

MEMORANDUM

TO: Western North Carolina Regional Air Quality Agency Board of Directors

FROM: Ashley Featherstone, Director

RE: Minutes for November 9, 2020

DATE: January 4, 2021

Enclosed, please find the Minutes for the **Monday, November 9, 2020** WNCRAQA board meeting. The next meeting of the WNCRAQA Board is scheduled for **Monday, January 11, 2021 at 4:00 pm**. Due to recommendations to limit public gatherings and Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), this meeting will be conducted remotely as authorized by Session Law 2020-3 and GS §166A-19.24. The meeting will be hosted via Zoom Webinar. The public may listen to the meeting as is occurs at the following link: <http://bit.ly/3b8OvSX>. Meetings will continue to be virtual until further notice.

****Public comment on agenda items will be taken via electronic means only. The following criteria for comment will apply: (1) any public comment must be received by 5:00 pm Sunday before the Board Meeting by sending an email to wncair@buncombecounty.org or by leaving a voice message at 828-250-6790; and (2) must be no more than 350 words.****

Comments will be read into the record, but the Board reserves the right to limit this practice to one hour. All comments received will be retained by the Agency as permanent record.

The Western North Carolina Regional Air Quality Agency Board of Directors met via Zoom Webinar and phone on Monday, November 9, 2020 as authorized by Session Law 2020-3 and GS §166A-19.24 due to COVID-19.

The attendance of the Board members was as follows:

Members Present:

*Karl Koon
Vonna Cloninger
Joel Storrow
Evan Couzo*

Members Absent:

None

Staff Present: *Ashley Featherstone, Director; Kevin Lance, Field Services Program Manager; Mike Matthews, Senior AQ Specialist; James Raiford, Permitting Program Manager; Betsy Brown, Air Quality Supervisor*

Others Present: *Dean Kahl, former Board Member; Brandon Freeman, County Attorney; Sybil Tate, Assistant County Manager; Patty Beaver, CIBO*

Mr. Freeman called the meeting of the Western North Carolina Regional Air Quality Agency Board of Directors to order on November 9, 2020 at 4:00 pm. He stated that the Agency finds itself without a chair or a vice-chair. It is appropriate for the Board to select someone to chair this meeting. Since the lack of chair and vice chair appears to be permanent, it would be wise for Board to elect a chair and vice-chair.

The order of business was as follows:

I. Election of Chair Pro Tem According to Bylaws

Mr. Koon moved to elect Mr. Storrow as chair pro tem, i.e. Joel Storrow would be selected to act as a chair while the chair and vice-chair are elected. Ms. Cloninger seconded the motion.

Voting was conducted by roll call. Ms. Brown took the roll call.

Mr. Koon-yes

Ms. Cloninger-yes

Dr. Couzo-yes

Mr. Storrow-yes

The motion passed 4-0.

Mr. Freeman turned the virtual gavel over to Mr. Storrow.

II. Election of Board Chair and Vice-Chair

Mr. Storrow opened the floor for nominations for Board Chair. Mr. Koon nominated Mr. Storrow to be Board Chair. Ms. Cloninger seconded the motion. There was no further discussion.

Voting was conducted by roll call. (This and subsequent roll calls taken by Mr. Storrow).

Mr. Koon-yes

Ms. Cloninger-yes

Dr. Couzo-yes

Mr. Storrow-yes

The motion passed 4-0.

Mr. Storrow opened the floor for nominations for Vice-Chair. Ms. Cloninger nominated Mr. Koon to serve as Vice-Chair of the Board. Mr. Storrow seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. Voting was conducted by roll call.

Mr. Koon-yes
Ms. Cloninger-yes
Dr. Couzo-yes
Mr. Storrow-yes
The motion passed 4-0.

III. Public Comment Protocol Announcement

Due to recommendations to limit public gatherings and Corona Virus disease 2019 (COVID-19), this meeting will be conducted remotely as authorized by Session Law 2020-3 and GS §166A-19.24.

Public comment on agenda items was taken via electronic means only and must have been received by 5:00pm Sunday before the Board Meeting. Public comment occurs later in the agenda.

IV. Introduction of New Board Member, Dr. Evan Couzo

Mr. Storrow introduced the new Board member, Dr. Evan Couzo. Mr. Storrow and Ashley Featherstone had an orientation with him before this meeting. The Agency is happy to have him on board. Dr. Couzo is a professor in the Department of Education at UNC Asheville and is the new city appointee.

Dr. Couzo spoke to the Board. He said he has been with the STEM education program since 2015. He has studied atmospheric science and air pollution for over 10 years. He did his graduate work at UNC Chapel Hill and his post-doctoral work at MIT. He has experience in atmospheric chemistry and regulatory air quality monitoring and modeling. Dr. Couzo said that he is excited to learn about Western North Carolina's air shed, and how he can help the Agency protect our air resources and public health.

Mr. Storrow commented that it is good to keep science at the forefront on the Board, since Dr. Dean Kahl is leaving the Board. Mr. Storrow, Ms. Cloninger and Mr. Koon are more from managerial backgrounds.

The other Board members introduced themselves and gave a brief description of their background as it relates to the Board. Ms. Cloninger has been on the Board for 13 to 14 years. She owns Biltmore Iron & Metal Company, which only recycles. She was on the Water Authority Board for many years. She noted that she lived on the top of a mountain and when she started on the Board she could not see downtown Asheville, and the air is cleaner now and she can see downtown.

Mr. Koon has been on the Board for 8 or 9 years. He took over for a member and then was appointed and reappointed. He is with Asheville Oil Company and Smokey Mountain Heating and Air. He has also served on Asheville's Planning and Zoning Commission and Buncombe County's Planning and Zoning Commission. He has also served on Asheville's Riverfront Redevelopment Association.

V. Adjustment and approval of agenda

Mr. Storrow asked if anyone had an adjustment to the agenda. Ms. Cloninger made a motion to approve the agenda as written. Mr. Koon seconded the motion.

Voting was conducted by roll call.

Mr. Koon-yes
Ms. Cloninger-yes
Dr. Couzo-yes
Mr. Storrow-yes
The motion passed 4-0.

VI. Special Presentation

A. Recognition of Dr. Dean Kahl for 17 years of service to Air Quality and the County

Mr. Storrow said it was his honor to recognize Dr. Dean Kahl who has served on the Board for many years. A picture of the plaque being presented virtually was shown in the Board meeting PowerPoint.

Ms. Cloninger thanked Dr. Kahl and expressed her appreciation and enjoyment working with him.

Mr. Koon said it was a pleasure to work with Dr. Kahl. He especially appreciated his work on the Advisory Council, shepherding that group. Mr. Koon appreciates all those efforts and the extra time.

Mr. Storrow said he admired Dr. Kahl's ability to dig into permits, and he learned a lot from listening in. congratulations on 17 years of service.

Dr. Kahl said it has been a wonderful experience. One of best things about being on the Board has been the improvement in air quality. Dr. Kahl can remember in 2002 and 2003 when the air quality was poor. Part of this may be due to loss of industry, which is sad. He appreciated that he was able to ask questions.

Mr. Storrow thanked Dr. Kahl for his service and said the plaque would be mailed to him.

VII. Consent Agenda:

A. Approval of minutes from September 14, 2020

Mr. Koon moved to approve the minutes as written. Ms. Cloninger seconded the motion.

Voting was conducted by roll call.

Mr. Koon-yes
Ms. Cloninger-yes
Dr. Couzo-yes (not present last meeting, but accepts consensus)
Mr. Storrow-yes
The motion passed 4-0.

VIII. Unfinished Business

A. Mission Statement

Mr. Storrow said this was on the agenda for the September meeting and this was in conjunction with the County asking all of the departments to look at their purpose and missions. There are three proposed options, which Mr. Storrow read.

Proposed Option 1: *Protecting and monitoring Buncombe County's air resources.*

Proposed Option 2: *The Mission of the Western North Carolina Regional Air Quality Agency is to protect and monitor Buncombe County's air resources.*

Proposed Option 3: *The Mission of the Western North Carolina Regional Air Quality Agency is to protect and monitor the area's air quality to safeguard the public health and the environment.*

Ms. Cloninger spoke up in favor of Option 1 due to its brevity. Mr. Koon asked if there was ever a chance of the Agency being a regional agency again instead of just Buncombe County. Ms. Featherstone said she believed we were set up as a regional program in 1970 because the agency covered four counties at one time. From 1970 to 2000, the agency's jurisdiction was two counties, Buncombe and Haywood. Then when the Agency was reformed in 2000, it was kept as a regional agency in case another county wanted to join. Ms. Featherstone has been with the Agency 19 years and she is not aware of another county expressing interest other than Henderson County about 19 years ago. They were interested in having their own air quality monitor. There are likely no funds available for new or expanded programs unless an area has their own funding. One area in Florida started a local program in recent years, but that is rare. The Board left the Agency set up as a regional agency to allow another county or counties to join because it was allowed by the statute. Mr. Koon also liked the short version of the mission statement (Option 1). It would be possible to make changes if necessary in the future, if another county were added. These are just options presented to the Board by staff; one of them could be amended if the Board decided to do so.

Dr. Couzo spoke in favor of Option 3 due to its specificity of "safe guarding public health and the environment," and it includes the Agency name. Mr. Storrow said that Option 3 does speak to a core value of the Agency.

Ms. Cloninger made a motion to accept Option 3 as the Mission Statement. Dr. Couzo seconded the motion.

Mr. Storrow read the proposed Mission statement to be considered.
The Mission of the Western North Carolina Regional Air Quality Agency is to protect and monitor the area's air quality to safeguard the public health and the environment.

Voting was conducted by roll call.

Mr. Koon-yes

Ms. Cloninger-yes

Dr. Couzo-yes

Mr. Storrow-yes

The motion passed 4-0.

IX. Director's Report:

A. COVID-19 Update

Ms. Featherstone said that the COVID-19 update has been a standing agenda item. For Dr. Couzo, she gave a brief update. Our office closed for about 3 months when Buncombe County offices were closed. We are reopened now with limited staff. Staff is teleworking and taking turns manning the office. One challenge was the onsite compliance inspections. Staff came up with individual plans for each facility inspection to limit exposure. Staff completed our inspections for our grant commitments that were due September 30. This includes the larger facilities such as the Title V and Synthetic Minors that staff inspect every year. The inspections were a combination of Team's meetings, and onsite visits, observing the emission sources from outdoors.

Mr. Matthews and Mr. Lance have inspected the gas stations for the Stage 1 vapor recovery systems. Staff do this every year. This year they modified their procedure to minimize going inside the stations, including sending letters out and possibly calling the facility prior to the visit. There are approximately 160 gas stations.

There have been many questions from the public about air quality and the pandemic, such as has the air quality been better because there are not as many people driving? Ms. Featherstone mentioned the Asheville Citizen Times article that came out about a week previous that covered the Air Quality Update (*an annual collaborative presentation of the condition of WNC air quality covered by the media*). The article quoted the state air director and James Raiford provided information about our data. The ozone levels are lower but it is not known if it is because people are driving less or could be partly from the power plant converting from coal to gas. The EPA is looking at data from all over the country. This will be studied for years to come. There are many factors to consider such as the weather. Ms. Featherstone will send a link to the article and to the video of the annual press briefing. The press briefing link is also posted on the Agency website.

B. Staff Position Update

The Agency recently filled the Permitting Program Manager position that was Ms. Featherstone's previous position. We are pleased to announce the Agency promoted James Raiford into that position. Congratulations to Mr. Raiford. The Agency hopes to post the Senior Air Quality Specialist position that Mr. Raiford vacated soon.

C. Air Quality Monitoring Update

Mr. Lance said the Agency completed the 2020 ozone-monitoring season on November 1. The area had a good season with no significant equipment failures. The data completeness for ozone monitoring was 94.1 percent, and for particulate matter, data completeness was 96.4 percent year to date.

Out of 214 days monitored during the ozone season, Buncombe County only had one code yellow day. There were no days above code yellow. For comparison, in 2019, there were 22 code yellow days. The fourth highest 8-hour ozone reading for this year was 54 parts per billion. The design value for 2018-2020, is going to be 59. For 2017-2019, the design value was 61.

About every 3 years, the EPA performs a thorough technical systems audit of the Agency monitoring network. This coming year 2021 is the time for the EPA to visit with us. The audit is scheduled to take place the week of March 8, and it will be a virtual audit this year.

D. Clean Air Excellence Awards Update

Mr. Britt Lovin (previous Board Chair) had suggested reaching out to Eaton Corporation to determine how to present the Clean Air Excellence Award (since we are meeting virtually due to COVID-19). Initially, Eaton invited the Board and staff to their facility. Mr. Storrow and Ms. Featherstone were planning to go to the facility the day after the Board meeting, November 10, 2020. However, Eaton's upper management preferred to do the presentation virtually due to the pandemic. It will be conducted as a Teams meeting; Eaton personnel will talk about the plant and this project, and then the Agency will present the plaque similar to how the Agency presented the plaque for Dr. Kahl. Then the plaque will be delivered to the

plant. Ms. Featherstone did mention Eaton during the Air Quality annual briefing and press conference a week ago. A couple of representatives from Eaton called in to the meeting. Buncombe County TV is going to do a story. Since it is a virtual Teams ceremony, with Eaton's permission, Ms. Featherstone is sending out a link to Board and staff members so they may participate. There is no obligation to watch, but it is available.

E. Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Meetings with Buncombe County

The Buncombe County FY 2022 budget process is kicking off. Last week the Agency had the first meeting with Budget. Buncombe County departments will be using a similar multiyear workbook and PowerPoint presentation as last year. The Board saw these for the first time last year. The Agency has two budget meetings with the Assistant County Manager (ACM), Sybil Tate. She is on the call today in case anyone has questions. The initial meeting with her will be in January to go over the basics in the workbook. The Agency will have an internal meeting prior to that. The second meeting will be in February with the ACM and will include an actual budget presentation. By mid-February, the Agency will have a draft budget. Depending on their budgeting needs, some departments will be presenting their budgets to the County Manager in March. March is when staff will bring the budget to the Board. The Board formally approves the budget in May. Staff is actively working on the budget now. Board members are welcome to ask questions.

F. Update on Vacant Board Seat-Schedule for Appointment

Ms. Featherstone gave an update on the vacant Board seat to be filled by a Buncombe County appointee. Initially the County was taking applications through November 6. They have extended the application period one week to Friday, November 13. The Commissioners will look at applications during their November 17 meeting. Ours is a governing board, so the County commissioners will do interviews. They schedule the interviews prior to a Commissioners meeting. Ms. Featherstone believes the interviews are at noon and that the public can listen in. She can get more information. The Agency will have a liaison at the interviews. The County sent out applications. Ms. Cloninger asked if Board members have any input. Ms. Featherstone said that sometimes the Commissioners would speak to other Board members to ask questions or get input. New Commissioners will be brought in December 7, and sworn in. If on the agenda for November 17, the current County Commissioners will select the appointee at that time.

X. New Business:

A. Director Performance Review

Mr. Storrow said that there are no permits to review which would typically appear at this point in the Board meeting.

The County is moving toward a more rigorous performance review process. All of the Directors are required to have annual performance reviews. Since Air Quality (AQ) is an independent agency and our Director answers directly to the Board, Ms. Featherstone's performance review should be done jointly between representatives from the Board and the County. The Board wants to collaborate with the County and try to get this done before the end of the year. In the Board packet is a job description to which Ms. Featherstone's job performance is tied. Mr. Storrow said there are some items that he would like to tweak. The job description is typically boilerplate. Since the Air Quality Director reports directly to the Board, some language needs to be added to make this more transparent. If the Board will allow, Mr. Storrow will work with Ms. Tate to get this finalized. If any Board member has

any suggestions, please let Mr. Storrow know. The Director's job description was updated around the time that Ms. Featherstone was hired last May.

Ms. Tate indicated that the County is moving toward even more generic job descriptions as part of the HR employee compensation study. The Air Quality Director's job description may still be more specific which should be helpful with developing a work plan. Mr. Storrow says he believes the job description is close. The original AQ Director job description required 10 years of experience. This one required 7 years of experience.

Mr. Storrow said this particular review for Ms. Featherstone would not come with any salary adjustment. That would be moving forward with broader initiatives of the County, moving toward merit-based pay. He does want to make sure she gets a good quality review. Ms. Tate confirmed that there is no pay adjustment associated with the job review. One day the County may move toward pay for performance. That would be dependent on the County Commissioners.

B. Buncombe County Employee Compensation Study

Mr. Storrow said that this has been going on for a while and is continuing. Ms. Featherstone said Mr. Storrow has spoken with Ms. Tate about this. Ms. Featherstone and Mr. Storrow wanted the Board to know this was happening. There is an update in the Board packet where the County manager explained the process. The County is looking at market rates and trying to assure that employees are being paid comparable to market rates. County management is looking at equity within in different departments. They are checking to see if staff are being paid appropriately for the job and the years they have worked. The goal is to bring everyone's pay up to an equitable level. Many increases may need to be made, and this could be spread out for several years. This could affect Air Quality's budget in the coming years if it is determined that staff salaries should be increased. The exact time frame is not known.

C. Legal Counsel Report

Mr. Frue sent his regrets. Mr. Freeman had nothing to report.

D. Consideration of Annual Board Retreat

Mr. Storrow wanted to consider an annual Board retreat. There is a lot going on, and meeting every two months does not allow the measure of input he believes is needed for Board members to do their job for the Air Quality Agency. It is budget time again. Mr. Storrow says the Agency and Board have not done much as far as forecasting the future of the Agency. There was a five-year budget plan when he came on the Board. It has not been looked at since then. The regulatory environment is changing. Duke has converted their plant from coal to gas, resulting in a lower annual fee. There are revenue pressures and increased expenditures with staff and some of the fixed costs. It would be helpful to have more of a road map for the next 5 to 10 years. The Board's Advisory Council is inactive. During the retreat the Board members could discuss what they would like the Council to do going forward. If the Board is interested in having a retreat, that could be during the first quarter of next year. It would be virtual, more than likely. This would take some of the fun out of it. The Agency would have to let public know. Mr. Freeman said it would have to be properly noticed, and the public would be invited.

Mr. Koon said it would be good to have the retreat with two new Board members coming onto the Board. It would give them a chance to find out more of what the

Board and Agency do, and ask questions in a more informal setting. Ms. Cloninger thought it was a great idea; although she did not think a virtual setting would seem much like a retreat. Mr. Storrow noted it would not have to be a long retreat, maybe a couple of hours. The Board could have a lot of the information they need to discuss prepared in advance. They could look at a ten-year budget that Mr. Storrow and Ms. Featherstone could work on together. Dr. Couzo thought it was a good idea. It gives him more of an opportunity to hit the ground running.

The County Commissioners are meeting in person. Ms. Cloninger offered an event center she owns as a possible location with plenty of room to socially distance, if the Board wants to meet in person. The Board will have another new Board member in January. Perhaps the Board could schedule the retreat in February or March. A discussion of days for the Board retreat determined a Tuesday or Thursday would be better days for the Board members. Mr. Storrow said that he would get back with the Board to schedule the retreat.

XI. Other Business:

A. Advisory Council Update

Ms. Featherstone said the Advisory Council had not met. The Agency had asked the Board for permission to advertise for new members. When the Agency had another Board vacancy, staff decided to wait to advertise until the Board position was filled. There has been confusion in the past about the role of the council members. Applicants thought it was a governing Board position.

Ms. Featherstone mentioned the fee study the Agency plans to do. One thing the Advisory Council could do would be to help with the fee study. The fees have not been raised since 2011. Sometime in January or March timeframe, the Agency plans to present that to the Board.

Mr. Storrow said the mission or purpose of the Advisory Council could be an agenda item for the retreat. There will be a full Board at that point.

B. Calendar

1. 2021 WNCRAQA Board Meeting Schedule

The Board meets the second Monday every other month beginning in January at 4pm. The 2021 meeting date list was included in the Board packet. No Board member had any issue with the proposed dates at this time.

2. The next regular scheduled meeting is January 11, 2021.

C. Announcements

Ms. Cloninger said she was going to miss Mr. Britt Lovin on the Board. Mr. Lovin is now on the Airport Authority Board. The Board and Agency will miss him and are grateful for his service. Mr. Storrow said Mr. Lovin was an incredible chair; he kept Board members informed.

XII. Public Comment

There were no public comments received.

XIII. Adjournment

Ms. Cloninger made the motion to adjourn. Mr. Koon seconded the motion. Voting was conducted by roll call.

Mr. Koon-yes
Ms. Cloninger-yes
Dr. Couzo-yes
Mr. Storrow-yes
The motion passed 4-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:57 pm.