

MEMORANDUM

TO: Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency Board of Directors

FROM: Ashley Featherstone, Director

RE: Minutes for September 12, 2022

DATE: October 31, 2022

Enclosed, please find the Minutes for the **Monday, September 12, 2022** Asheville Buncombe Air Quality Agency (AB Air Quality) board meeting. The next meeting of the AB Air Quality Board is scheduled for **Monday November 7, 2022 at 4:00 pm** in the meeting room located at the Buncombe County Permit Office at 30 Valley Street, Asheville, NC 28801.

The Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency Board of Directors met on Monday, September 12, 2022, in the meeting room at the Buncombe County Permit Office located at 30 Valley Street, Asheville, N.C.

The attendance of the Board members was as follows:

Members Present:

Karl Koon

Joel Storrow

Evan Couzo

Garry Whisnant

Ned Guttman

Members Absent:

None

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

Others Present: *Britt Lovin, former Air Quality Board Chair and Member; Vonna Cloninger, former Air Quality Board Member; Rafael Baptista, Strategy and Innovation Director; James Shelton, Strategy and Innovation Management Analyst; Keith Bamberger, NCDEQ Division of Air Quality; Jay Haney, new member of the Advisory Committee; Patti Beaver, CIBO; Sybil Tate, Assistant County Manager; Brandon Freeman, County Attorney*

Mr. Storrow called the meeting of the Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency Board of Directors to order on September 12, 2022, at 4:00 pm.

The order of business was as follows:

I. Public Comment Protocol Announcement

Mr. Storrow started the meeting by reading the announcement about the public comment protocol. It was noted that the Board would take public comment at the end of the meeting.

II. Introduction of New Board Member, Dr. Ned Guttman

Mr. Storrow introduced Dr. Ned Guttman to the Board. Dr. Guttman has been a member of the Advisory Committee for a long time. He is a retired physical scientist. He has a BA in Meteorology and Oceanography, a Masters in Statistics, and a PhD in marine science. Dr. Guttman has worked 42 years as a meteorologist and physical scientist with NOAA; 22 years as a weather officer with the NC Air National Guard; and 30 years teaching. He has taught environmental sciences at Mars Hill, UNC Asheville, Western Carolina University and as a visiting professor at the US Naval Academy at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

III. Adjustment and approval of agenda

Mr. Koon made the motion to approve the agenda. Mr. Whisnant seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. Special Presentations

A. Recognition of Britt Lovin for 17 years of service to the Air Quality Agency and Buncombe County, 15 years as Chairman.

Mr. Storrow noted that Mr. Lovin had been a giant with the Agency for many years. He ran a tight ship in the meetings. He served as a hearing officer for a number of permits, including the contentious Duke permit renewal several years ago. Mr. Lovin was presented with a plaque honoring his 17 years of service and a mounted

photo comparison of the webcam view from Purchase Knob. This compares the visibility improvement between the year Mr. Lovin began with the Agency and when he left.

Mr. Lovin thanked the staff for their support and commented on how much he had learned serving on the board. He spoke of the value of having a local air quality agency and its ability to better serve our community.

B. Recognition of Vonna Cloninger for 18 years of service to the Air Quality Agency and Buncombe County

Mr. Storrow commented on Ms. Cloninger's value to the board and how much she would be missed. She always said what she thought even if it was counter to what other board members wanted. Ms. Cloninger was presented with a plaque honoring her 18 years of service and a mounted photo comparison of the webcam view from Purchase Knob. This compares the visibility improvement between the year Ms. Cloninger began with the Agency and when she left.

Ms. Cloninger voiced her appreciation of the staff and how she had enjoyed being a member of the board for so many years.

C. Clean Air Excellence Award-Strategy & Innovation, Buncombe County

The Agency has given this award since 2004 in special recognition to business and industries that have gone above and beyond the requirements to do voluntary measures that reduce air pollution. Typically, these are improvements in energy efficiency or fleet projects; they also save money. There are two recipients of this award this year: Buncombe County Strategy and Innovation and the VA Hospital, which was unable to be represented today.

Dr. Couzo and Ms. Featherstone presented a plaque to Rafael Baptista and James Shelton. Heather Parkinson was very instrumental in the project also but was not able to attend. In response to COVID-19, many employees went home to work. After the mandates were lifted, the benefits of flexible working conditions were examined and a permanent telework policy, or flexible workplace arrangement, was implemented by the County. There are roughly 577 Buncombe County employees that have telework arrangements. They are documented in the HR system. A survey was performed looking at what kind of car they drive; did they drive a truck; was it gas, was it diesel, what their commute was; and also, what their work arrangement was, were they working five days a week from home? This was permanent in 2021. Some of these are hybrid arrangements where the employee might be working 3 days from home and two days in the office. The reduction in miles driven resulted in a reduction in 169,000 gallons of gas usage and over 2,000 tons of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions per year. This is 86.3% less GHG emissions from employee commutes with the permanent policy compared to before COVID, when many less employees were teleworking.

Mr. Baptista said he does strategy work for a living. He sits in his office and writes policies and reviews policies for people and offers advice. He was glad that Strategy & Innovation was able to do something which made a meaningful difference to the environment. He credited the strong leadership from the county commissioners and county manager, and their focus on how we help the environment while also providing better services.

V. Consent Agenda:

A. Approval of minutes from July 12, 2022

Mr. Koon made a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Whisnant seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

VI. Director's Report:

A. FY 23 Budget Update

The Agency was awarded funds from the EPA as a onetime award to replace monitoring equipment. The equipment is going to cost more than we had thought initially. We are also going to buy an additional piece of equipment, a shelter for the monitoring equipment. The shelter is about \$8,000. In addition to that, the rest of the equipment is at least \$2,000 more than what we received from the award. The initial quotes for the equipment were obtained and the funds applied for about a year ago.

We are not asking for a formal budget amendment and the budget is not being increased; we are shifting funds within the operating budget. We moved approximately \$12,000 from our contingency for this new equipment. We have a \$15,000 contingency fund. We wanted to let the Board know because it is a substantial amount, and we may need to come back to the Board for a budget amendment later in the budget year.

We still do not have all of the estimates for moving the monitoring site from the top of the roof down to the ground. Target date for that move had been September. The schools were busy with their projects which had to be completed before students returned to school. There is no firm timeframe, but we hope the equipment can be moved by December. We will have more of an update in November.

B. Board SharePoint Site

Mr. Raiford showed the Board the SharePoint site being developed. For the Board's convenience the first thing members will see will be the board packets which will be highlighted. Currently the Board packet information goes back five years for easy referencing. There is a calendar tied to it. All the board meeting dates will appear on that calendar, and we can populate it with other important dates.

There is a section for links which will include sites for information that would be valuable for the board to have. There is a Document tab from which members can access board information, such as past minutes and past agendas.

One of the things we are trying to do, is to recreate the information formerly printed and placed in the board books and make it available on the SharePoint site. OneNote is tied into the SharePoint. You click on it, and it functions like a notebook. These are clickable links to documents, that can be opened. The documents can also be downloaded. Currently on the site are the Fee Table, the Interlocal Agreement, some Policies, etc.

Our rules are available on our website but are not simple to access. Mr. Raiford is working on making them available from the SharePoint site. There is a tab for Rules. Each rule has a clickable link so the rules will be easier to navigate.

There have been some delays in this project, but we anticipate between now and the next Board meeting, Board members will receive a link and a message saying that they have been invited to participate in the SharePoint site. A password is not necessary, but board members will need an Office login. They will only have to login once.

We will still email board members the board packets.

C. Monitoring Update

Mr. Lance said that we have about a month and a half left of ozone season. It has been a pretty quiet ozone season so far. We are at 94.6% data completeness for ozone. For PM 2.5 we are at 95.5% year to date for data completeness. As far as the AQI values, we have not had any code orange days; we have only had 18 code yellow days. The rest of the time the AQI has been green.

We received our American Rescue Plan funds. We have ordered our ozone equipment. We have one more order to process for our new PM10 monitor. Once the metropolitan statistical area reaches half a million, which is projected in the next couple of years, we will have to operate a PM10 monitor as well as a PM2.5 monitor.

The shelter mentioned earlier will house the new PM10 monitor; so hopefully, we will be on the ground with that. We will also have a citizen sensor shelter EPA purchased for the Agency at that site. Dr. Couzo and his students will be able to utilize the shelter as well as citizens who wish to participate. Once we get our infrastructure in place on the ground, we hope to be able to do all that at one time. We are waiting on physical facilities at the Board of Education to be able to make that happen.

There was discussion around why a PM10 monitor was required at the half million population threshold. It will be a continuous monitor. No one was sure why a PM10 monitor is required. PM10 was monitored for 20 to 30 years prior to when monitoring began for PM2.5 when scientists with the EPA determined that PM 2.5 is more of a health endangering pollutant than PM10. It was speculated that the rules had not been updated, although the information from the PM10 monitor might be useful and is referred to as coarse PM.

D. Clean School Bus Grant

EPA has \$5 billion to grant over five years under the bipartisan infrastructure law for clean school buses; this includes \$500 million per year for funding the replacement of older diesel school buses with new electric school buses and the remainder will go toward some alternative fuel vehicles, like propane. This was covered in the air quality update Ms. Featherstone made to the Buncombe County Commissioners Subcommittee on Energy and Environment. Commissioner Terri Wells took an interest in this program and was able to get a meeting with the schools. We met with the schools, and they have applied to replace two of the Buncombe County School buses that are eligible for replacement with new battery electric school buses. The City of Asheville did not have any buses eligible for replacement this year.

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians obtained the first battery electric school bus in North Carolina in March with NC Volkswagen settlement funds. They have five more coming; and they have committed to switching over their whole fleet of 15 or 20 buses to battery electric buses. We work with our Clean Cities coordinators on these kinds of projects. An event was organized to try to get more interest from other counties here in the region to apply for these funds. This allowed school bus transportation directors and administrators to come out and see the bus and talk to the people that drive it. They put on a school bus drag race between a diesel school bus and the electric school bus. Ms. Featherstone attended this event at the Cherokee Reservation.

Mr. Raiford played the WLOS footage of the drag race for the board. Efforts to replace diesel buses with electric buses show that we are concerned about air quality and the environment. Having a fleet of electric buses shows that we are doing our part.

The buses have no problem with the 100-mile range that they have in Cherokee. At first, they were concerned they would need to charge in the middle of the day between routes but has not been the case. They are able to charge at night during off-peak hours. In Buncombe 60 to 70% of the routes are within that range. There is one 200-mile a day route in the northern part of the county and there are some concerns about the charge lasting for that route. Ms. Featherstone noted that the cost to charge the Cherokee bus for one month was less than half of the diesel fuel costs for a bus per month. Operating costs are less.

The grant does not pay the full cost of the buses; however, it is not costing Buncombe County anything to get the electric bus versus the diesel bus because the state pays for them. The state would be paying the extra amount. There are also issues with the charging infrastructure. The grant does not pay the full cost of a charging station. The NC Department of Public Instruction and the State Energy Office are helping out to pay for some of the difference in cost. Duke Energy also has a program that pays for some of the cost. Since we are not what they call a priority county, or an economically disadvantaged area, we are not eligible to receive the full cost of the electric buses and a lesser amount for charging stations. For priority counties the grant pays for the entire bus, and a higher amount for charging infrastructure. But in our case, in Buncombe, we have to pay the difference.

There were more applications than there are funds available. We should have more information in October.

VII. New Business:

A. Low-Cost Air Quality Sensor Policy

We have the Air Quality Sensor Policy ready to review and adopt by the board. A copy was in the board packet. This will serve as a guideline for residents and also inform anyone concerned of our official position on the low-cost sensors. The Advisory Committee looked at the policy, made a couple of minor edits and a footnote was added where the policy referenced our sensor shelter that residents can use. This noted that the shelter is not up and running yet and to contact us for more information.

This policy addresses some of the concerns that the Agency has about residents using low-cost sensors. These include the quality of the data as well letting the public know we are aware of these sensors and what the Agency's official position is on those sensors.

The regulatory monitors generate better data, but we do recognize that there are good uses for the low-cost sensors, especially when there are fires or localized sources of air pollution. They are a really good tool that we can use.

Dr. Guttman made the motion to adopt the Low-Cost Sensor Policy. Mr. Koon seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

VIII. Other Business:

A. Legal Counsel Report

Brandon Freeman was sitting in for Mr. Frue. He did not have anything to report.

B. Advisory Committee Report

1. August 24, 2022 Meeting

Mr. Storrow expressed his appreciation for the members of the Advisory Committee and the work they do.

Dr. Couzo introduced a new member of the committee, Jay Haney, who shared some of his background with the board. Mr. Haney has a BS and a master's degree in meteorology. He joined a small air quality consulting firm in California. He was mainly focused on air quality modeling that was used to support assessments for single sources or larger assessments for ozone, and state implementation plans. Modeling was required by the 1990 Clean Air Act, and the firm he was with had the only working model at the time. Later he moved on to other regional and larger scale modeling of PM10, PM2.5, mercury deposition and others. He has worked in all the southeastern states and for different agencies including the EPA as well as for utilities. He retired a couple of years ago. He primarily lives at his home in California; he also has a home here in Black Mountain where he lives part time. His in-laws live in the area, and he has been coming here for 40 years. He is very familiar with the area and wanted to contribute.

Dr. Couzo noted that at the August committee meeting, the low-cost sensor policy was discussed. The committee considered the policy a good idea and recommended that it be considered by the board.

Dr. Couzo presented at the European Meteorological Society last week. One of the comparisons he made was the data from the PurpleAir sensor at the weather station at UNCA to the Agency BAM monitor, which is about a mile and a half away. There is not perfect agreement, of course, because there is bit of a distance there; but it was good to see that the PurpleAir was tracking the hourly changes extraordinarily well. We looked at July 4th as a case study and you see the hour by hour increases and decreases in the PM2.5 concentration. He has some grant applications out to hopefully purchase a lot more of these sensors and put them in various places around town. He will keep the board and the committee informed as these plans progress.

Ms. Featherstone gave the committee updates on several projects. These included the mobile source projects with the VW settlement money, the Clean School bus program from the EPA and idle reduction. We also talked about lawn equipment rebate programs, which is exciting. Internal combustion engines that are used by landscaping companies are heavy polluters. If they are swapped out for electric, there are no emissions.

Dr. Couzo noted how lucky we are with much cleaner air here than in the Rhine River Valley, Germany, where he went for the conference. He also mentioned the smog in Houston which he studied in graduate school. It was noted that the air here has not always been as clean and clear as it is now.

The Advisory Committee meets every two months, during the month between the Board Meeting months.

C. Calendar

1. Next meeting is November 7, 2022

Dr. Couzo said that for next semester at least, Tuesdays were better than Mondays, with his academic schedule. Next year's board meeting calendar will be discussed at the November board meeting.

D. Announcements

Mr. Storrow and Ms. Tate got together to collaborate on the review of the Director, Ms. Featherstone. Mr. Storrow noted his appreciation of the board members input on that. The review is now complete. Ms. Featherstone is doing a fantastic job. He and Ms. Featherstone also voiced appreciation for the rest of the staff and the board.

IX. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

X. Adjournment

Mr. Whisnant made the motion to adjourn. Mr. Koon seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 4:53 pm.