Environmental and Energy Stewardship Subcommittee
200 College Street, Room 310
February 20th, 2026

Meeting Minutes

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

Staff Members Present
Jeremiah LeRoy, Jennifer Harrison, Jackie Hamstead, Tim Love, Sam Kirk, Max Taintor, Nate Pennington, Amy Broughton

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

Motion to approve agenda and November meeting minutes passed unanimously.

Public Comment:
No public comment.

Text Amendment Process and Priorities:

- After adopting comp plan, Planning Department had anticipated jumping into a slew of text amendments
    - Short term rental discussions and Hurricane Helene delayed this work
- Flood-related ordinances have moved to the top of the list
    - Goal of joining community rating systems, discounts for flood insurance
- Swannanoa Small Area Plan and Pedestrian Plan are current priorities
- EV charging and battery storage
    - Incentivizing vs requiring- County has a history of success with incentivizing
    - Seeing an increase in permits for EV charging
- Senate Bill 382 will delay zoning ordinance
    - Plenty of other work to focus on- stormwater, erosion, watershed
    - Many of Buncombe County's non-zoning ordinances need updates based on state model ordinances
        - Need to right-size and customize for Buncombe County and mountains, apply filters (i.e. urban vs rural)
- Mountain Housing Opportunities property, East Haven, in Swannanoa is a good example of energy efficiency incentives for density
    - An example that others followed
- Debris flow, landslides: concerns around developing in those areas
    - Debris flow pathway mapping was the basis of steep slope ordinance
    - Helene validated the modeling
    - County didn't get zoning until 2009- a lot of the housing stock predated that
- Flood Amendments coming
    - Join Community Rating System

- Adopt higher standards for development in the floodway
- Currently have a rule against any habitable structures within the floodway
  - Working to prevent any development in the floodway, including RVs
  - Including restricting temporary storage, anchoring
- In the process of drawing new flood maps, a 2-year process
- It could be time to consider restrictions in the 500-year floodplain

Battery Storage Project Updates:

- Two existing projects
  - 40 Coxe Ave and Public Safety Training Center
  - Battery systems are programmed differently for each site based on utility tariff type
  - Both projects resulted in electricity cost savings
  - Projects were partially grant-funded and eligible for tax rebates
    - The ROI for County investment is estimated at 2 years
- Upcoming projects
  - End goal: achieve energy resilience, maximize on-site renewables, minimize utility costs
  - Scope of future projects includes integration with solar PV, generators, and microgrid controllers
  - Approach: do initial design and break projects into phases that align with available funding
  - Upcoming projects:
    - Big Ivy Community Center
      - Phase 1 is for solar and 60 kwh battery
      - Partnering with Solar Equity to fund the project
    - 35 Woodfin
      - Phase 1 is 180 kwh battery
      - Funded through NC EECBG
    - East Asheville Library
      - Partnering with Land of Sky to fund the project

Solar Project Impacts

- Considerations and layers of complexity for calculating cost avoidance from solar projects
  - Utility rate structures/ changing tariffs
    - Rate on average up 22%
  - Facility equipment/ operations
    - Still have a lot of natural gas
  - Weather
- Project investments and incentive programs
  - Total expenditure: $13.2 million
  - Total rebates: ~$3.8 million
- County portfolio: 18 of 44 facilities have solar
  - Annual solar production 1492 MWh, 414 MWh sold back
  - Estimated annual solar value: $125K- $140K
- AB Tech portfolio: 7 of 18 facilities have solar

    - Annual solar production: 987 MWh
    - Estimated solar value: $140K- $160K
- County Schools: 12 of 45 facilities have solar
    - Annual production 4,260 MWh
    - Estimated annual solar value: $300-$325K
- City Schools: 4 of 8 facilities have solar
    - Annual production 1420
    - Estimated value: $100-$115K
- Fire Stations- 10 stations total
    - Newer installations, less available data
    - Total production for all sites to date 310 MWh
    - New critical peak pricing makes solar less profitable during those times
        - Additional justification for battery storage
- Lessons learned
    - Risks of being an early adopter
    - Utility tariff and rate changes are undermining the economics of standalone solar
    - Future solar projects should incorporate storage from the beginning- retrofitting is not cost effective

Announcements

- C-PACE adopted
    - Training session March 18th, 9-10am
- Compost processing facility ribbon cutting
    - April 15th 10:30-11:30am, rain date April 17th 10-11am
    - More details/ invitation coming soon

Adjournment:

Meeting adjourned at 12:06 pm.