**Environmental and Energy Stewardship Subcommittee**
200 College Street, Room 310
March 21, 2025

**Meeting Minutes**

**Subcommittee Members Present**
Commissioner Ball, Commissioner Sloan, Commissioner Wells, Councilwoman Ullman, Josh LittleJohn, Bob MacDonald

**Staff Members Present**
Jeremiah LeRoy, Jennifer Harrison, Ashley Featherstone, Jackie Hamstead, Angelica Tyler, Tim Love, Sybil Tate

Councilwoman Ullman called the meeting to order at 10:04 am.

Motion to amend agenda to include subcommittee member introductions passed unanimously. Motion to approve meeting minutes passed unanimously.

**Public Comment:** No public comment

**Land and Water Conservation Updates:**

- Recap of Current goal: Initiate the conservation of 20% of Buncombe County by 2030
    - 20% is inclusive of federal forest, parkway, etc
    - 2021-2022- there was a big jump in conserved land attributed to increased funding
    - Need ~1400 acres to reach 20% goal by 2030
- New proposed 2030 strategic plan goal: Initiate 700 acres/ year or 3,500 acres in five years
- Land conservation program process improvements save staff time and better inform landowners
    - Now do a preliminary survey to give better value estimate and support grant writing
    - Updated tracking mechanisms
- "Initiate" vs "close" is important designation because it can take 3+ years to close depending on funding source
- Open Space Bond Funds
    - Open space includes conservation easements, greenways, and passive rec
    - Leveraged bond funds as a match for the Agriculture Growth Zone grant for conservation of agricultural lands or forested lands
    - $10 million of $30 million bond funds remaining
- Storm impacts and reevaluation
    - Passive Rec and Greenway projects approved before the storm are being reevaluated to determine if they are still viable
    - Staff are seeking guidance on how to mitigate storm impacts on farmlands
        - There is annual data that can be used to measure how environmental quality of protected lands has been impacted by Helene
    - Flood plain buyouts could be used for open space, recreational use, flood storage development, and riparian protection

        - Haven't seen farms applying for hazard mitigation buy-outs
    - Enka Heritage trail was on pause post storm but has been restarted, but need to assess storm impacts. Landowner seeking additional compensation to pave parking lot.
- Emergency Watershed Protection:
    - EWP can support debris removal and streambank stabilization
    - Anticipate having 350-400 sites
    - EWP requires proximity to infrastructure
    - An alternative program, RCPP, supports streambank restoration. Doesn't require proximity to infrastructure but does require 1500 consecutive linear feet.
    - 218 site visits completed across the county
- Wildfire prevention
    - Significant amount of downed timber/ debris are fuel source for fire
    - FEMA doesn't remove debris from undeveloped property
    - Staff are looking for opportunities for salvage
    - Working with partners to develop fire safety plans
    - Potential of LIDAR surveys and parcel-level fire risk assessment

**Hurricane Helene Air Quality Impacts:**

- Helene Response
    - 8 Additional monitors and sensors (PM2.5)
    - 55% Increase in demolition permits
        - National standards for asbestos removal that recommend surveys on all structures prior to demolition
    - 7 Air curtain incinerators and open burning sites
        - 7 Locations: North End Stump and Brush, Town of Weaverville, Biltmore Estate (x3), Landfill, Riverside Stump Dump
        - Air Quality cannot require air curtain
        - Setback required for air curtain and open burning but not chipping
    - Release of additional guidance documents/ outreach
    - More diesel engines and traffic
    - Demolition and asbestos permits
        - 273 applications since Helene (up form 193 from previous year)
        - National Emissions Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants establishes requirements
            - Recommend survey on all structures built before 1980 prior to demolition/ renovation
- Ozone season started March 1st

**Internal Sustainability Projects:**

Where we've been:

- 60+ solar projects
- Community faced work- solarize campaign, electrification, weatherization
- Current progress- we are about 40% of the way to the 2030 goal

Where we are going:

- First two battery projects being installed in 2 weeks at PSTC and 40 Coxe
    - Maximizing renewables through peak demand shaving and energy arbitrage
- Community Resource Centers (aka resilience hub)
    - Sample features: renewable energy, energy storage, water storage, bidirectional EV charging, backup generators, enhanced air filtration
    - Thrive is hosting an event for folks who led these spaces during the storm on March 28th, 10:30-1:30, registration required
- Resilient communications- renewable energy and battery storage at cell towers
- Resilient transportation- mobile EV charging and utilizing EVs as flexible power sources
- Residential resilience- bulk purchase campaigns for solar generators, promoting residential battery storage campaigns (i.e. Duke PowerPair)
- New funding opportunities unlocked for hurricane recovery
    - Federal grants
    - Corporate donations could present funding opportunities
- Subcommittee suggests sharing cost/ benefits of sustainability projects with public

**Review of Committee Member Terms:**

- Commissioners do not have term limits
- None of the Community Members have served a full term
- Josh LittleJohn and Chris Link will be up for reappointment in July 2025
    - Reappointments will be on the agenda for June
    - Josh LittleJohn expressed interest in serving another term. Will reach out to Chris to gauge interest in serving again.

**2025 Meeting Schedule:**

- Commissioner Sloan suggests organizing thoughts on what the subcommittee wants to learn/ discuss this year, then they will decide on meeting schedule
    - Asked members to email him any ideas
    - Subcommittee can guide on how we can achieve strategic plan goals
- From a staff perspective, a quarterly meeting schedule feels more manageable considering recovery-related responsibilities
- Cancel the April meeting, next meeting will be in May

**Adjournment:**

Meeting adjourned at 12:02.