

Durham Environmental Affairs Board 2013 Annual Report

The Durham City-County Environmental Affairs Board (EAB) is an advisory board that consists of eleven voting members and seven non-voting ex-officio members. Our mission is to recognize the importance of local cooperation and advise both the City and County on environmental issues. The eleven seats on the EAB are water resources, public policy, solid waste, energy, biological science, education, air quality, public health, law, engineering, and soil and water conservation. EAB considers topics such as air and water quality, the environmental impacts of development and pollution, energy conservation, environmental education, climate change, green building design, and greenhouse gas reductions. The Board advocates environmental accountability, in both the private and public sectors, and meets the first Wednesday of every month at 6:00 p.m. in the Committee Room on the second floor of City Hall.

The board's official duties are:

1. To advise the Durham City Council and the Durham County Board of County Commissioners on environmental policy;
2. To educate the public and local officials on environmental issues;
3. To perform special studies and projects requested by the City and/or County on environmental questions;
4. To facilitate citizen participation in local government's consideration of matters involving the environment;
5. To promote intergovernmental and public/private cooperation and coordination,
6. To perform such other duties as may be assigned to it from time to time by the City and/or the County; and
7. To adopt Rules of Procedure, for the orderly dispatch of its business.

A key part of fulfilling the EAB's public outreach and education duties is by hosting presentations on new ordinances, ideas, and issues that might impact the environment. The EAB provides a mechanism for communication with the municipal governments on environmental issues in Durham. The EAB hopes to encourage more people to attend and discuss issues by having City and County staff and others share information related to the environment.

In 2013 the EAB added four new members, Christopher Werner, Mark Fogel, Mark DeWitt, and Jessica Isola. Throughout 2013 the Board focused on: Jordan Lake Rules, Falls Lake Rules, the Northeast Creek dissolved oxygen levels, monitoring legislative activities regarding environmental issues, and hydraulic fracturing.

Accomplishments for 2013

One of the EAB's roles is to provide feedback on the environmental impact of major public projects, and private projects as requested by elected officials. In 2013 the Board focused on the items summarized below.

Water Quality, Land Resources, Public, and Biological Health

1. Northeast Creek Water Quality

The EAB was consulted regarding potential eco-friendly and humane means of improving the dissolved oxygen levels in the Northeast Creek. It was determined by a contractor that low dissolved oxygen levels were the result of three beaver dams and three roadway culverts that slow water velocity, in addition to relatively low natural flow conditions. The EAB reviewed potential solutions, and recommended to Durham City Officials that flow devices be installed at each of the three beaver dams to serve as an inexpensive and likely effective, means to increase the flow rate and the dissolved oxygen levels in the Northeast Creek.

2. Falls Lake Water Quality

EAB is committed to the process of improving the water quality in Falls Lake and supports efforts to ensure that it is done efficiently and effectively. The EAB continues to monitor progress in the Falls Lake Nutrient Reduction rules implementation. Furthermore, the EAB has taken action regarding recent legislative action, in the form of preparing a resolution in favor of extending the Falls Lake Nutrient Strategy deadline for completion of Stage II. We made this recommendation because, among other reasons, the current Stage II deadline for completion would require a contribution of \$1400 per household per year within the watershed for the next 25 years. The EAB went on to recommend that Durham continues to seek cost-effective and sustainable nutrient management strategies, such as nutrient-removal facilities.

3. Jordan Lake Rules

The EAB has closely monitored and passed resolutions regarding N.C. Assembly activities that affect the Jordan Lake Rules. For example, the EAB prepared a resolution in opposition of N.C. Senate Bill 612, the "Regulatory Reform Act of 2013," which proposed to lessen regulations in place to improve the water quality of Jordan Lake. In addition, the EAB prepared a resolution in opposition of Senate Bill 515, the "Jordan Lake Water Quality Act," which proposed to repeal the current Jordan Lake Rules. The EAB has, and intends to continue, encouraging the Durham City Council and Durham County Commissioners to protect drinking water quality at Jordan Lake.

4. Trees Across Durham

The EAB has heard presentations from Durham Urban Foresters, such as Alex Johnson, regarding the status of trees in Durham. The EAB disseminated this information to the public, using social media. The current situation in Durham is that approximately 13,000 street trees will die in the next ~20 years, requiring more time and money than Durham

currently has budgeted for tree replacement activities. Alex Johnson has asked the EAB to publicize the issue to citizens, raise public support, serve as a conduit to local officials, and help reduce costs by coming up with alternative uses for wood chips generated during the disposal of dead trees.

5. Downtown Durham Open Space Plan

City Planner Tom Dawson presented the Downtown Durham Open Space Plan to the EAB, which includes several urban open spaces, public parks, and rooftop gardens. The EAB is excited to support this project, and see it progress.

Sustainability

1. Polystyrene Container / Plastic Bag Reduction

The EAB began working with community stakeholders to develop a voluntary usage reduction campaign for polystyrene (Styrofoam) containers and single-use plastic bags. After its initial formation, the group separated from the EAB, so as to focus solely on polystyrene and plastic bag reduction in Durham. The EAB continues to support its activities.

2. Hydraulic Fracturing

The legalization of hydraulic fracturing in North Carolina has a large number of environmental implications for citizens of Durham County. The EAB presented a comprehensive report of the potential environmental impacts for Durham to City Council and Board of County Commissioners in 2012, which was approved. However, since then, state-level legislation has passed that supersedes City and County resolutions. Therefore the EAB remains concerned that hydraulic fracturing will lead to adverse human health and environmental impacts in Durham. The EAB continues to monitor development of state regulatory framework for natural gas extraction by hydraulic fracturing, hear presentations regarding fracking from citizens, and convey our opinions about hydraulic fracturing legislation to local government officials.

3. Greenhouse Gas Plan

Tobin Freid kept the EAB updated on activities targeted to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as the implementation of Neighborhood Energy Retrofit Program (NERP), Home Energy Savings program (HESP), and City facility retrofit projects. Ms. Freid has held a number of Get Your Grass off Gas events as well organizing the Trees Across Durham initiative. The Sustainability Office kept the EAB informed on the process of starting a social media effort to encourage sustainable living. All of these activities help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

EAB Goals for 2014

Trees Across Durham

The EAB plans to publicize the issue of mass tree loss to citizens, raise public support for tree replacement in Durham, serve as a conduit between Durham Urban Foresters and local officials, and come up with alternative uses for wood chips generated during the disposal of dead trees.

Sponsor the Sustainable Properties Award at the Golden Leaf Awards

The EAB looks forward to working in concert with the Durham Appearance Commission on Golden Leaf Awards. The EAB plans to again sponsor the Sustainable Properties Award at the 2014 Golden Leaf Awards ceremony, to promote and publicize the building of environmentally sustainable properties in Durham.

Duke Diet and Fitness Center

The EAB will continue to support converting the Duke Diet and Fitness Center into a flood-reducing and headwater-protecting stormwater retention lake. The proposed plan for the former Duke Diet and Fitness Wetland Project would bring approximate reductions of 10 percent nitrogen and 12 percent phosphorus in the headwaters of Ellerbee Creek, one of the most impaired streams in Durham.

Downtown Durham Urban Space Plan

The EAB intends to support the Downtown Durham Urban Space Plan, to increase the look, feel, and environmental-friendliness of Downtown Durham.

Polystyrene Container / Plastic Bag Reduction Group

The EAB plans to continue supporting the activities of the Polystyrene Container / Plastic Bag Reduction Group in any way possible.

2013 Durham Environmental Affairs Board Members

Elizabeth Chan (chair), Marion Lamberth (vice chair), Thomas Poole (secretary), Scott Schwartz, Joseph Pinto, Tatjana Vujic, Jessica Isola, Mark Fogel, Mark DeWitt, Christopher Werner, and Ann Woodward.

2013 Durham Environmental Affairs Board Staff Liaison

Kathleen Snyder, Planner, Durham City-County Planning

2013 Durham Environmental Affairs Board Ex-Officio Members

City Solid Waste Management, City-County Planning Director, City Public Works Director, City Water Management Director, County Health Department Director, Soil and Water District Conservationist, and the County Engineer.

2013 Durham Environmental Affairs Board City Council Representative

Councilman Mike Woodard (Jan-Mar) and Councilman Don Moffitt (Mar-Dec)

2013 Durham Environmental Affairs Board County Board of County Commissioners Representative

Commissioner Ellen Reckow