Environmental and Energy Stewardship Subcommittee
200 College Street, Room 310
May 16, 2025

Meeting Minutes

Subcommittee Members Present
Commissioner Ball, Commissioner Sloan, Commissioner Wells, Josh LittleJohn, Bob MacDonald, Chris Link

Staff Members Present
Jeremiah LeRoy, Jennifer Harrison, Ashley Featherstone, Jackie Hamstead, Angelica Tyler, Tim Love, Sybil Tate, Andy Zoller, Curt Euler, Amy Broughton

Commissioner Sloan called the meeting to order at 10:01 am.

Motion to approve agenda and meeting minutes passed unanimously.

Public Comment:
DeeDee asked Commissioner Wells to report that she is standing guard over stream banks to ensure debris removal is happening correctly and not compromising wildlife habitat.

C-PACE:

- In July 2024, official C-PACE legislation was passed at the state level
- C-PACE= Commercial Property Assessed Capital Expenditure
- It is a voluntary financing program for commercial property upgrades
- Administered by the Economic Development Partnership of NC
    - This takes the burden off local governments
- Eligible project types
    - Must be privately owned
    - Commercial, industrial, agriculture, or multifamily
    - Clean energy, water conservation, energy efficiency, resiliency
    - Example projects: HVAC upgrade, solar panels
    - Can include hard and soft costs
- Different from traditional financing
    - Property owners pay through a lien on their tax bill
    - Repayment obligations are transferred with the property itself
    - Low cost, long term repayment schedule
- Challenges
    - Haven't identified capital provider(s)
    - Interest rates and loan terms haven't been defined
    - Requires consent from mortgage lender
    - No active projects to date to learn from
    - Potential redundancy with Mountain BizWorks Electrify Fund
        - CPACE could fund really large industrial customers
        - Mountain BizWorks's funding could be in jeopardy

- Stakeholder roles/ responsibilities
    - Local Government
        - Adopt a resolution
        - Record lien with register of deeds. County can be reimbursed for this work
        - No exposure to financial or legal liability
    - EDPNC
        - Review application
        - Collect admin/ processing fees
        - Submit closing documents to local governments
    - Private capital providers
        - Disperse funds
        - Billing and collecting repayment
- Process: adopt resolution→ Property owner applies→ Project approved by EDPNC → local government administers tax assessment → contractors complete upgrades → repayment of loan
- Discussion:
    - Local businesses can't access the funds without County adopted resolution
    - Low risk and low administrative burden for the County
    - No counties have finished rolling this out- we could take a wait and see approach to learn from others
    - New Hanover passed the resolution, Wilmington will lead roll out
    - There is a well-developed toolkit to serve as a resource
    - Typically, lien priority would be in order of who files first on the deed, this is not the case for C-PACE
        - mortgage lenders might not sacrifice their priority
    - Subcommittee recommends waiting to see to learn more about loan terms and experiences of other local governments
    - EDPNC is the non-profit complement to Department of Commerce

Loan Loss Reserve

- In 2023 the Commission authorized a LLR of $100K to be managed by the NC Clean Energy Fund
    - Financing can be a tool to incentivize energy efficiency
- Participation isn't as high as originally hoped- only 3 to date
- Original plan was to align with state's weatherization and electrification incentive programs but those haven't launched yet. Expect increased participation then.
- NC CEF is recommending using $30K of the LLR to cover the 2.99% loan fee
    - Fee covers technical assistance for borrowers and LLR administration
    - Waiving of fees would only be available to households below 150% AMI in alignment with state eligibility for their programs
- Self-Help now offers the energy-saver loan state-wide
    - This was born out of the product that originated in Buncombe County
    - Interest rates in Buncombe County are 1% better because of the LLR
- Only $20K of LLR is currently obligated- other funds are not being utilized

- The original plan was for the fund to constantly replenish, if the funds are used to pay fees, the balance would be depleted.

Strategic Planning Discussion

- Plan was put on hold due to Hurricane Helene
- New timeline goal is to get a draft in front of Commissioners by October 2025
- Currently working on community engagement
- May-Aug will be focus area meetings with staff and an update to the board
- Overview of objectives/ goals that were set
    - Preserve agricultural heritage and prioritize conservation of natural resources
        - Streambank restoration, land conservation, recycling, increased economic viability of farmers
        - Recommendation to reserve resources to restore waterways further upstream to minimize flashiness
        - Recommendation to rank goals in priority order
    - Reduce GHG emissions and Protect Air Quality
        - Zero emission fleet, solarize campaigns, compost
    - Increase hazard mitigation to support climate resilient communities
        - Stream gauges, hazard awareness campaigns, become a class 8 community
            - Stream gauges are for emergency management, not water quality
    - Discussion
        - Recommendation to address wildfires, including private property
            - County and other stakeholders are working on this
        - Interest in seeing resilience hubs added to this objective
            - Recovery plan will be project specific and will include resilience hubs
        - Helene recovery plan- has broad overarching goals, then outlines project-level initiatives to achieve those goals
            - Topics include housing, wildfire mitigation
        - Need to consider goals around stormwater runoff
            - Covered in becoming class 8 community
        - Recommendation to develop a crosswalk to show where else issues are addressed- CAPE is working on this
    - Next steps:
        - Don’t want to duplicate the recovery plan
        - Additional Board engagement June-Sept
        - Incorporation of Envision Buncombe community engagement
        - Plan adoption- Oct 2023
        - The real work for the EESS comes after the goals are set. Help staff develop strategies to achieve those goals

2025 Discussion Topics and Meeting Schedule

- Discussion topics
    - How will federal cuts in funding and regulations impact the County

- Subject matter experts around landslides to present and guide this group's recommendations
    - Be intentional about vetting experts

- Schedule
    - Start meeting quarterly
    - Meet next in August, then November
    - In November, we could start discussions around achieving Strategic Plan Goals

Adjournment:
Meeting adjourned at 11:43 am