do interdepartmental work that would benefit the CIAC, as well as the Child and Family Wellbeing task force, and the Racial Equity Commission. Other advisory boards are also proposing an increase of county staff in the Executive's office, Public Works and the Health Department.

Ellyn asked about the scope of knowledge that the director of an office like this would require, she also said that initiatives tend to be short term projects so she worries about the longevity of such an office

Chris said that since this is proposed to be in the executive's office that it would be easier to remove than if it is in another department

Phil commented on the proposal letter and said that it could use a bit of editing and more clarification on the problem that this proposal is trying to fix

Eddy said that the letter was not intended to be a specific recommendation but more an invitation to discuss with other advisory boards.

Phil said that the second page is laid out well in terms of what criteria needs to be met but suggested adding more information on some ways that these issues are not being met by the county government.

Sue said that she didn't think combining our interests with that of other advisory committees made sense because it would add another layer of bureaucracy to getting stuff done and agreed with Ellyn's point about the difficulty of finding a person with knowledge in each of these unique areas. She suggested that we write our own letter that encompasses our own issues rather than joining in with issues that mainly face the other groups and that the things we need to get done climate wise are more related to infrastructure rather than social issues.

Steve said that this letter has a lot of jargon in it and could stand to be edited down a bit for the sake of clarity.

Ellyn suggested that it might be beneficial to meet with these other groups and get some clarification on the goals of this proposal.

Dave said that he could see the interconnection between these three groups. And asked Sue if in her discussion with a hospital board member if they explained any of the ways that climate change has an effect on health?

Sue said that the discussion was more of a philosophical nature, and that the majority of our solutions are more technical in nature.

Ellyn said that yes on some level health and climate change are connected but when you look at our proposed strategies and actions that they are more technical in nature.

Dave advocated that the health department should be engaged in climate discussions

Steve said that Climate is essentially connected to everything

Dave said that the main reason we proposed a separate climate action office is to accomplish interdepartmental tasks

William asked if we can integrate our stuff with the objectives of the other committees

Phil in Zoom Chat: I believe our implementation chapter recommends that the OCA be placed under the county exec. Perhaps we were not being sufficiently detailed in that proposal. The proposal we're looking at tonight technically meets our implementation language.

Ellyn – an earlier draft version did indicate the desire to be under the county executive. After meeting with county leadership July 28th, we removed this since it was clear that the leadership felt it was more important to initially “grow” the OCA under PW. Basically, we left the reporting structure open in regards to where the OCA will appear in the County organizational chart (only that it should be at a high enough level to facilitate cross-department and cross-division projects.)

Ellyn said that the majority of our climate-based initiatives will be covered by public works but the other two groups are more public health based

Phil in Zoom Chat: If we write a separate letter, we should make our recommendation more specific.

Phil said that in our CAP it states that the OCA be housed directly under the county Exec. It doesn't say anything about the other existing departments within county government.

Steve said that based on the information he got from Chris on how things get done in the county government, we made the option of where the director of the office would report more flexible

Eddy said that the OSI is not likely to pass unless we can agree with the other groups, we won't end up with a position that actually has any power to implement anything. 

The consensus is that the committee does not agree with signing on to the proposal as is but **Eddy** said that he will be signing onto it so that he can have a seat at the table for discussions on the matter. **Eddy** said that even if the whole committee doesn't sign on individuals are able to sign on if they want.

Steve asked when the deadline to submit changes to the letter is?

Eddy said that it would be as soon as possible, Monday at the latest

Sue asked who proposed this office of strategic initiatives?

Eddy said that it came from the executive's office and the public health department.

Steve said that we should also consider federal funds in relation to this matter

Ellyn asked **Eddy** if we could potentially set up a meeting with these folks tomorrow?

Eddy said yes

Ellyn asked if there was anyone who is interested in attending

Katie, and **William** said they might be available tomorrow

Sue asked if we are going to be drafting a letter about our opinion on the budget?

Ellyn said that we should have a discussion with these other groups before we decide whether or not we write a letter of our own.

6) Discussion of PSE's Clean Energy Implementation Plan (CEIP) – Sue

Sue gave a brief summary of the 211 page plan

Some of their goals include:

-increasing the of portion of renewable energy

-Expanding community solar, including for low income, industrial

-Expanding distributed battery storage

They are developing distributive energy technologies which is something we have asked for. Sue said that it seems like they are in the foundational stages of their plan right now so the renewables aren't projected to increase dramatically until 2024

Sue said that PSE has done a lot of community outreach and have established a diversity and equity inclusion committee.

Sue said that it's a good plan, but it would have been better if it had started 10 years ago.

Ellyn – due to the 2019 Clean Energy Transformation Act or CETA, all utilities in the county are required to submit a CEIP (PSE, PUD-1, MUDs in Blaine and Sumas). Ellyn said that it is difficult for people not familiar with utility regulations to really cut through the initial layer of PR and understand what the utility is proposing. So, Ellyn instead relied primarily on two organizations that do have independent experts in utility regulations to see what they thought of the CEIP - the Washington Clean Energy Coalition (WCEC) and the Northwest Renewable Energy Coalition. The general consensus is that PSE's CEIP is flawed and that it either meets the bare minimum CETA requirements or does not actually meet the requirements of the law.

County's Role in the CEIP Process – The CETA process requires long-term continuous public input to the UTC if we are going to meet the goal of 100% clean energy by 2045. This will be an important responsibility of the climate manager.

Three issues that may affect the County's ability to reduce GHG emissions:

1. PSE's Integrated Resource Plan indicates a new natural gas peaker plant operational by 2026, which is not mentioned in the CEIP – will this new plant be located in Whatcom County that already host 4 of PSE's natural gas peaker plants?
2. PSE's choice of Customer Benefit Indicators to evaluate different investments in clean energy are confusing and may have been selected to benefit their corporate direction as opposed to benefit customers.
3. Multiple issues with Cost Calculations in the CEIP – Is the intent to load costs in the CEIP in order to exceed the 2% CETA cost cap to avoid CETA compliance?

Bottom line for Whatcom County is that electrification is the most logical way to cut GHG emissions as long as the electricity on the grid is generated from clean, non-emitting sources. The CAP does provide some alternatives to clean up the electricity on our grid.

Phil said the approach to take with the CEIP process is to reach out to a consultant for advice, since it doesn't seem likely that there is internal technical expertise in the county staff

Ellyn asked Phil if she could send him information from the UTC comments and if he could advise on the costs.

Phil said that he could look at it and offer some expertise but that he thinks a consultant would be the best option since this is what they do for a living.

7) Social Media Campaign Update – Chris, Katie, William and Steve

Chris heard back from the county that Advisory committees are not allowed to have their own social media accounts. But that the county government has social media pages and if we would like to make a proposal for a post, we can submit it to the county for review and approval on the official county page.

Steve asked if he could start a Whatcom climate twitter account with the disclaimer of it not being affiliated with the county government.

Chris said that he can't give a legal opinion on a workaround like that and suggested Steve write up a proposal and Chris can run it by the legal department.

Kaylee in Zoom Chat: We should have Sharon Shewmake do a TikTok for us!

Steve in Zoom Chat: Cool!! she's a CIAC emerita anyway.

8) Wind Energy code revision background information - Ellyn

Ellyn said that **Alex Ramel** worked on this with **Chris** back in 2019 when he was on the Climate committee

Chris said that there was a wind energy proposal of Squalicum mountain but that it had a lot of backlashes from citizens on an aesthetic perspective. Chris suggested working on this as a subcommittee.

Ellyn asked for volunteers to join a subcommittee on wind energy, she also suggested including members of the public

Eddy and **Sue** volunteered

Phil Suggested **Imran** for the subcommittee

Eddy said that he had some external contacts that he could reach out to

Jack Wellman said that he would check in with his team at PSE about participating in the wind energy subcommittee

9) Agenda Items for next CIAC meeting - All

Some agenda items include:

Social media

The November 9th council meeting

Phil suggested an agenda item concerning what our committee's role will be now that the report is done, monitoring county effort for implementation and the CETA regulations.

Steve talked about potential vacancy since Kaylee was elected to the County Council and discussing individuals or skills that we would be interested in having on the committee.

Kaylee said that she would be willing to serve as a nonvoting member of the committee to serve as a liaison between the committee and the Council.

Sue suggested preparing for federal funding and grants and having a discussion on it.

10) Old or New Business

Kaylee asked about public testimony for the November 9th meeting and if we should show up.

Chris said that there is not an official public hearing because it's a resolution.

Ellyn asked **Kaylee** if she thought we should have some people from the committee speak at the Council meeting.

Kaylee said that she thought it would be powerful to send a strong message of support.

Eddy said that due to the structure of the public comment being via Zoom meeting that it might be better for us to send our thoughts directly to council via email.

Chris said that a grant application was submitted with the health department to set up an Arc GIS dashboard to connect the climate and health issues. He also submitted a shoreline grant to consider sea level rise in Whatcom County.

11) Adjourn

Next meeting scheduled for December 2nd, 2021

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