Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency

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Advisory Committee Meeting Notes

The Advisory Committee for the Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency met on April 30, 2026 at 3:30pm in meeting room A131 at 35 Woodfin Street. Some members also joined via Microsoft Teams.

The meeting started at 3:33pm.

Member Present (In-Person):
Ned Guttman
Jim Neely
Keith Bamberger
Caitliln Cook

Members Present (Virtual)
Jay Haney

Staff Present (In-Person)
Ashley Featherstone, Director
Hannah Rhodes, Air Quality Coordinator
Steven Ensley, Air Quality Monitoring Coordinator

Staff Present (Virtual)
James Raiford, Permitting Program Manager

Others Present: *None*

1. Review and Approval of Agenda
    a. A copy of the draft April 2025 minutes and draft agenda was emailed to members
    b. Ashley Featherstone suggested adding Air Quality Awareness Week and UNCA updates to the agenda.
    c. Ned Guttman made the motion to amend the agenda
    d. Caitlin Cook seconded the motion.
    e. Passed 5-0
2. Review and Approve April 2025 Minutes
    a. Ashley Featherstone reviewed what was on the minutes of the last meeting.
    b. Ned Guttman made the motion to approve the minutes.
    c. Jim Neely seconded the motion.
    d. All present – yes
    e. The motion passed 5-0
3. Review and Discuss Clean Air Excellence Awards Nominations
    a. Ashley Featherstone said that we received no applications this year. Ned Guttman asked why there weren't any.
    b. Steven Ensley said that the person who worked on the Eaton application last year took a new job, so that is why we wouldn't have received an application from them.
    c. Ashley Featherstone said that we did not have the time to promote it very much this year, but would like to promote it more in future years.

d. Ashley Featherstone said that Land of Sky nominated the Footprint Project last year, but they did not nominate anyone this year.
e. Steven Ensley suggested mentioning the awards when staff go out on facility inspections.
f. Keith Bamberber suggested asking Brad Rouse to promote it on his climate environment radio show. He runs Energy Savers Network.

4. Air Quality Awareness Week
    a. Keith Bamberger said that the EPA did not announce that they were officially doing Air Quality Awareness Week until this past week. He said they did not change any of the daily themes from last year.
    b. Ashley Featherstone asked if there was a website from the EPA like last year with resources to share. Keith Bamberger was not quite sure, but it was determined that we can use the same graphics and resources from last year.
    c. Ashley Feathersone said that she is doing an interview with WLOS next week on wildfires and other air quality-related issues. It is nice that it pairs up with Air Quality Awareness Week. She is going to be interviewed at the South Asheville Library where a Purple Air monitor is located, and she plans to talk about those.
    d. Keith Bamberger mentioned that she can talk about how the current Burn Ban actually positively impacts Air Quality.
    e. Ned Guttman asked if our monitors were showing any affects to this area from the Georgia wildfires.
    f. Steven Ensley said that he had not seen any major indicators that they were impacting us. Ashley Featherstone thought that it was a little hazy last week and that the wildfires may have been the reason why.
    g. Keith Bamberger said that the American Lung Association did their annual air quality Report and they named Asheville as the 1st cleanest city in the country for a short term Particulate Matter (24 hour PM2.5). This was particularly notable because years ago Asheville was ranked in the 25 worst cities for air quality by the ALA.
    h. Ashely Featherstone said that she wanted to highlight the air sensor network on the Fire and Smoke Map (on Air Now) as well as wildfire prevention tips on the WLOS interview.
    i. Jay Haney had a question about the burn ban and if it was still in place. Ashley Featherstone said that yes, it is still in place. Jay Haney asked if Jackson County also had a burn ban in place. Ashley Featherstone confirmed that the entire state is under a burn ban.
    j. Ashely Featherstone said that the number one cause of wildfires is careless debris burning, which she can share on WLOS.
    k. Keith Bamberger said he heard the state will keep the burn ban in place until we get a significant amount of rain.
    l. Ashley Feathersone said that the Agency's Ford Lightning does have a bumper sticker saying it is an electric vehicle.

5. Recognition for participants of WNC Post Helene Monitoring Project
    a. NC DAQ and AB Air Quality Certificates (state has prepared and will be printing and framing)

i. Steven Ensley said that the state is putting together this certificate to give to their partners from the Purple Air monitor project. They were kind enough to put our name on this certificate, too, so that we can share it with our hosts.
ii. Steve Ensley hopes to have the certificates in-hand soon.

b. How best to give these out – have a reception at July board meeting and present at Board meeting similar to Clean Air Excellence Awards (Have done something similar in the past). Other ideas?
i. Ashely Featherstone said she was trying to think of the best way to give out these certificates. We have done something like this with fire stations in the past for a different project and invited them to the Clean Air Excellence Award Ceremony.
ii. Keith Bamberger said that there were several Buncombe County schools that participated in another event (students that placed at the regional level at the AQIQ event), and we could also honor those students that participated in that. We could give them their regional awards, or invite the students that participated. This could add to our event/awards ceremony.
iii. Ashley Featherstone said that we anticipate doing this reception in July.
iv. Steven Ensley said that we currently have seven Purple Air monitors set up in the county. We had an eighth that was at a Brewery, but we took it down to do some maintenance on it and decided not to put it back up at the Brewery. This means we have a spare monitor we could put somewhere else if we would like, or we can keep it as a spare for when other monitors go down.
v. Keith Bamberger said that Carl Sandburg in Henderson County would like a Purple Air monitor, although he knows that is out of our county.
vi. Steven Ensley said that there is one Purple Air monitor in Marion that they were having issues finding a place with free access internet for, so that could be one they could move to Carl Sandburg.
vii. Steve Ensley offered to help Catlin Cook's UNCA students set up a Purple Air if they need assistance.

6. UNCA Updates
a. Caitlin Cook said UNCA got the older ozone monitoring equipment from the Agency in the Fall, and they have a student, Ben, that has been working on it. He is trying to put it together and see what they would need to get it up and running again. Steve Ensley said that we have 3 Compressors that we had when we had the old system with the old Zero Air. We are not currently using them. Ashley Featherstone said that we could fill out the same form as the other equipment and loan it along with the others. We wouldn't have to go through the board voting on it again since we already did that and they have given permission to loan the equipment for this project.
b. Caitlin Cook said that Ben is working with people in another department on a light pollution project, and he is hoping to take a monitor to the Blue Ridge Parkway at the same time as them to take air quality data in additionan to clear sky data.
c. Caitlin Cook said that there could be a class of hers soon that could go on a field trip to see one of the Agency's monitoring sites.
7. Agency Updates

a. Agency Governing Structure – Potential Changes to Governing Board/Interlocal Agreement
    i. Ashley Featherstone talked about the timeline for changing the Agency's governing structure. We have been looking to transition the Agency to become a county department rather than an Interlocal Agreement Agency. The reason is financial, as in recent years our funding has not been sufficient, and we have been losing staff over the years.
    ii. Ashley Featherstone further explained that the County has offered to take us on as a county department. Right now our employees are County employees, and we act in many ways like we are a county department, but we are not able to be financially supported by the County. This has been a challenge because we keep getting cost of living and other expense increases each year, but no additional funding to match it.
    iii. The County has notified the City that they wish to withdraw from the Interlocal Agreement. The main thing that has to happen is the County has to reform our board. We are changing our governing structure. Right now we are governed by our Air Quality Board, whereas the Board of Commissioners will be the new governing board. The current board will be reformed to be an advisory board. One of the key duties this advisory board will have is to review appeals of permits and other items. We will present our budget to the advisory board, and they can offer recommendations, but the Board of Commissioners will be the final approvers.
    iv. We have reached out to the State, and we have to be recertified by the NC EMC since we are changing our governing structure.
    v. We are in the process of updating our rules, which is something we were doing anyway, but we are going to get that done before the transition happens. Air Quality has been included in the County's budget. This is not a done deal until the budget gets approved.
    vi. June 2nd is when the Board of Commissioners would approve the budget, and that is when we expect we would need a resolution to reform the Air Quality Board into an advisory board. We will be amending Chapter 1, taking out the Interlocal Agreement and putting in that we are under the Board of Commissioners.
    vii. Ashley Featherstone said she is hoping that with time, this program could potentially add a position and start to thrive instead of just survive.
    viii. Jim Haney asked if this timeline document was sent out to the Advisory Committee members. Ashley Featherstone said that she has sent to the Air Quality Board members just recently, but she has plans to send it out the advisory committee as well.
    ix. Agency staff are meeting with the EMC on May 5th. We are going to ask them what they need from us and what timeline they would like to see.
    x. Ashley Featherstone will attend the May EMC AQC meeting in Raleigh. They also meet on July 8th and 9th. Our certification will be up for discussion at that July meeting. But, Ashley Featherstone is going to be giving an overview of local air

quality programs at the May meeting to prep them with information prior to the July meeting.

xi. Ashley Featherstone said that, due to this timeline, we will have to extend the Interlocal Agreement with the City beyond July 1st. Legal is looking into that, but we are hoping we can do it with a memo. If the NC EMC decides to recertify us at the meeting on July 9th, we would be recertified officially at the end of July. We do not know if we would be a part of the County officially at the beginning or towards the end of July when the Board of Commissioners can adopt the air quality code. That is something we need clarity on.

xii. Ned Guttman asked if we would be able to do inspections or not during this transition time. Staff will need to continue to gather more information from the State on the process.

xiii. Ashely Featherstone said that the nice thing is we have Forsyth and Mecklenburg's local program code that we can reference and base our new administrative codes on, since they are set up this way.

xiv. Jim Haney asked how Mecklenburg and Forsyth County got recertified. Ashely Featherstone said that they were recertified in the 1970s and 1980s and have not been reformed since then. We were the last ones to reform in 2000.

xv. Ashley Featherstone said that, as a part of this process, we need to ask the state to take over permitting for county owned facilities to the State. For example, the County's landfill has a Title V permit, and we're concerned about that being a conflict of interest, so DAQ has agreed to take that facility back. There are two other small facilities that have similar circumstances.

xvi. Ashley Featherstone said that one of the reasons this is happening is because the President has recommended twice to eliminate our EPA grants. Going under the County is part of contingency planning for that, so that we can continue to have a program here for our residents.

xvii. The County is very supportive of the local air program, and likes the things we offer such as additional local air quality requirements and permitting of more sources.

1. We had lots of dust complaints last week, which is a local rule we have that is applies to construction sites. The state amended their rules at one point and they no longer apply to those sites.

b. Rule Updates

i. Ashley Featherstone said that we are updating our rules as a part of our transition. We will be going to public notice soon for that. We are essentially adopting the State's updated rules, and for the rules we had that are slightly different than the State's, we are keeping those the same.

c. Ned Guttman said, given the upcoming governing structure changes, this Advisory Committee will cease to exist in its current form.

i. Ashley Featherstone said that the Air Quality Board will be reformed as an advisory board. She said that when they reform the board, the County likes to advertise member openings for 30 days. One way they could do it is to appoint

the current board members to serve on the new board for a certain period of time, and then they would ask the current members to reapply at that time.

ii. Ashley Featherstone is hoping that the members on this Advisory Committee will also apply for that new advisory board when the time comes.

iii. Jim Haney asked if the current governing board and advisory board would essentially be combined into one, and Ashley Featherstone and Hannah Rhodes confirmed this (but everyone would need to apply).

iv. Ashely Featherstone said that one other thing that is changing is that the Air Quality Board currently approves our industrial source permits. The Director would likely do this in the future. It is possible we could share information with the advisory board about permits and request some input or report on public comments where applicable.

v. Jim Haney asked how the new board might address new rules in place that manage the number of people on boards in the State. Ashely Featherstone was not aware of the State rules Jim was referring to.

d. Committee members said they would take a field trip to the 35 Woodfin Air Quality Lab after the meeting adjourned.

8. Adjournment
   a. Ned Guttman made the motion to adjourn the meeting.
   b. Caitlin Cook seconded the motion.
   c. All present – yes
   d. The motion passed 5-0
   e. The meeting was adjourned at 4:52pm