

Durham Environmental Affairs Board 2015 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 Commissioners on environmental issues;
2. To perform other duties, such as special environmental studies, as assigned by the City and/or County;
3. To facilitate citizen education and participation in environmental matters, laws and regulations, and the local government's consideration of matters involving the environment;
4. To promote intergovernmental and public/private cooperation and coordination, and
5. To adopt Rules of Procedure, for the orderly dispatch of its business, and on an annual basis meet with the Joint City-County Planning Committee to report on past activities and develop priorities for the upcoming year.

A key part of fulfilling the EAB's public outreach and educational duties is achieved by freely exchanging ideas and commenting on proposed ordinances, while hearing other issues that may affect the citizens of Durham or impact the environment. The EAB provides a mechanism for communication with the local 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 2015, the EAB added seven new members, Matthew Herman, Mark Koegel, Nancy LaPlaca, Tyjuanna LaBennett, Neil Matouka, Barrington Ross and Stephen Senter. During 2015 the Board focused on: preparing and presenting recommendations for sustaining a healthy urban forest in Durham, water quality assessments, and monitoring legislative activities regarding environmental issues.

Accomplishments for 2015

In 2015, the Board provided feedback on the environmental impact of the items summarized below:

1. Sustaining a Healthy Urban Forest

At the request of the Durham City Council, the EAB evaluated the future health of Durham's urban forest. The EAB determined that in order for the City of Durham to maintain the approximate canopy coverage from trees on public property, 1,680 trees must be planted and 750 trees must be safely removed each year for the next 20 years. Current tree replacement operations support the planting of only 500 trees and the removal of only 300 potentially hazardous dead/dying trees per year. Without additional resources, the City faces the reduction in the quality of life, economic, ecological, and human health benefits for its current and future citizens. The EAB recommended that the Durham City Council allocate resources to develop an Urban Forest Master Plan and facilitate the planting of at least 1,680 trees per year, the removal of the 750 aging trees per year, and the proper maintenance of all trees on public property in Durham. EAB Chair Elizabeth Chan presented the Urban Forestry Report to the City Council at a work session in May 2015.

2. Assessing the Need for a City-County Stormwater Committee

Melissa Rooney requested from the Board that a Joint City-County Stormwater Committee be formed. This committee would be composed of two County Commissioners, two City Council members, the Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor, Director of City Stormwater Services, Director of County Engineering, Director of Soil and Water Conservation District, and a City/County Attorney. The Board has also heard responses to this request from City and County Stormwater Programs. The Board voted that no action was needed.

3. Hydrilla Presentation from Stormwater

In May 2015, Stormwater presented information on a NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources project to stop the spread of hydrilla into the Eno River. Hydrilla is an invasive species, causing water quality issues. It is a problem in multiple places in North Carolina, though currently only a concern in the Eno River in Durham. A herbicide was injected into the Eno River to prevent the growth and spread of Hydrilla. It is a slow drip feed that will continue from spring to summer, 2015-2016. The injection covers 16 miles of the Eno River. The herbicide is not concentrated, only targets Hydrilla and is not harmful to other biologics. Currently there is a dye study being conducted to assess the spread of the herbicide. Swimming, fishing and boating are still prohibited. The herbicide will not bio accumulate in fish, which are still safe to eat. It is advised to not use the water to water garden or houseplants. Dogs and other animals can still drink the water. The herbicide used has been used in other areas safely. Sterile grass carp are also being utilized to eat the excess Hydrilla.

4. Enforcement of Policy 7.1.2d. Low Impact Development

In June 2015, Durham residents Tom Struhsaker and Liz Conroy asked the EAB to encourage the City/County to enforce Policy 7.1.2d. Low Impact Development. Struhsaker and Conroy felt development near their neighborhood was being approved without consideration for this Policy. EAB agreed this could be an issue and suggested Struhsaker and Conroy discuss this issue with the Planning Commission, which more directly advises the City Council and County Commissioners on these issues.

5. Urban Open Space Plan

In June 2015, EAB liaison Helen Youngblood presented information about the Durham Urban Open Space Plan and invited board members to comment through the online survey available to all residents and to attend the public meetings. The Urban Open Space Plan will provide guidance to the City and County about the value of open space properties and create an open space network that can be used throughout the Urban and Compact Neighborhood Tiers. The plan will connect and build on our adopted Downtown Open Space Plan and other adopted open space plans, including the adopted Durham Trails and Greenways Master Plan, and the adopted Parks Master Plan.

6. Public Input Process for NPDES Permit

In August of 2015, Michelle Woolfolk presented information about the public input process for NPDES permits and asked the EAB for feedback on how Durham could expand its feedback process. Currently Stormwater relies on the EAB to provide input, questions and review for the NPDES public input process. Though Durham has not had an issue and recently renewed its permits, other cities in the Northeast have recently have recently had issues with only using an advisory board for feedback. Stormwater would like suggestions from EAB on how to improve or expand the public input process. EAB discussed the issue and suggested there be a list of qualified residents that could be asked to review to NPDES permit during the next application period. EAB is still discussing how best to create and conduct this list and outreach.

7. NC Heavy Duty Vehicle Idling Restrictions (15A NCAC 02D .1010) Enforcement

In September 2015, County Commissioner Ellen Reckhow asked the EAB to recommend ways the City could help enforce NC Heavy Duty Vehicle Idling Restrictions (15A NCAC 02D .1010). She has seen many heavy duty trucks that appear to be idling beyond the restriction limits in construction areas. EAB suggested that literature available from the state and city could be given to contractors during the permitting process to remind builders on of the restriction.

8. Sustainability in Durham Public Schools (DPS)

In October 2015, Brian Callaway coordinator of energy and sustainability at DPS discussed recent sustainability initiatives within the DPS system. DPS has focused on energy efficiency efforts through several measures including changing lighting to LED lights and encouraging conservation. DPS has also created a recycling campaign called "Toss it Right," which employs the train the trainer model through environmental champions and engaging high school students to create the posters and educational materials.

9. Non-flushable Woven Wipes

In October 2015, Tyrone Battle industrial waste control coordinator presented information about the Industrial Waste Control Program with a focus on FOG (fats, oils and grease) and woven wipes. There has been a recent problem with woven wipes being advertised as flushable, but they do not disintegrate and clog wastewater pipes and pumps. There is currently an education campaign "Wipes clogs pipes" to increase public awareness.

10. Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit (D-O LRT) Presentation

In November 2015, Willie Noble from Go Triangle presented an overview of the D-O LRT project and how it would impact Durham. EAB inquired about specific Durham impacts and was directed to the D-O LRT environmental impact statement available online.

11. US Climate Resilience Toolkit (<http://toolkit.climate.gov/>)

In December 2015, James Fox director of National Environmental Modeling and Analysis Center at UNC-Asheville presented the US Climate Resilience Toolkit and how Durham could utilize the toolkit to prepare for climate change issues. The Toolkit provides scientific tools, information, and expertise to help people manage their climate-related risks and opportunities, and improve their resilience to extreme events. Fox indicated scenarios and case studies in the toolkit about water quality issues that may be most relevant to Durham. Fox also showed how to find local resources and state climatologist for more specific feedback on issues.

12. Golden Leaf Sustainability Award

In December 2015, the EAB agreed to partner with the Durham City-County Appearance Commission to help create a sustainability award for the Durham Golden Leaf Awards. The EAB drafted description and criteria for the Sustainability Award:

The award for Sustainable Design is given to projects creating a sustainable environment by incorporating green building principles in planning and development. Projects must document these principles in the areas of energy, design, site, water, and building materials. Projects should meet at least two of the below criteria.

- Increase energy efficiency
- Increase use of environmentally preferred transportation options
- Improve water quality
- Change behaviors to achieve environmental quality
- Protect open space and preserve rural character

13. Outreach to other Durham City and County Boards

In an effort to improve EAB reach and understanding, EAB members looked into another City or County Board and attended a meeting to give a brief synopsis about EAB, such as the mission statement and other to collaborate on relevant issues. Neil Matouka talked with the Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Commission; Mark DeWitt talked with the Planning Board and Mark Fogel with the Board of Health.

EAB Goals for 2016

Sustain a Healthy Urban Forest in Durham

The EAB intends to continue supporting the goals of maintaining the current level of canopy coverage and safely removing dead and dying trees in Durham. In an attempt to assist local government officials in this process, we will research and present the costs other similar cities have incurred while performing an inventory and risk analysis of public trees. We will also attempt to estimate the costs involved with frequent pruning cycles of newly-planted trees, increased levels of tree maintenance (including removal), and the planting of at least 1,680 trees per year over the next 20 years (the approximate number required to maintain the current canopy level). In addition, we plan to raise public support for tree replacement in Durham and serve as a conduit between Durham Urban Foresters and local officials. We also plan continued involvement with urban forest issues, such as researching environmentally-friendly ways of handling the waste created when trees are removed for public safety.

Advocate for Recycling in Durham Public Schools

The EAB would like to continue to support the education for and enforcement of recycling in Durham Public Schools.

Assist Durham with Climate Change Preparedness

The EAB is very interested in investigating the potential effects of climate change here in Durham, NC. We are particularly interesting in determining how Durham can best prepare for expected environmental changes due to climate change and extreme weather.

Increase Community Outreach and Involvement

The EAB plans to increase community outreach projects in order to better involve local residents in environmental issues. Specifically, we would like to interact with residents about increasing building efficiency, solar power, alternate fuel sources, the light rail, taking care and making better use of the Geer Cemetery, car and bus idling around schools, and planting gardens as part of the Poverty Reduction Initiative.

Receive Training in Soil and Water Conservation

A great deal of EAB business deals with issues related to water, such as drinking water quality and storm water runoff. Members would like to enroll in a course that would improve the EAB's understanding of local water resources and allow us to better advise local officials regarding these resources, benefiting both the city and county. We feel that the Basic Training for Soil and Water Conservation Supervisors at the UNC School of Government would fulfill this purpose and hope to enroll in the course the next time it is offered.

Sponsor the Sustainability Award at the Golden Leaf Awards

The EAB would like to sponsor the Sustainable Properties Award at the 2016 Golden Leaf Awards ceremony, to promote and publicize the building of environmentally sustainable properties in Durham.

Monitor Hydraulic Fracturing in NC

The EAB will continue 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.

Support the Rain Catchers Pilot Project

Success of this program would be determined over the next 10 years by water quality and hydrology assessments, as well as the measurement of infiltration from downspout disconnection by NCSU. The EAB plans to support this project and help translate its findings to the public and local government officials.

Support the Downtown Durham Open Space Plan and the Urban Open Space Plan

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

Support the Polystyrene Container / Plastic Bag Reduction Group

The EAB plans to continue supporting the activities of the Polystyrene Container / Plastic Bag Reduction Group, now called Don't Waste Durham.

Support the Northeast Creek Water Quality Improvement Attempts

The EAB intends to continue following the progress of and supporting the City's progress in contracting the installation and maintenance of a flow control device to increase dissolved oxygen without disturbing the beaver population in Northeast Creek.

Support the community and the citizens of Durham in its' education efforts on environmental issues

The EAB will continue to monitor and support community efforts in Durham for a Healthier Durham.

2015 Durham Environmental Affairs Board Members

Rachel McIntosh-Kastrinsky (Chair), Mark Fogel (Vice Chair), Elizabeth Chan, Mark DeWitt, Matthew Herman, Mark Koegel, Nancy LaPlaca, Tyjuanna LaBennett, Neil Matouka, Barrington Ross, Stephen Senter

2015 Durham Environmental Affairs Board Staff Support

Helen Youngblood (July-Dec) and Kathleen Snyder (Jan-July), Planner, Durham City-County Planning

2015 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, Durham County Environmental Health Department, City-County Sustainability Manager

2015 Durham Environmental Affairs Board City Council Representative

Councilman Eddie Davis

2015 Durham Environmental Affairs Board County Board of Commissioners Representative

Commissioner Ellen Reckow