

Climate Change, Energy, and Environment Commission
(C2E2)

Summary of December 16, 2024

Hybrid Meeting

Members Present: Cindy Lewin (Chair), Joan McIntyre (vice-chair), Mikaila Milton, Rob Sandoli, Doug Snoeyenbos, Kevin Vincent, Joe Trivette, Elizabeth Whitney, Melissa Benn, Mark Greenwood, Trevor Montano, Jonathan Morgenstein

Members Absent: Majdi Shomali, Alex Rough

Staff Present: Jenna Peabody (DES-AIRE), Jennifer Fioretti (CPO)

Staff Virtual: Aileen Winkvist (DES-OSEM), Rich Dooley (CPO), Jason Papacosma (DES-OSEM)

Non-members Present: Jamie Kern, Eric Burlow

Introduction and Public Comment

None.

Stormwater and Flood Resilience in Arlington - Aileen Winkvist, Stormwater Communications Manager, Department of Environmental Services (DES)

Cindy introduced Jason Papacosma, noting it was his first day as acting head of the AIRE team, following Demetra's last day on Friday. Cindy mentioned that Jason would not have to present on his first day but would do so in the January meeting. Jason then introduced himself, stating he had been with the county for 25 years in the stormwater program and looked forward to working with the team.

Aileen Winkvist, the stormwater communications manager, began her presentation. Aileen provided an overview of the stormwater program, highlighting its guiding principles, regulatory commitments, and current challenges, including climate change and increased impervious cover.

Aileen discussed the program's focus on streams, water quality, and stormwater infrastructure, mentioning the need for system upgrades and increased capacity. She also talked about the flood resilient Arlington initiative, which aims to address flooding challenges through innovative approaches and increased funding. Aileen concluded by noting the county's recent updates to floodplain maps and ordinances and the voluntary property acquisition program to reduce flood risk.

The team had been addressing multiple watersheds, focusing on properties at higher risk of flooding due to their location in former stream areas. These areas, now with buried stormwater pipes, remained low-lying and prone to flooding. The new approach, initiated in 2022, involved acquiring such properties for overland relief, allowing space for floodwaters and providing access to infrastructure for future improvements. This strategy aimed to facilitate system upgrades and potential detention installations in high-risk locations.

Additionally, the team addressed water quality programs, noting challenges like increased impervious cover from redevelopment. They highlighted regulatory targets for reducing pollutants such as total suspended solids, phosphorus, and nitrogen, achieved through various projects and programs. The Land Disturbing Activity (LDA) permit program, updated in 2021, played a crucial role in regulating development activities and ensuring stormwater management for new homes and larger projects.

The team often received questions about different types of stormwater facilities and their purposes. They discussed stormwater quantity, focusing on improving system capacity, and stormwater quality, aiming to clean, filter, and reduce pollution. They explained that some facilities, like green streets, managed water quality by treating smaller storm events and reducing runoff, while larger facilities, such as stormwater vaults, focused on flood mitigation and could handle much larger storm events.

Upcoming projects included the Gulf Branch stream project, which was close to 100% design, and the Green Street Project, which was under construction. They also planned to update local ordinances in response to changes in the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act and develop flood-resilient design guidelines.

During the discussion, Aileen and Jason addressed questions about the trajectory for phosphorus and sediment reduction, the challenges of nitrogen removal, and the need to balance stormwater and tree needs on development lots. They emphasized the importance of creating enough pervious space to serve both purposes and discussed the role of community support in watershed capacity improvements.

C2E2's SPRC Checklist: Discussion – Mark Greenwood

In 2022, the team began sending checklists along with cover letters to the county board, marking the first time the checklists were included. They evaluated 14 sites using these checklists, categorizing each site's performance as "exceeds," "meets," or "falls short" for various building components. They noticed that most sites met the standards, raising questions about the rigor of these standards.

The discussion highlighted the need to reassess the criteria for meeting standards, especially for stormwater management, which currently only required compliance with the Virginia building code. They debated whether to set higher benchmarks and considered the

implications of the current scoring system, which often resulted in scores around 66-67%, perceived as failing.

The team also discussed the importance of aligning their assessments with county policies, such as the green building incentive policy, while considering higher standards to meet long-term goals like carbon neutrality by 2050. They emphasized the need for clear, simplified scoring and better risk communication to ensure that the county's development projects align with its sustainability and climate goals.

The team identified a discrepancy in how they articulated their evaluations, noting that a project could receive a poor score but still be described as meeting expectations. This inconsistency highlighted the need to rethink their approach. They acknowledged that developers primarily followed the Green Building Incentive Policy (GBIP) and didn't necessarily consider the team's evaluations, which were meant to communicate broader goals to the county board.

The team discussed the importance of aligning their evaluations with the county's broader goals, such as carbon neutrality, and considered setting higher standards. They also debated the relevance of certain evaluation criteria and the need for more rigorous and measurable standards. The conversation included suggestions for simplifying the scoring system and ensuring that critical elements were emphasized.

They planned to continue refining their approach, with Mark Greenwood spearheading the effort, and considered involving the Energy Committee for additional input. The team also discussed the importance of clear communication and the potential for a climate action plan to provide direction and clarity for future projects.

Climate Change Resolution - Letter for Approval – Elizabeth Whitney

The team discussed the importance of including adaptation in the climate action plan, noting that while mitigation efforts were ongoing, adaptation was crucial due to the inevitability of climate change impacts. They emphasized the need for a climate resolution that set ambitious goals and directed staff to develop a comprehensive climate action plan.

The team debated the inclusion of various elements in the plan, such as decarbonizing county operations, energy sector emissions, the built environment, transportation planning, adaptation, and zero waste. They considered combining some sections to streamline the plan and ensure it addressed the most critical sources of carbon emissions.

They also discussed the need for clear, ambitious goals that would drive significant policy changes and prioritization of efforts. The team aimed to ensure the climate action plan was both ambitious and self-executing, providing sufficient direction to staff to implement necessary programs and policies effectively.

The team discussed the importance of understanding the Commission's focus areas for the coming years and how to articulate these priorities effectively. They emphasized the need for clear communication to the board, staff, and public. The conversation included suggestions for improving the closing of their letter to the county board, specifically regarding the resources and tools needed for the AIRE Team.

They debated the inclusion of specific asks, such as budget increases or subscriptions to certain software, to ensure the AIRE Team could effectively manage and analyze data. The team also discussed the importance of providing sufficient resources for both the development and implementation of the climate action plan.

A motion was made and approved to finalize the letter, subject to final edits by the chair of C2E2 and the Energy Committee.

C2E2 Work Plan for 2025 – Cindy Lewin and Joan McIntyre

The team also reviewed their annual report, noting the importance of including quantitative data, such as the number of letters sent to the county, to highlight their efforts and accomplishments. They agreed to make some adjustments to the report to better reflect their work and impact.

The team discussed the importance of emphasizing their key themes in the annual report, noting that while the themes remained consistent, the specific accomplishments and focus areas could be highlighted more effectively. They debated the presentation style, suggesting that emphasizing what was achieved in the past year would make the report more powerful.

They also considered the idea of obtaining testimonials from county board members to demonstrate the impact of their work, though they acknowledged the challenge of doing so. The team reviewed their work plan for 2025, noting new focus areas and the need for ongoing updates.

The conversation included a discussion on social equity and environmental justice, recognizing the need for partnerships with community organizations to address these issues effectively. They acknowledged the importance of prioritizing resources and efforts to ensure meaningful engagement and impact in disadvantaged communities.

Cindy and Jonathan decided not to go through the work plan section by section due to the late hour. They agreed that the document was a living one and could be updated as needed. Cindy proposed adopting the annual report, and a motion was made and seconded. The annual report was approved unanimously.

They then moved on to the 2025 work plan. Cindy reassured Melissa that the plan was flexible and could be adjusted throughout the year. A motion to adopt the work plan was made, seconded, and approved unanimously.

November Meeting Summary for Approval

The group briefly discussed the summary, and a motion to approve it was made and seconded. The summary was approved unanimously.

Updates (Energy Committee, AIRE staff transition planning, Green Building Incentive Program update, SPRCs, NRJAG, Solid Waste Committee)

The group touched on various topics, including staff transitions and the Green Building Incentive Program (GBIP). Cindy mentioned that she and Joan attended a meeting of the NRJAG (joint group of Forestry, Parks, and C2E2 commissions) on Monday and noted the benefits of aligning with other commissions on key overlapping issues.

Doug requested to share his final report on energy at the next meeting. The group thanked Doug for his leadership as chair of the Energy Committee for the last two years and welcomed Elizabeth Whitney as incoming chair of the EC. Joan updated the Commission on the work of the Advisory Group for the update to the master transportation plan. The Commission reviewed and approved the C2E2 input of its priorities, perceived challenges and opportunities for the updated Master Transportation Plan.

Next Meeting: January 27