

**Climate Impact Advisory Committee**  
APPROVED Meeting Minutes



Date: April 2, 2020

Location: RE Store, 2309 Meridian St, Bellingham

QUORUM	Y
<b>Members Present</b>	
Kaylee Galloway	X
Casey Harman	
Erika Lautenbach	
Treva Coe	X
Phil Thompson	X
Ellyn Murphy	X
John Yakawich	X
Katherine Kissinger	X
David Kershner	X
Cynthia Mitchell	X
Alex Ramel	X
STAFF Chris Elder	X

**1) Meeting Began at 5:36 PM**

Ellyn called the Zoom meeting to order at 5:36pm. Everyone on the call introduced themselves. In addition to committee members and staff noted above, the following attendees were present at the beginning of the meeting:

Clare Fogelsong, City of Bellingham

Adrienne Hegedus, Port of Bellingham

Alec Howard, member of Transportation Working Group and Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee

Fred Miller, interested citizen

Christy Shelton, Cascadia Consulting Group

Emily Wright, Cascadia Consulting Group

**2) Review and Approval of Minutes**

Ellyn asked if there was any discussion of the March minutes.

Phil wanted to make sure that the Green Direct purchases were not showing up as zero kilowatts in the inventory. Cynthia added that because of the current PSE energy mix, any consumers of grid-supplied power, whether they are Green Direct or not, are contributing to fossil fuel consumption when they use electricity. She said we need to make sure folks are educated about this so they understand that when they conserve energy, they are helping reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Christy Shelton from Cascadia Consulting Group explained that the inventory would show it both ways, highlighting that even purchasing Green Direct has an environmental cost and reducing energy use will reduce that cost.

Phil said that sounded fine with him and that it would address the concern that he and Cynthia had. Phil made a motion to approve the March minutes. Cynthia seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

### **1) Cascadia Consulting Presentation**

Christy outlined the presentation, noting that Emily would be going through feedback on the vulnerability assessment fact sheets, discussing the ratings rubric, and the guidance document draft.

Emily started with an update on the vulnerability assessment fact sheets. She said Chris had sent over committee feedback earlier in the week and so committee review is assumed to be complete. The Overview fact sheet is intended to be the bridge between the Climate Science and Impact Summary document and the Vulnerability Assessment. Cascadia is holding off on any additional revisions to the Overview fact sheet until all revisions are made to the subject area fact sheets.

Cascadia will develop a designed fact sheet, similar to one of the examples we saw at the February meeting. Emily noted that the current budget doesn't allow for additional rounds of review and revision. She suggested that the fact sheets could be a useful starting place for discussions within work groups and the community. She asked if there were any questions on the fact sheets.

Katherine asked if Cascadia was done taking feedback on all the land use/agriculture, transportation, and fresh water fact sheets.

Christy said that if people have additional comments, Cascadia could adjust the timeline. She said they are happy to take additional comments in this round and then incorporate them into the designed version. The original intent was to have designed versions done by mid April, but she said that might need to be adjusted.

Chris said one challenge we are facing is that some of the committee members would like a couple of revisions to get comfortable with the fact sheets and at the same time we are running out of funds in the contract to go through additional iterations. He noted that we are trying to balance the financial reality with being comfortable with the final work products that comes out of the contract.

Ellyn added that she was expecting Cascadia to provide a process for completing a vulnerability assessment but in the end the committee would be finalizing the assessment, taking advantage of local experts. She expressed concern that otherwise we run the risk of not having credibility in front of the County Council. Ellyn didn't think it was feasible to get feedback from local experts during the stay-at-home period and that it will probably have to happen after the Cascadia contract is completed.

Christy said that the fact sheets may be most useful as input to a process rather than as finished products, helping us with the development of the climate action plan and adaptation strategy. Emily added that the fact sheets could be thought of as living documents that evolve over time if the committee decides that makes more sense.

Alex asked that the conversation include the question of software compatibility for the design-level files.

Christy said it might make sense not to put the fact sheets into a design program if it is going to get in the way of what we want to do with them.

Chris thought there was some benefit to have some design work done at this stage and for that to then be a basis for some graphics in the climate action plan update. He said it depends on the audience for the fact sheets. If the audience is primarily council and they are going to be reading the entire vulnerability assessment anyway, then the design of the fact sheets is less important.

Alex thought design work would be valuable but wanted to make sure it was done in a program that the County already has access to so County staff could easily revise it.

Chris said he did have one staff member in his division with the full Adobe Illustrator suite, so if we get it in that template, we can modify and adjust as needed.

Emily continued with a slide about the ratings rubric. She explained the criteria that go into assessing exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity (see PowerPoint Slides 4 and 5).

Ellyn asked if the exposure “amount” variable was based on the total number of people impacted and how the assets metric is calculated.

Emily responded, using the example of forest health. She said for that asset, it would be what percentage of forest across the county was in harm’s way or at risk from climate change.

Ellyn said that for the freshwater resource, it seems like exposure would be countywide.

Emily explained that the primary metric for assessing the vulnerability of freshwater was saltwater intrusion or groundwater contamination, problems that affect a limited part of the County. She said there is a lot of interpretation involved and the methodology is imperfect but can provide a guide for future research.

Ellyn was not sure how useful some of the rankings are, given their high-level nature, but said she would give it some more thought.

Cynthia said she had difficulty understanding why some elements were ranked medium versus high. She came back to the question of who is the intended audience for these documents. She was concerned that it might not be worth the investment of time to refine the rankings and that Cascadia’s limited time might be better spent focused on the community emissions inventory and other tasks.

Christy explained that originally Cascadia had proposed a more limited scope of work but tried to expand it to cover more elements while still on a budget that is typically for a vulnerability assessment alone. She said it just isn’t possible to do a thorough vulnerability assessment within this budget, given the amount of time that was required to do the emissions inventory and climate science summary document and other components we requested.

Ellyn said that maybe what needs to happen is we set aside the vulnerability assessment for now and focus on completing the community emissions inventory, which is going to be at the core of the climate action plan update.

Chris said that the emissions inventory was on track to be completed, regardless of whether Cascadia devotes more time to the vulnerability assessment. Chris noted that the 2007 climate action plan didn’t even address climate change vulnerability or adaptation, making the vulnerability assessment a high

priority in his mind. He is in favor of working to refine the assessment with another round of revisions, making sure the committee is comfortable with how things are scored, but recognizing that this is a high-level assessment and will be of value in helping the County Council engage in a discussion about possibly doing a higher-resolution assessment. He said having even a preliminary assessment of which resources have a high vulnerability is valuable because it helps highlight where County staff need to focus on collecting more high-resolution data.

Phil agreed that the vulnerability assessment could still be useful without examining the data at the micro-level, but he suggested that where there was more uncertainty surrounding the vulnerability of a particular resource, the report could acknowledge the need for more data gathering as an action item. He said he didn't think we were going to necessarily come to a consensus about every ranking for this report, but that it might not matter, as long as we aren't claiming to answer every single question about vulnerability in the action plan update.

Ellyn agreed but said that the criteria that underpin the exposure component of the ranking (i.e. amount, spatial extent, and value at risk) needed to be discussed for the audience to really understand how we came up with the exposure rankings.

Emily said the notes column in the spreadsheet does briefly explain the components of the rankings, but what it comes back to is the audience for the fact sheets. She said that in February, the committee indicated that the fact sheets were meant to be for a broad audience, including members of the public who might not want to get into the methodology but simply want a general overview of the relative risk to different resources. She said that there is an inevitable compromise in detail when trying to translate the content of a vulnerability assessment for a broader audience.

Ellyn said that the committee is going to need to be able to explain the ratings to a broader audience.

Chris said he thought it would be helpful for the committee members to review the ratings rubric spreadsheet again, because, as an example, his own comments might change the score for adequate water supply. He suggested that getting some subject matter experts to look at the spreadsheet might be a way to get some rapid-fire feedback on whether or not we are heading in the right direction.

Emily said that could be a good approach, but keeping in mind that the notes in the spreadsheet are abbreviated and you lose some of the nuance that is contained in the fact sheets.

Christy added that the notes columns represent an abbreviated explanation of the ratings rationale based on a review of the literature and County plans but Cascadia staff are not as intimately involved as some committee members and subject matter experts who live in Whatcom County, so they are looking to us for that ground-truthing of the information.

Cynthia said that maybe we are making this process harder than it needs to be because we have big climate change vulnerabilities in all these areas. She noted that there is need for adaptation and mitigation where possible across the board, also pointing out that there are interdependencies and cascading effects.

Ellyn added that we are not subject matter experts in all of these areas, so she felt it was going to be necessary to reach out to experts not on the committee for the ground-truthing.

Christy clarified that she was looking to committee members not so much for subject matter expertise, but for our lived experience, meaning that, as residents of Whatcom County, members of the committee are in a better position to identify realities that aren't showing up in the literature or reports that Cascadia reviewed.

Emily then gave an overview of the components of the vulnerability assessment process (See Slides 7,8, 9, and 10). She followed with a review of possible assumptions to guide future vulnerability assessments (Slide 11).

Christy then reviewed the status of the greenhouse gas inventory. She said that Cascadia has taken the municipal inventory as far as they can go with it, based on the data available to them. The new data that has been incorporated relates to emissions from solid waste, especially the County's closed landfills (see Slides 13-17).

Cynthia asked about the timeline for the community emissions inventory. Christy responded that data continues to come in and that they hope to have it completed by the May meeting, though it has been challenging to get responses to queries, given the pandemic.

Ellyn asked if there was a way to document the process of data gathering to facilitate future updates.

Christy responded that a lot of that documentation would be captured in the ClearPath software. Cascadia will also be delivering all the raw data spreadsheets to show where data came from. Chris has tracked down a lot of the data in hardcopy. A recommendation for the future is to improve data collection, tracking, and consolidation.

Phil asked a follow up question regarding landfills. Ellyn said all landfills in Whatcom County are now closed and municipal waste from the County is going to two landfills, one in Eastern Oregon and one in Eastern Washington (the Roosevelt landfill). Christy added that the collection and transport of waste to landfills outside the County would show up in the community inventory, because the County contracts that work out.

Alex asked if for the electricity emissions are based on Puget Sound Energy's coefficient or the Northwest regional grid average. Christy responded that they used the PSE coefficient. Alex said he wasn't going to argue with that approach but noted that the 2007 inventory used a different methodology. Ellyn noted that a lot of the methodology is different from 2007 and that it highlights the need to document the information gathering process. Christy added that using ICLEI's ClearPath software for this inventory and future updates will help maintain the consistency over time.

Christy then went into discussing the phase of the contract involving evaluation of the 2007 action plan implementation, the development of a list of mitigation and adaptation measures, and prioritizing a list of early action items (Slides 19-22). Cascadia created a draft template for compiling/evaluating strategies and actions that has columns for a number of evaluation criteria (Slide 23).

Christy reviewed some proposed assessment criteria provided by Cascadia, which she said could serve as a starting point for the committee's evaluation of action items. She said the criteria would need to be refined based on what is consistent with local priorities, emphasizing that it is a qualitative process and there is no right answer for the methodology used to assess action items. Cascadia is interested in getting feedback from the Working Groups on the assessment template.

Ellyn asked if for the cost criteria we could use marginal abatement cost for adaptation projects, as well as for mitigation projects. Phil said it would be a challenge to do a cost-benefit analysis where the benefits of an adaptation strategy cannot easily be assigned a dollar value.

Alex added that he thought it was reasonable to have cost be one criterion for evaluating actions, but keeping in mind that our mandate is to answer the question, “How do we get the County to 100 percent renewable?” He said it wouldn’t be reasonable to rule out actions simply because they cost more than other actions, if they in fact would lead to meaningful reduction in GHG emissions.

Cynthia said that fortunately the cost of green energy generally is less than brown energy. As part of the Energy Supply and Buildings Working Group, Cynthia has put together a document of goals and strategies that will be reviewed by Alex and Casey, then presented to the full committee for feedback to see if it can fit in with the draft assessment spreadsheet.

Ellyn noted that the 100 percent renewable goal is contained in County ordinance 2017-080, which directs the advisory committee to work “diligently toward that goal.”

### **3) Definitions and Terminology**

The committee discussed definitions and terminology, based on a memo by Cynthia dated March 20<sup>th</sup>.

Ellyn suggested going with the proposed goal-strategy-action item terminology, unless there were objections. The committee members endorsed Cynthia’s proposed approach.

### **4) Working Group Updates**

Ellyn went over a possible timeline and meeting schedule for the work of the Working Groups, with a goal of presenting a draft climate action plan update to the Council in December. Cynthia thought it was a reasonable timeline for getting a report draft completed. Alex added that it was useful and thanked Ellyn for putting it together. He said he couldn’t comment on whether it was feasible or not. Katherine thought it was helpful. Ellyn encouraged committee members to suggest revisions, given that the timeline was a draft.

Ellyn then gave an update on the work of the Communications and Community Engagement Working Group. She said that the near term work has involved interviewing community members about best practices for communication, but it has been tough, given that people are focused on the pandemic right now. She noted that we have had some meetings over Zoom and that an article on water and climate change is going to be coming out in the April issue of Whatcom Watch. The Working Group members have been talking about doing a generic presentation that could be used with different community groups. Another possibility is to develop short videos on climate change topics or identify YouTube videos that are relevant, such as electrification of heating.

Cynthia gave an update on the Energy Supply and Buildings group. She has prepared an overview of how the committee could approach its work, with some proposed goals and strategies. She, Casey, and Alex are planning to give a short presentation at the next meeting.

Phil gave an update on the Transportation and Land Use Working Group. He said they had a Zoom meeting last week and had been reviewing action plans of other counties and government agencies. Using the framework that Cynthia put together to identify goals, strategies, and actions, they are going to start prioritizing action items this month.

Kaylee gave an update on the Natural Resources group. The Working Group members have been reading through the reports of other entities, including the City of Bellingham, the Community Research Project, and the Lummi Nation. They have come up with six or seven subcategories and are compiling strategies within each of them.

Alex said he anticipated an additional federal stimulus package that will likely be infrastructure. He said if Whatcom County has projects that are ready to go, then it will be in a better position to actually secure that funding. The Energy Supply and Buildings Working group will present some possible projects at the next CIAC meeting.

Ellyn said we should all be thinking about demonstration projects that need funding. Cynthia concurred and suggested a brainstorming meeting before the May meeting.

#### **5) Old/New Business**

Alex said he wanted to acknowledge that he had not officially met everyone on the committee, at least not in their capacities as committee members, and thanked the new members for volunteering to serve.

Ellyn noted that committee member bios are now up on the website. She encouraged committee members who want a photo with their bio to send one to Chris.

#### **6) Public Comment**

Ellyn then invited public comment. Alec Howard said he had been listening and that it sounded like the committee was making progress.

Clare Fogelson said that the City has formed a working group that is putting together a work plan for how the City can move forward with the recommendations that are contained in the City's Climate Action Task Force Report.

Ellyn and Cynthia thanked Cascadia for the presentation.

#### **7) Meeting adjourned at 7:42pm.**

Recorded by David Kershner for Casey Harman, Secretary

Staff Contact: Chris Elder (360) 778-5932