



## ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS BOARD MINUTES

**March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022**  
Virtual Meeting (Zoom)

**Voting Members:** Chi Vo (chair), Juilee Malavade (vice chair), Wilson Salls (secretary), Roberto Valle Kinloch (at large), Ethan Case, Aissa Dearing, Jennifer Hill Carrigan, Wafa Khalil, Chastan Swain, Sherry Taylor, Jillian Riley, Melanie Allen, Matt Kopac

Excused Absences: Katie Barnhill-Dilling, Bill Busa

**Ex Officio Members/Staff:** Paul Cameron (General Services), Tobin Freid (Durham County Sustainability Manager), DeDreana Freeman (City Council), Heidi Carter (County Commission), Scott Whiteman (City & County Planning), Summer Alston (General Services), Sydney Miller (Water Resources), Anna Smith (Stormwater), Michelle Woolfolk (Stormwater), Jane Korest (County Open Space Program), Summer Alston (General Services)

Attendees & Panelists Total: 37

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- I. Call to Order at 6:05 PM
  - II. Approval of EAB Minutes from February: Approved 13-0
  - III. Announcements
    - a) Next EAB meeting is scheduled for April 6th, 6-8 pm.
    - b) Sydney Miller: [Fix a Leak Week](#) starts on March 14-20.
    - c) Summer Alston: [Creek Week](#) is March 12-19.
    - d) Tobin Freid: Board of Commissioners adopted Renewable Energy Plan - "Now the hard work begins!" Hopeful for staff to assist in implementation.
    - e) C. Vo: Tree planting this Saturday 12-2. Ongoing volunteer opportunities [are available](#).

#### IV. **New and Continuing Business**

##### a) **New Topic: State of Our Streams Report**

**Notice under the Americans with Disabilities Act** - A person with a disability may receive an auxiliary aid or service to effectively participate in city government activities by contacting the ADA Coordinator, voice 919.560.4197 or [ADA@DurhamNC.gov](mailto:ADA@DurhamNC.gov), as soon as possible but no later than 48 hours before the event or deadline date.

Presenter(s): Anna Smith, Pollution Prevention Coordinator, Public Works Department

- Seeking for Board to fill any informational gaps.
- The report is the public facing portion of the data. Report for each stream available [online](#).
- All data comes from information gathered by staff throughout previous year. Each stream is monitored every two years through 23 sites across the City
- A whole suite of environmental variables are collected.
- Water Quality Index (WQI) takes data collected throughout year and provides general assessment of overall ecological health based on several water quality parameters. Each city may tailor their WQI based on their own needs. Durham's focuses on nutrients, aquatic life, water clarity, fecal bacteria.

## Stream Scores

New Hope Creek	B	89
Eno River	B	82
Lick Creek	B	81
Little River	B	80
Third Fork Creek	C	75
Ellerbe Creek	C	73
Little Lick Creek	C	71
Northeast Creek	D	69

- Overall scores for each stream: red indicates lower (worse) than previous WQI score; green indicates higher (better).
- Each stream has different challenges; report includes top sources of pollution in each river.
- Durham's overall water quality has improved. 77/100 (C), which is actually very favorable for an urban watershed.
- Top 5 sources of pollution in Durham:
  - public sanitary sewer discharges: can be result of resident behavior, e.g. flushing unflushables, washing grease down drain
  - erosion and sediment discharges: often from construction, but also uncovered dirt from yards, parking lots, driveways - encourage residents to cover dirt with plants and sweep up dirt from hard surfaces
  - petroleum spills: leaking cars, improper disposal of home oil systems
  - private sanitary discharges
  - improper yard waste disposal: don't blow yard waste into the street! Can [sign up for Durham yard waste pickup](#).
- Public outreach campaign to increase visibility of report across Durham's residents. Tracking Twitter and website traffic.
- Questions:
  - What else would you like to know?
  - How do you see this information benefiting Durham's residents?

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- How would you expect this information to be provided to Durham's residents?

**Comments:**

**R. Valle:** Great work on simplifying language. The information is available; however, can you find ways to more closely connect the pollution sources to residents' actions, and to policies that can address that? Also, are there ways to present it more clearly so that people don't have to seek it out - e.g. post it where they're walking? Finally, you want people to take actions - partner with Neighborhood Improvement Services?

- **Anna Smith:** Thank you - great idea to communicate with NIS.

**J. Malavade:** In terms of private and public sanitary sewer discharge, can you provide more information about how residents can do better?

- **Anna Smith:** Even if says "flushable", it may not be. Actions in kitchen, specifically grease in drain. Also info on website.
- **J. Malavade:** Consider info of examples of what not to do - add do's and don't's action list.
- **Rachel Owens** via chat: I do know that Durham Soil and Water has been doing a good job at educating our young people in DPS about stormwater management with all of the programs/outreach through grants they've obtained. And there is the Adopt-a-Drain program too!
- **James** via chat: I think direct mailers targeting homes along streams would be wonderful in terms of reaching directly to those homes that have the most impact on stream quality (like mine which has a storm drain leading to Ellerbe).
- **Jessica Sheffield** via chat: ECWA and Eno river association can easily distribute these reports or other info to their membership lists if that's useful.
- **Michelle Woolfolk** via chat: Residents that connect to city sewer can also have discharges and are counted as private sanitary sewer discharges. So discharges from apartment complexes are private sanitary sewer discharges.

**S. Taylor:** Consider including indication of overall trend vs. just from last year. Also, is there a way for people to enter their address to find nearby creek?

- **Anna Smith:** Website does having [address feature](#). Good idea on trend.

**E. Case:** True that Eno River is getting worse?

- **Anna Smith:** Yes.
- **E. Case** This is big news - lots of people using river during pandemic - recommend highlighting.
- **Anna Smith:** Tough as city department. EAB could work to get that info out, though!
- **Chi Vo** via chat: Does that correlate with the developments around it?
- **Michelle Woolfolk** via chat: Development is part of the problem, but direct intervention also affects the creek. For example, one of our Eno monitoring stations is at West Point on the Eno. That location has seen a decline in aquatic life primarily b/c of people moving around rocks, removing rocks.

**W. Salls:** Have you made it clear in public facing resources why people should care?

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- **Anna Smith:** 2021 report more focused on people who already care but don't have access to info. Future will include further outreach.

**J. Hill Carrigan:** Monitoring smaller creeks?

- **Anna Smith:** We manage largest creeks, so the smaller tributaries are reflected in those metrics but not regularly monitored.
- **J. Hill Carrigan:** Do you coordinate with City and County in terms of intervention in watersheds that expand beyond Durham (e.g. Eno R.)?
- **Michelle Woolfolk:** Coordination with Orange County, especially Hillsborough, e.g. controlling Hydrilla, an invasive weed.

**Megan Cherry** via chat: Is there a way of notifying the City of businesses who routinely sweep yard waste into curbs?

**Tobin Freid** via chat: Which of the measures are driving the reduction in quality of the Eno? (turbidity? oil spills? etc.)

**Melanie Allen** via chat: What are we doing about Northeast Creek? It looks like it improved from an F to a D, but I'm curious about what might be necessary to continue the upward trend.

- **Michelle Woolfolk** via chat: Melanie, thanks for asking about Northeast Creek. We have a very large plan to deal with Northeast Creek. It contains things such as tracking bacteria to type of source (e.g., humans, dogs), looking for other discharges, but still can't keep up.

**Unknown attendee** via chat: Is the increased turbidity of the Eno also due to heavy foot traffic and erosion of paths due to COVID popularity?

- **Michelle Woolfolk:** Erosion from the paths is bad, but wouldn't affect the score much at all.

**Anna Smith** via chat: Here is our Stormwater Pollution Prevention Hotline number (for any pollution you see entering the storm drain system): 919-560-7946.

## b) **New Topic: Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers in the City of Durham**

*Presenter(s): Community Members Thomas Struhsaker and Nicholas Stoia*

*Thomas:*

- Adverse health effects in terms of humans and the environment.
- Noise pollution, effects on hearing, stress, hypertension, increased cortisol levels (immune system). Particularly strong impact on development in children - considerable difference in grades between students near and away from noise.
- Letter sent to EAB almost three years ago. What has EAB done?
- Noise limit: 80 decibels, but leaf blowers are substantially above that.
- Bad enough for community members, but consider impact on those using leaf blowers, who are often people of color.

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- There are alternatives. Many communities around the country have banned them. Calif will offer a discount on electric leaf blowers. Most expensive electric is roughly same cost, but lifetime of battery is a concern.

*Nicholas:*

- Constant source of noise pollution and terrible for the environment. Solution is worse than the problem (leaves).
- Good as a labor saving device but terrible for people using them.

*Barbara Driscoll* (New Hope Audubon Society member) via chat: [Leave your Leaves](#) initiative!

*C. Vo:* Equitable approach to forming an ordinance or any other action step. Opening floor to CM Freeman or Commissioner Carter. Could move to create an EAB working group.

**Comments:**

**Mark Hilpert** via chat: I live in Raleigh and have been advocating with the City Council to ban gas leaf blowers. They are extremely harmful to our peace and quiet, to our environment, to the health of workers who have to use them, and to people and students working and studying from home and need quiet. Please see the voluminous research we have to back up these claims at [noisefree.org](http://noisefree.org). Thanks!

**M. Allen:** Would like to hear from community members and other stakeholders.

**J. Hill Carrigan:** Have you been in touch with City Council?

- **Tom:** DeDreana Freeman said she would like to hear from others on the topic. Workers using leaf blowers don't have any say in the matter - in the hands of their employers.
- **J. Hill Carrigan:** Do City workers use gas or electric? Could start there and then move forward over time.

**C. Vo:** Any City staff want to comment?

- **Summer Alston:** Some General Services crews (doesn't represent all crews using leaf blowers) are well on their way to all electric. GSD has begun the transition; however, for reasons of battery life for some field crews our transition is not yet complete. It may take another 1-2 years as the technology improves I am told.
- **Commissioner Carter:** Would be good to determine whether City is already working on this, and where they are. County could also investigate whether ordinances exist in unincorporated areas.

**J. Riley:** Do other cities target mowers in addition to blowers? Why specific to leaf blowers vs. all gas lawn equipment?

- **Tom:** Gas blowers are two-stroke engines, which uses a mix of gas and oil. Mowers tend to be four-stroke. 1 hour of gas leaf blowing is equivalent to driving a Camry 1100 miles. Rider mower can do 25 yards on one charge. Mowers could be included in any ordinance that comes forth. Ch. 26 Article 3: mowers are excepted, but not leaf blowers.

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- **Nicholas:** Noise pollution from leaf blowers is different from mowers: fluctuates constantly, more distracting.

**Matt Kopac** via chat: Like the Atlantic article said, if anyone has spent time in a developing world city with motorcycles or other vehicles with two-stroke engines (same as a gas-powered leaf blower) and have felt the burn on your lungs, you know the impact of this equipment on human health.

**James** via chat: Link to a relevant article from LA Times.

**R. Valle:** It makes sense. Considering phasing out other engines as well over time. Good to engage folks who have to use them. Seems like no reason not to move forward.

**C. Vo:** Form working group and continue to talk to City and County staff. We've approved Renewable Action Plan, Comprehensive Action Plan, Unified Ordinances - consider how this fits.

**Motion to create working group to look at this issue (approved 13-0)**

**c) New Topic: Update on Durham Open Space & Trails (DOST) Resolution – Open Space Implementer Budget**

*Presenter(s): Wilson Salls, EAB*

- DOST is asking us to support their budget request to City Council.
- The budget is largely devoted to promoting open space, particularly establishing an open space implementer. This position exists at the County level, but not City.
- Durham City and County adopted an Urban Open Space Plan (UOS) five years ago, but no movement has been made to execute the plan. In fact, the district policy recommendations in the UOS still do not have a responsible party assigned by the City.
- Focus on equitable access to open space. DOST has been calling attention to inequities for the past decade. UOS identifies seven communities of concern. Many areas of these lie more than one-half mile from any park.
- Myriad mental and physical health benefits associated with access to open space noted.
- Personally, I have noted the abundant open space around Durham. It's part of what makes our community special. Yet so much land around the city that could be enjoyed by all members of our community lies fallow.
- I see this issue as intersectional - equity, wildlife corridor connectivity, water quality, general quality of life.
- The DOST budget include four major components:
  - implementer
  - annually recurring budget for the City
  - expanded policy re surplus properties
  - annual report to City Council
- The request from us: draft an endorsement of the budget request. Do we move to draft an endorsement? If not, could establish working group to address concerns.

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**Comments:**

**Scott Whiteman:** Update from city side: Planning Department is liaison to DOST. Funding to buy open space. Council Member Caballero has pushed. Good to hear from EAB ASAP.

**Jane Korest:** Citizen public hearing 3/21 and 6/6, but by the later one there will already be budget. Struck by the multitude of ways this is relevant to priorities - heat island, water quality, air quality. So many community goals. However, it may not rise to the top of any single department's core mission. Multilayered benefits. Each creek that has action plans to improve water quality includes specifically identified properties to acquire and prioritize. Also, from the County side, since the 23M dollars, but only paid 5.9M, but got 17.2M in grants, donations, and partnerships. Leaving money on the table without applying for such grants.

**Ellen Reckhow** via chat: Jane Korest just made a great point. Black Meadow Ridge is a keystone property that was identified in 2018 as a priority project for acquisition.

**C.. Swain:** Many environmental groups in community, e.g. Environmental Coalition. Green Infrastructure Bond needs city position to manage how projects will be directed. Position would be a contact for environmental orgs. Lots of value for lower income communities to have open space besides basketball courts. Unique that Durham does not have this position considering other cities of similar size.

**Motion to write a letter before 3/21 and share with EAB (approved 13-0)**

**d) Continuing Topic: Working Group Report Outs**

*Presenter(s): EAB Working Group Members*

*W. Khalil: Solar Schools*

- DPS has a resolution to reduce emissions by 80% by 2030 toward 100% by 2050.
- DPS put \$40M earmarked for solar, renewable, efficiency.
- Seeking EAB support. And as many emails, public comments to Commissioners and DPS.
- Example letters of support available to send.
- [Infographic](#) showing how to express support. Please do!
- *Tobin Freid* via chat: Dan Schnitzer at DPS got promoted this week to Director of Construction and Sustainability at DPS (was previously Project Manager of Sustainability & Capital Improvements).

*J. Hill Carrigan: Comprehensive Plan - Policy Working Groups*

- Infographic
- Freezing status by end of March for community sharing in April - we'll want to be advertising on our own channels to solicit community feedback starting then.
- Updates [available here](#).
- Notes from Policy Working Groups [available here](#).

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*J. Malavade: Community Engagement Working Group*

- Met to discuss scope, values, establishing mission statement
  - soliciting community feedback
  - communications
  - events
- Seeking action items to build out these core goals.
- *C. Vo*: Meetings are on EAB calendar, so please feel free to join.

**Adjourn at 7:58 PM**

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