



MEMORANDUM

TO: Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency Board of Directors

FROM: Ashley Featherstone, Director

RE: Minutes for November 7, 2022

DATE: January 5, 2023

Enclosed, please find the Minutes for the Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency Board meeting held on **Monday, November 7, 2022**. The next meeting of the AB Air Quality Board is scheduled for **Thursday, January 12, 2023 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, November 7, 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:

*Joel Storrow
Evan Couzo (via Teams)
Garry Whisnant
Ned Guttman*

Members Absent:

Karl Koon

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

Others Present: *Kevin Davis, Environmental Manager VA Hospital; Anjelica Tyler, CAPE; Nick Jaegar, CAPE; Patti Beaver, CIBO; Sybil Tate, Assistant County Manager; Michael Frue, County Attorney*

Mr. Storrow called the meeting of the Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency Board of Directors to order on November 7, 2022, at 4:01 pm.

The order of business was as follows:

I. Public Comment Protocol Announcement

Mr. Storrow read the public comment protocol.

II. Adjustment and Approval of Agenda

Mr. Whisnant made a motion to approve the agenda. Dr. Guttman seconded the motion.

Since one board member was attending virtually, roll call was taken during the meeting.

Voting was conducted by roll call.

Mr. Whisnant-yes

Dr. Guttman-yes

Dr. Couzo-yes

Mr. Storrow-yes

The motion passed 4-0.

III. Special Presentations

A. Clean Air Excellence Award- WNC VA Health Care System

Kevin Davis, the Green Environmental Management System Coordinator, represented the Veterans Administration and accepted the award from Mr. Storrow. Ms. Featherstone expressed appreciation to the Veterans Affairs Medical Center for participating in the award again this year. The Agency has been doing this since 2004 in an effort to get a special recognition to organizations and businesses that go above and beyond the requirements to implement voluntary measures to reduce air pollution, many of which save money as well. The VA Medical Center has received this award in the past for several different energy efficiency projects, and this time they have implemented several more projects.

Over the course of the last three years or so they have upgraded much of their lighting to LED and have added a combined heat and power unit that generates electricity using excess steam and natural gas. They have implemented geothermal heating systems and added solar panels on the roof of their Community Center for solar hot water. They are also using many electric vehicles on the campus and have incorporated several hybrid vehicles into their fleet.

In addition, the hospital is participating in a national practice green Health Excellence Award that they won this year. They apply for this recognition, and it is a lengthy process. It provides a lot of resources for medical centers; they won in the exemplary environmental stewardship category.

Mr. Davis said the VA works hard to try and meet their environmental requirements and go beyond that with everything that they do. In his job he is always working toward recycling, reducing, and minimizing water usage.

Ms. Featherstone expressed gratitude to the Advisory Committee, led by Dr. Couzo, for reviewing the applications and making recommendations to the Board.

B. Public Input for County Boards and Commissions-Angelica Tyler, Communications and Public Engagement (CAPE)

Ms. Tyler is the new Communications and Information Specialist with the CAPE team. She is specifically in charge of the new public input portal called Engage Buncombe found at engagebuncombecounty.org. Ms. Tyler wanted to give the Board an introduction to the site and how the Board and Agency could utilize this platform. The purpose of the portal has many layers. It is a way to reach more of the community and allow them to participate more easily with the County than they have been able to previously. This reflects the County commitment to Equity as one of its values and, identifies opportunities to create a more equitable structure of engagement. It allows the County to be more inclusive of historically underrepresented communities in programs and other county initiatives and expands interaction and reach to rural areas. This includes streaming of meetings, surveys and polls.

She noted that the online world is necessary; more of the community can log on to watch Board meetings at a time convenient for them. This could expand interaction to rural residents. The goal is to have all board and commissions online by summer 2023.

The County looked at the online data and saw that the majority of our residents were getting their data about government from the website buncombecounty.org. They realized there was an opportunity there to share even more information. The community is engaging with buncombecounty.org and this allows the county to conduct surveys and gather a lot of data quantitatively. User data is useful. Public input is accessible in over 100 different languages. This is expanding access to participation with boards. The County wants to encourage different levels of influence and commentary.

This would not be intended to replace our web page, but to add a plug in to watch the meetings, engage with awards and perhaps a better way to tell the story of the board. Ms. Tyler considers this more of a storytelling platform. It is extremely customizable. The public comment aspect can be toggled on or off accordingly if there is a quasi-judicial issue and public comment is just not legally allowed. A placard can be put up in the stream that lets people know that. Pages for specific

projects during the year could be added for projects that we might not want or be able to add to our website. Email campaigns can be sent out to subscribers.

Ms. Taylor will circle back with Ms. Featherstone about next steps.

IV. Consent Agenda:

A. Approval of minutes from September 12, 2022

Mr. Whisnant made a motion to approve the minutes. Dr. Guttman seconded the motion.

Voting was conducted by roll call.

Mr. Whisnant-yes

Dr. Guttman-yes

Dr. Couzo-yes

Mr. Storrow-yes

The motion passed 4-0.

V. Director's Report:

A. FY 22 End of Year Budget Update

The Board packet contained a chart with the 2021 and 2022 budgeted numbers as well as the actual numbers. This includes the revenues, expenses, the fund balance draw and the fund balance at the end of the two Buncombe County fiscal years. The Buncombe County budget year runs July 1 through June 30, but it takes several months to get the final numbers. This is an update for the Board. At the end of 2021, we put \$119k back into fund balance. For 2022 the drawdown was \$692 or nearly even. In 2021 we were not fully staffed, which was the main reason we put money back into the fund balance that budget year. In 2022 we were fully staffed. We did not factor in the fee increases which were not approved until after the beginning of the budget year.

Our salary and benefits have increased due to the annual cost of living increase and the compensation study. This was a multiyear effort that increased our salaries and benefits by about \$80,000 per year. That is not reflected in these numbers. In future years we do expect to pull more from the fund balance somewhere in the \$80,000 or more range.

We do expect to come back to the Board this budget year to ask for a budget amendment. That's partly because we are buying new monitoring equipment, replacing old equipment and the funds that EPA gave us were based on a prior year's estimate. We have already had to move some of our contingency funds to cover the extra amount for that equipment purchase.

Our budget is getting tighter, and we will have to start asking the board for budget amendments more often. We did not typically do that in the past. We budgeted a position for a while that we did not fill and that gave us some flexibility with salary and benefits. The county is asking that all the departments try to make their budget as accurate as possible so that there is a good chance that we will need to do a budget amendment at some point this year.

The Agency is self-funded and currently has a healthy fund balance of around \$700,000. It has fluctuated quite a bit in the past. In recent years it has been around \$400,00 to \$500,000. It is up now partly because we were down a staff

member for a couple of years. We use the fund balance to balance the budget which we present to the Board for approval in May. In the future based on our projections, it is possible we will need to go to the City and the County for additional funding as is outlined in our interlocal agreement.

Adequate funding is an issue for air quality agencies. Mr. Raiford and Ms. Featherstone attended the fall Air Directors Meeting where this was discussed. The NCDOT is projecting an increase of 0.4% which is close to level funding for the gas tax over the next 8 to 10 years. This is taking into consideration more electric and fuel-efficient vehicles. Our gas tax revenue will decrease eventually but will hold fairly steady for a while. Different ideas for other funding sources were discussed at the meeting. Florida has implemented a license tag fee that goes to state and local air quality agencies.

B. ITGC Request Submitted to County

An ITGC request was submitted to the county by our office. ITGC projects are projects that county departments submit to IT if they have a significant expense. It is a competitive funding process where a project is submitted and may or may not get funded.

Since we are self-funded, it is possible that we will not get selected, but the Agency was encouraged to apply. The project is for the digitization of the air quality files. It is named Digital Vision 2022. Several years ago, when the rest of the county departments had most of their files digitized, ours were not done. We still have paper copies of everything. Eventually we have to get our files digitized, because the next step is to start receiving permit applications and data electronically. It is a big project that we think would probably be around \$50,000.

This includes first getting approval from the State Archives Office, where all of our files are required to be searchable and acceptable for public record. We have to put together a plan and get that submitted and approved to the state archives. Mecklenburg County Air Quality has done this and so has the State Division of Air Quality. We have received some assistance from them on how to proceed with this process. Then the next step is establishing a document management system and scanning files once they come in the door. The third and final step is the big one, which is going back into our old paper copy files and scanning everything in such a way that it will be searchable and acceptable for public records. The benefit of filing this request is that IT will work with us on a plan, finding contractors, and getting it approved.

This is consistent with our discussion during the budget retreat, possibly requesting funds from the county for a project, not necessarily for regular operating funds. This also fits in the County's goal of operational excellence for trying to improve customer service. More digital access will benefit our regulated industry and make things more available for the public to find online as well.

Our project high level review was done, and the next step is that they will be contacting us to start working on the detailed plan. Even if our project is not selected this process will still be beneficial because we will have a plan moving forward. When we get to the expensive part, we could possibly spread that out over time and have a certain number of files scanned a year.

The next step beyond digitization would be to become CROMERR compliant (EPA Cross-Media Electronic Reporting Rule requirements). This will be an additional project down the road after digitization.

We are doing this with our demolition and asbestos removal permits to a certain extent; however, we are not CROMERR compliant on even our asbestos NESHAP permits, even though we are taking applications for those are online. We have to get a hard copy signature for permits that trigger that particular rule. This is going to be a multiple year effort.

C. Board SharePoint Site

Mr. Raiford sent out an invite to the board members which links to the site. The site is pretty simple and a place to access certain Board information, a Board of Directors Portal. He pulled up the site for the Board to view and noted the information included. Before a board meeting, when the board packet is emailed out, it will also be live on the site for easy access.

There are Quick links located on the right to our website, our rules, the NCDEQ air quality portal which includes the current air quality forecast and the Division of Air Quality NCDEQ site.

Scrolling down under Documents, you can find minutes, agendas and board packets back to 2017. Earlier board information is available if anyone is interested. Documents can also be accessed from the left side. There is a Board Information Folder which includes our rules and policies. Access is available in different ways. Rules and policies are listed on the left and mimic the former board books in a Team site notebook. A current budget summary and budget ordinance are available. Everything blue is clickable and takes you directly to that file or document. The rules are also in the Team Site Notebook and easier to navigate than previously. If one is looking at a permit review and wants to reference a rule, that is easily located here. You can hit the back button to get back to the main site.

As we move forward, there will be other uses for this site. Staff will easily be able to share information here with the Board. Board members can bookmark the link or use the invite link. There may be a way to put a link to the SharePoint site on our website, since one would have to be a member to access it, like an employee portal.

The Board praised Mr. Raiford's work on this site.

D. Monitoring Update

Mr. Raiford gave the monitoring update. He noted that Mr. Lance gives the completeness data every board meeting which is basically the amount of data we should collect versus what we do collect. The data completeness required is 75%. The data completeness for the PM 2.5 monitor is 97.1% so far this year.

Our average PM for the year so far is 6.6 micrograms per cubic meter. The standard right now is 12 micrograms per cubic meter. The EPA is going to lower that standard. The EPA may announce by the end of the year and finalize that lower standard next year. The range for the new standard will be between 8 to 11 micrograms per cubic meter. If the standard is lowered to 11, we have a lot of headroom. If the EPA sets the standard at 8 micrograms per cubic meter, we

would still be able to meet it at 6.6 but that would be close to the limit. It may fall somewhere in the middle, at 9 or 10 micrograms per cubic meter.

The standard is based on what is called a design value, which is the average of three years and for this particular one, it is the annual mean average. If you have a particularly bad year averaging helps that. Our current design value is 5.9 micrograms per cubic meter. That includes 2020 during Covid where we were at our lowest level ever, 4.9 micrograms. After a period of time, this pandemic related data will fall out and our design value will probably go back up.

There is also a daily standard of 35 micrograms per cubic meter. Our current design value for that is 15, so we are also well below 50% of that. This year's number, which will become part of the next design value is 13; we are doing really well on our daily PM. We think the EPA is staying with that standard for now.

Our data completeness for ozone was 95.1%. We ended ozone season the end of October. The season ends then because ozone is related to a photochemical reaction that happens and part of that is due to trees. When there are no leaves on the trees, ozone is less of a problem. We start monitoring again in the spring.

This year, our fourth highest (daily maximum 8-hour concentration), which is how we determine whether or not we are in compliance with the NAAQS, is 60 ppb. This year, our fourth highest (daily maximum 8-hour concentration), which is how we determine whether or not we are in compliance with the NAAQS, is 60 ppb. The current standard is 70 ppb, so we are doing really well there as well. Our projected design value for the previous three-years with the 60 included is going to be 58 ppb.

We also had a historically low ozone year in 2020; it was 54 ppb. At some point that year drops off our 3-year average design value. We are doing well here, in compliance with the ozone NAAQS.

We are having a really good air quality year. So far there have only been 11 yellow days for particular matter and 11 yellow days for ozone. There were a couple overlapping days, so out of all the days this year, we have only had 18 code yellow AQI days.

We have ordered the monitoring equipment funded by the American Rescue Plan money that has been mentioned before. We have received most of that equipment. One piece is on back order. This is not an issue as we will not need to begin using that equipment for a while.

It appears that things are progressing for the move of our monitoring equipment off the roof of the Board of Education. An electric permit has been pulled and Mr. Lance was contacted by a contractor about pouring the concrete. Once that is put in place, we will be able to move our particulate matter monitors from off the roof. Once the site is set up on the ground, we will be installing the new PM 10 monitor. It is a new type of monitor for us, so will have to receive some training on it. The requirement to run a PM-10 monitor is triggered when a metropolitan statistical area reaches the 500,000 level. The EPA uses that data for collecting background levels to get an idea of regional air quality trends. We are well below the ambient standards for PM10 and should have no issue with compliance.

E. EPA Advance Program Path Forward

Ms. Featherstone gave an update on the EPA Advance Program. This is EPA's program where areas can voluntarily take measures to reduce NOx emissions, to stay in compliance with the ozone standard and also to reduce PM emissions to continue to be in compliance with the PM standards. There are a lot of climate benefits as well.

The Agency has to turn in a letter with our path forward this month, and Ms. Featherstone hopes to have that drafted soon for submittal and board and advisory committee review. It is due a year after you join; it will be simple and straightforward. We are going to be continuing with some of the things that we put in our county business plan last year to help to reduce greenhouse gas and other air pollution emissions. We are going to continue working on emissions reductions from vehicle projects and also some energy efficiency initiatives with the Community. The path forward will be a page or two. We will talk more about that with the Advisory committee. It is a living, breathing document; it is voluntary, and we can change it at any time moving forward.

The EPA is really touting this program because it is all about community partnerships and voluntary projects. There is money coming from the government for competitive projects associated with the Inflation Reduction Act. We have our advisory committee active again which will be helpful. We will continue working with the county and other partners like the Clean Air Campaign. We hope we can apply for some of these funds for projects to benefit our community.

F. Clean School Bus Grant Update

The first round of this grant money has been awarded. We met with Buncombe County Schools, the Clean Air Campaign, Buncombe County Sustainability Office, and Duke Energy to partner on this project. Buncombe County did not get selected but is on the wait list. The EPA had \$1 billion and 4\$ billion in applications. The majority of the awards were given to priority counties; Buncombe is not a priority county. Buncombe County Schools can apply again next year.

We are going to be in the parade on Saturday the 19th with the Clean Air Campaign. There is a Clean Vehicle Coalition entry in the parade. The board and advisory committee members are welcome to join us and participate in the parade. It will be filmed and aired on WLOS Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day.

G. Pratt and Whitney Ribbon Cutting-November 16

The Pratt and Whitney ribbon cutting is coming up November 16th. We have been invited to participate because of our efforts working with Pratt and Whitney, the Economic Development Group, the Planning Department, and Permits and Inspections for the work we did for the air permit.

The company is getting ready to open. They may submit one more modification to the air permit. Initial plans include certain pieces of equipment which can sometimes change during the actual build and set up process. We do not expect that they will need to update their air quality modeling. The emergency engine output power is expected to be lower than what was submitted.

VI. New Business:

A. None

VII. Other Business:

A. Legal Counsel Report

Mr. Frue had nothing to report.

B. Advisory Committee Report

1. August 24, 2022 Minutes

2. October 24, 2022

There were some issues with Dr. Couzo's connection and Ms. Featherstone gave the report. The Advisory Committee has been talking about the Clean Air Excellence Awards.

We let them know that the board approved the sensor policy that they reviewed and commented on. We talked about low-cost air quality sensor data and how the agency would use that. We will need to have another policy when we get this sensor shelter set up, for how residents can use this, a registration process. There are different questions that came up including: What are we going to do with the data? Should we compile the data to make it available?

Mr. Keith Bamberger, who is with the DAQ, talked about how the meteorologists in Raleigh might be interested in some of our data. The mountains are unique. A potential project might utilize some portable monitors that are more like the regulatory monitors to track data in the mountains.

Dr. Couzo updated the committee on his project with EPA funding. The EPA has not made a final decision. He has been working with an economics professor at UNCA. They are still interested in putting up sensors in areas like public housing and redlined neighborhoods where they can look at correlations if the pollution levels are higher there than in other neighborhoods. They would look at redlined areas and also consider things like urban heat island effect by measuring temperature and humidity in different areas.

The committee also got other updates on mobile source projects that we have been following.

Dr. Couzo needed to leave the meeting and Mr. Storrow suggested voting on the 2023 board meeting calendar (see item D.) prior to that time as Dr. Couzo's teaching schedule needed to be considered.

C. Meeting with City of Asheville November 8

Mr. Storrow said that he and Ms. Featherstone are meeting with the City of Asheville tomorrow. This includes Deborah Campbell, the city manager and her staff.

We have an interlocal agreement with the City and the County. Every year the City asks us to give them an annual report except one year during the pandemic. Mr. Storrow and Ms. Featherstone felt that we ought to take the opportunity to present an update on our program to the city because we have not done that in a long while. We will use the PowerPoint presentation that we have typically used in the past to give an overview. A part of this will be a budgetary presentation to

them about how we are funded, what expenses we have, and what revenues we have. We want to get their feedback or any input going forward for potential funding. It is just a starting point. We want to give an overview of our agency: our purpose, mission, goals, accomplishments, and projects that we are involved with currently. We may include the pictures of the mountains over a span of years which show much air quality has improved.

D. Calendar

1. 2023 Board Meeting Schedule

2. Next meeting is January 12, 2023

Mr. Whisnant made the motion to schedule 2023 Board meetings for Thursdays every other month. Dr. Guttman seconded the motion.

Voting was conducted by roll call.

Mr. Whisnant-yes

Dr. Guttman-yes

Dr. Couzo-yes

Mr. Storrow-yes

The motion passed 4-0.

E. Announcements

None

VIII. Public Comment

None

IX. Adjournment

Mr. Whisnant made the motion to adjourn. Dr. Guttman seconded the motion.

Voting was conducted by roll call.

Mr. Whisnant-yes

Dr. Guttman-yes

Dr. Couzo-yes

Mr. Storrow-yes

The motion passed 4-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:16pm.