



## ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS BOARD

### MINUTES

**September 6th, 2023**  
Virtual Meeting (Zoom)

#### **Voting Members:**

Jennifer Carrigan (chair), Corie Hlavaty (vice chair and secretary), Wilson Salls, Anjali Boyd, Cooper Norris, Malcolm Gregory, Ethan Case, Ben Goldberg, Wafa Khalil, Sandra Howell, Chi Vo, Jonathan Chan

#### **Ex Officio Members/Staff:**

Tobin Freid, Amy Armbruster, Heidi Carter, DeDreana Freeman, Summer Alston, Wade Walcott

Presenters: Dr. Dan Richter, Emily Rhodes, Marcus Southern, Langston Alexander, Emily Barrett

Attendees & Panelists Total: 21

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- I. Call to Order at 6:01 pm
  - III. Approval for the June and August minutes - they have been approved.
  - IV. Centering and Icebreaker: EAB members went around and shared their favorite natural space in Durham.
  - V. Announcements:
    - a) Next EAB meeting is scheduled for Oct 4th, 2023, it will be virtual.
    - b) Tobin Freid - Solarize Durham is in its next phase.
    - c) Climate Pollution Reduction Grant - The state and Central Pines Regional Council are taking public input about it. There are also a lot of funding opportunities, please let Tobin know if you are looking for any.
    - d) Amy Armbruster - On October 26th from 6-7pm Board Members are invited to volunteer at Durham Neighborhood College.

- e) J.V. Loperfido - A new project in the Public Works Department, Stormwater Division, is called the Watershed Restoration Group. It just launched applications for southeast Durham watershed projects, with the goal of improving water quality in those watersheds.

## VI. **New and Continuing Business**

- **Dr. Dan Richter, Professor of Soil and Ecology at Duke University**

Leading question for presentation: Is there lead in city park soils from incinerator ash?

- 1937 Public Works map was the start of this project. Four locations are shown, one is located in Walltown Park. Every one of these four incinerators are under current parks. Question - is there long-term lead exposure in parks? Dr. Richter is a soil chemist, studied the soil chemistry and found ash. Ash in any amount is potentially dangerous.
- Three park maps are shown. In East End Park, it's a remarkably clean area next to an abandoned property. We could lean on the city to survey abandoned land. In East End Park, studies show a relatively clean park. The city said that where they were finding these high levels were not high trafficked areas. They are right next to basketball courts. The real tragedy is on East Main Street by East Durham Park, where the majority of people go. A picnic shelter area has high levels. A 2 acre parcel where lead values are so high, we usually only find this at lead smelters.
- He could not find much historic information about these areas. In 1915 Durham built its first garbage incinerator. They stopped being used between the 1920-1940s; this is the lifetime of the four neighborhood incinerators. In the 1950s, the abandoned incinerators were converted to playgrounds and parks with wide support.
- Durham is not unique in burning garbage or dumping ash. This is a national story unfortunately. 3 surveys in the U.S and Canada show values of lead in parks. At this time they had no idea of the risks. The sanitary landfills were probably the limiting factor. NY, LA, Florida have contaminated parks.
- When will Durham begin to remediate what we have in the parks? It won't take much, a couple truckloads of soil, growing grass, installing fences along stream channels.
- How many more Durhams are there? Has ash from pre-1960s incinerators been a blind spot for environmental protection agencies?
- Giving a shorter history, starting in November 2022. Dr. Richter's graduate student sent a message to DPR in Nov, and did not get a reply. --- A walltown resident found the student (Bihari's) paper in early spring. In June, WCA conducted a public meeting with 120 residents. After this meeting, DPR confirms there is lead in the park, after a citywide response. Between these four neighborhoods, residents have been meeting all together. There is signage in East and Walltown park, the plastic orange construction fencing and signage. We will talk about the inadequacies in this communication, and what are other long term steps? NC Law of Justice says it will be a long time to remediate.
  - **Emily Rhodes, Walltown Community Association**

- The goal is to restore trust in Durham residents. Walltown is a historically black working class neighborhood. Their requests for the city and county: help move towards restoring trust.
- This would include:
  - mobile lead testing. Recognize that people in these neighborhoods cannot get to the health department, and they need to come to them. These need to be advertised at the park sites.
  - A bigger ask is having the testing be on site, at the parks would be great. While they understand lead having a greater impact on older and young members, they think the age requirements should be expanded, especially for children who have been living there for a long time.
  - Better signage, and not just at the parks! Put signage at the neighborhoods, mailings out to residents, signage at entrances of the parks. QR codes on the signs. Pop up signs will not help build and restore trust.
  - Only about 25% of the sites have been tested, we are demanding that they expand the soil testing to include more areas of the parks.
  - They also request immediate action to remediate the playground and a grant writer to help find federal funding.
- So far the Walltown Community Association has had one council member attend a public meeting about this, and it was Councilwoman Freeman. We are very disappointed this is not more of a priority. We know remediation is expensive, but it's more costly to have generations pay for this in the future.

**Jennifer Carrigan:** Some of the asks, requests, demands are for different departments and officials. Have you already asked these people, or are you looking for us to find and ask these people? Who have you asked?

**Emily Rhodes:** The county is offering free lead testing for children under 6, but we are asking for more testing.

**Sandra Howell:** How long has this been a problem?

**Emily Rhodes:** The four neighborhood incinerators were closed in 1942, took about 10 years until the sites were converted to parks. So about 70-80 years.

**Corie Hlavaty:** I want to make sure Jen's question was answered: have you asked for these specific needs yet, and want us to reiterate them?

**Heidi Carter:** I have not received any emails as a county commissioner, you make great points, and I just sent an email to our Director Rod Jenkins about your requests. So you should also email the County Commissioners.

Jen: That's a good point, we should think about how the county can help as well.

**DeDreana Freeman:** Make sure you emphasize how lead has an impact, because it's important to emphasize that children under 6 absorb it in their brain. The responsibility of a city council member is to protect the city, but it's important to share that the children are our city, and we need to prioritize them.

**Chi Vo:** Jesse Hulderson is coordinating community organizing in the different neighborhoods. Toxic Free NC is speaking at the next Durham Environmental Coalition meeting, I will put that information in the chat.

**Ben Goldberg:** Does doing the lead testing help us know that people are exposed, what is the purpose of lead testing?

**Emily Rhodes:** If it's found the lead exposure happened, there needs to be some sort of responsibility for that. Children exposed to lead in the long term need more support in school. I don't know what an effective treatment for lead exposure is.

**Wilson Salls:** If there's a possibility for future testing, what are the biggest risk areas, and are they being tested? For example, what about testing at community gardens?

**Dan Richter:** I have a masters student with a proposal to test community farms, within 6-12 months this should come together.

**Jen Carrigan:** Does anyone on the board have a proposal for the EAB with a path forward?

**Ethan Case:** I propose we send a note to the City Council and the County Commissioners tonight and say the response has been too slow, and we are looking for smart people to address this problem. Who are we if we are not protecting our kids? We will spend more time on this, and give more specific ideas and answers later on. Particularly the issue of expanded lead testing. Bump up the recommendations provided to the EAB, we recommend doing this as soon as possible.

**Jonathan Chan:** Is our main goal just to bring it to the City Council, or can we reach out to other Durham entities, such as Durham Parks and Rec?

**Jennifer Carrigan:** We can make recommendations to elected officials and staff.

We are voting that Ethan and Jen write and send an email to City Council and County Commissioners without us reviewing it beforehand. This is approved.

- **Climate Resilience and Community Resilience, Langston Alexander, Emily Barrett, from Central Pines Regional Council (CPRC)**
- The CPRC is a resource and support hub to local governments.
- Climate resilience is the capacity of a community, business, or natural environment to present, withstand, respond to, and recover from a disruption. Adaptation vs. Mitigation can get mixed up. Mitigation is reducing the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, while adaptation is changing for the future. A practical way of thinking about this is a shark, which is the hazard, but if you don't go in the water you are not being exposed. You could go in a cage and watch the shark, but you are still not exposed. You are vulnerable if you are out in the open, exposed to the shark.

- Climate threats to the Triangle Area are: extreme heat, intensifying storms, changes in precipitation patterns, air quality due to wildfire.
  - Extreme heat, the growth of warmer nights has been significant. The inability to cool yourself at night is a health concern. The heat island effect is happening in Durham, and we have really good data showing this.
  - Intensifying storms, such as rain or wind storms. We see an uptick of days with heavy precipitation. Changing precipitation patterns - heavier events, and more precipitation in general. One impact is the changing of places that flood often. There are about 900 buildings in the 1% flood zone, more buildings will increase this risk. The science is unclear on how it's impacting drought, but we know that just a small impact of drought can really impact an area.
- Strategies for building resilience - bolster partnerships, External partnerships with community organizations, internal partnerships within the city. Embedding climate resilience in decision-making in the city and county. Climate data - thinking about what will happen long term, but also in the short term. The main thing is being specific in what data you need. This is all a process, there is no end point. Durham city and county are already taking action in lots of ways.

**Jennifer Carrigan:** The purpose of this presentation was to get a better sense of climate resiliency and how we can connect it to our goals.

**Emily Barrett:** I want to plug the EPA Priority Action Climate Plan. A 3 year effort, the EPA is requiring we have the big part done in February. Why is that important? The next phase : EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG), there is a second phase that will be a competitive \$4.6 billion grant.

**DeDreana Freeman:** I want Emily to repeat how to make these grants competitive.

**Emily Barrett:** To make the grant competitive, notice that there is an environmental justice component - how do we support low income communities and communities of color, while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions?

**DeDreana Freeman:** Environmental justice focus, working nationally to get that in the grant. I want folks in this group to hear that environmental justice piece, and not just the greenhouse gas magnitude which we tend to look at more.

**Jonathan Chan:** Who are all of the people working on this proposal? Who is being consulted on the second part, specifically the benefits to minorities or disadvantaged communities?

**Emily Barrett:** CPRG submitted a proposal for the EPA, it was for different metropolitan areas. The Raleigh/Cary MSA was incorporated, but they wanted to include Durham as well. We plan to do very intense outreach, but the EPA timeline is short. The idea being community based organizations know their communities way better than the larger organizations. There are maps that have areas in our region that are disadvantaged.

**Jennifer Carrigan:** How would embed climate resiliency in city and county planning? about working with a City on Resiliency?

**Langston Alexander:** Some cities have a climate action plan, some have a chief resilience officer, we need to find people to sit down and talk regularly between the city and the county.

**Corie Hlavaty:** What incentives could be given to cities and counties?

**Langston:** There's a lot of money on the table, grants from the federal government. They want the focus to be on justice in communities, and regional projects.

**Jennifer Carrigan:** We are ending the conversation now, thank you Emily and Langston for the presentation. Now we are doing some housekeeping, and taking nominations for Secretary and Vice Chair

**Ethan Case:** I self nominate for secretary

**Jennifer Carrigan:** Let's take a vote. There are 10 votes for Ethan as secretary. Any nominations for the vice chair?

**Sandra Howell:** I nominate myself for Vice Chair.

**Jennifer Carrigan:** 10 votes for Sandra as vice chair.

Ethan Case was officially appointed Secretary and Sandra Howell was appointed Vice Chair.

Meeting adjourned at 7:42