

Pierce County Coalition for Environmental Health Priorities

December 4, 2008 meeting notes – *DRAFT*

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Attendees:

Acacia Larson, Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department Physical Activity & Nutrition	Kelda Miller, Puyallup
Anne Norman, Graham Self-Reliant Community	Larry Volland, Summit-Waller Community Association
Barbara OByrne, Tacoma	Laura George, Gig Harbor
Betsy Stubbs, South Hill Community Council	Liz Lathrop, Gig Harbor, KGI Watershed Council, League of Women Voters Tacoma-Pierce County
Betty Corey, Key Peninsula	Lynn Abegglen, rural South Pierce County
Bud Rehberg, Graham, Friends of Pierce County, Graham Advisory Commission	Maria Salado, East Tacoma Blueberry Park neighborhood
Burk Ketcham, Tacoma	Marilyn Sanders, Graham
Carmela Micheli, Gig Harbor	Marnie Boardman, Fircrest
Charles Stovall, Tacoma Mall	Marty Webb, Tacoma
Charlotte Valbert, Tacoma, League of Women Voters Tacoma-Pierce County	Mike Webb, Tacoma, Surfrider
Cindy Beckett, Midland Community Assoc.	Miriam Fitzgerald, South Tacoma
Dale Sandretzky, Longbranch	Paul Shell, East Tacoma
Danielle Dykas & son, North Tacoma	Rick Sorrels, Key Peninsula
Davis Zhen, Environmental Protection Agency Region 10, CARE Program Officer	Rose Perrino, East Tacoma, Safe Streets
Doug Klippert, Tacoma	Roxanne Miles, Tacoma, MetroParks Tacoma
Erin Ewald, Pierce Conservation District	Roy Taylor, Tacoma
Frank DiBiase, Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department EH Program	Sammy Samuelson, Tacoma
Grace Willems, Key Peninsula	Sarah Garitone, Pierce Conservation District
Harold Bircumshaw, South Tacoma	Scott Hansen, Puget Creek Restoration Society
Janet Byrd, South Hill/Puyallup	Sophia Petro, University Place
Jason Hodges, TPCHD Office of Community Assessment	Susan Eidenschink, North Tacoma
Joanne Bircumshaw, South Tacoma	Trisime Close, South Tacoma, Evergreen Tacoma student
John Howard, East Tacoma	Veronica Dykas, North Tacoma
Joyce Murray, Wauna	Wayne Cooke, Graham Self-Reliant Community
Judy Rucker, West Tacoma	Marianne Seifert, Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department Environmental Health Program, Coalition coordinator

Introductions

Marianne reviewed the purpose of tonight's meeting, and the previous 2 meetings – for everyone to find out about the different action plans and decide which action plan they'd like to help develop and implement. Some may be implemented very locally, in specific neighborhoods. Others may be more county-wide. It's up to you. Tonight you'll hear about a variety of action plans – they may not all be called water action plans, but they relate to what we do on land and impacts on water quality and quantity.

Land/Habitat Action Plan Draft: Restoring Natural Areas

Central Pierce County workgroup members Barbara OByrne, John Howard, Judy Rucker, Len Sanderson, Maria Salado, Mike Webb, Paul Shell, Roxanne Miles, and Scott Hansen develop this plan. Roxann, Judy and John presented on it, using a powerpoint (posted at www.tpchd.org/ehpriorities).

Our first step is to coordinate cleanup and restoration activities in watersheds and nearby natural habits. Our goal is to inspire and foster local environmental groups to actively combat erosion and mitigate detrimental effects of toxins on animals, plants and humans. The benefits of our program would be to have immediate and long term improvements on local surface, storm and drinking water resources as well to increase the overall awareness about these issues.

Coordination of groups is important so as not to duplicate efforts. We need to find a lead agency with county-wide oversight. We want to strengthen the grass roots organizations that exist. Our approach to public outreach needs to be strong so that people are educated about how they contaminate the site by what they do in their homes and businesses. A lot of the neighborhood groups don't know how to get started. We need to connect the various groups so they can learn, strengthen and grow from each other. Giving technical assistance is an important component, as is easier access to funding for grassroots and neighborhood groups to help them clean up the sites.

We also want to elevate our research around what the toxins and pollutants are that are affecting our water system and be able to clearly state what makes them a priority.

Question: What are your thoughts behind providing funding without the groups having to make their case?

It's not that people shouldn't have to make a case. If I write to a grantor on the East Coast, they don't really know what's going on around here. But if the grantor is monitoring identified toxins and pollutants, you shouldn't have to write a grant that proves the toxins are there. The organization providing funds already knows that the pollutants are there - they are looking for groups to clean up. Groups should be able to say what they can do to clean up, and the groups' accountability is to follow through and do what they propose to do.

Marianne added that the problem will already have been documented by your group, having made the case to begin with, and the groups applying for the money will not have to document, they will describe what they will do about the problems you have already identified?

That is correct. We have discussed other means of funding as well.

Suggestion: You mention as your goals "Clean-up & Restoration. You should remove the term "Restoration" which implies to destroy and remake something that existed at some point in the past. Whereas, cleanup means to remove something that should not be in the environment. Concentrate on "Cleanup" and remove restoration as one of your goals.

Also, to be successful with the EPA I think it is important that you identify certain specific toxic chemicals that you know of to be removed.

Everyone should know that our Governor Christine Gregoire actually spoke with President – Elect Obama about these problems - so she supports these efforts.

Food System Action Plan Draft: School- Community Gardens

Gig Harbor/Key Peninsula workgroup members Betty Corey, Bob Jardin, Carmela Micheli, Grace Willems, Jaime Garner, Liz Lathrop and Nicole Rodman develop this plan, and the Saving Farmland plan, to help improve local food supplies.

Carmela described the plan: Our priority is to have a connection to the earth and we are achieving this through community gardens. The environmental health benefits of this is that more people would understand the food system and respecting farming, learn to eat healthier foods, encourage stewardship of the land, learn about healthy soils, exercise, reduce pesticides used and thereby improve water quality. Water conservation is also part of the plan, by encouraging collection and use of rainwater. Social benefits include working with others, food for food banks, more local grown foods and feelings of accomplishment.

We can do this by making lots of contacts and combining efforts, as we have done. Through one of our efforts, we have four schools on the peninsula that are ready to begin the project with us, they will be using the gardens as part of their curriculum.

Marianne added that Jaime couldn't be here tonight, but she lives in an apartment and has several children – she'd like to also encourage people to garden in containers. Chiko couldn't be here tonight – she's also interested in working on community gardens, in Tacoma, as is Rose. She asked Cindy and Wayne if they would like to share information on their work.

Cindy Beckett described the Growing Midlands work, with the Midlands Community Association. They were concerned about people not being able to afford fresh produce, with the energy crisis and increasing prices. They had seeds and lumber donated, used volunteers to build raised beds to make gardening more accessible.

Wayne Cooke and Anne Norman are part of the Graham Self-Reliant Community – they have a community garden and volunteers. He passed out information on victory gardens and passed around a Seed People book.

Davis Zhen added that it is good to see the synergy & energy among the committees, and that he's available for questions. Marianne asked that people not talk to Davis during the meeting, but wait till after the meeting, so he can hear the action plan presentations and discussions.

Food System Action Plan Draft: Saving Farmland

Gig Harbor/Key Peninsula workgroup members Betty Corey, Bob Jardin, Carmela Micheli, Grace Willems, Jaime Garner, Liz Lathrop and Nicole Rodman develop this plan, and the Saving Farmland plan, to help improve local food supplies.

Part of our action plan is to create strategies to encourage our elected officials to find money to buy development rights for the farmers so that they can continue to farm their land and not have to sell to developers. One of the strategies is to give them tax cuts, financing program for affordable loans, encourage younger people to coop and farm the land.

Question: Are there any statistics as to why the farmers are leaving, is it solely money?

As the farmers get older, it is harder for them to maintain their farms. Children of farmers aren't always interested in maintaining the farms and the developers are willing to pay millions for the land. The children can make a lot more money by leaving the farms and doing other things.

Some incentives to stay would be to provide affordable loans to purchase equipment. We could encourage younger generations into coop farming.

Another strategy is to require future developments to incorporate community gardens.

Pierce Conservation District has a survey of local farmers that describes challenges to farming in Pierce County – it's on their website. Wayne held up a copy. Sarah is from the conservation district, and staffs the Food System Coalition. Sarah added that was excited about the action plans, and looks forward to working together to improve the local food system.

John contacted Adam Smith's office - contacts there will assist with letter writing to support these types of efforts.

Water Action Plan Draft: Education and Enforcement

South/East Pierce County workgroup members Betsy Stubbs, Cindy Beckett, Janet Byrd, and Pat Drake developed this action plan.

Betsy described the education piece of the action plan. Information on things that are harmful to our environment should be directed towards classroom education and to our elected officials as well. We

need a watershed approach to this education, so everyone sees how our actions threaten water quality and quantity.

Question: With initiatives to protect certain farmland parcels, why are we just protecting those when there are other influences that hinge on them as well?

It isn't just farmland we want to protect. We are fighting politics and money - we have to get and stay involved with our local politicians to bring these other influences to their attention. They need to understand threats to our water supply.

Cindy described arsenic and lead soil contamination, from Tacoma to Olympia. The contamination doesn't stop at the freeway. She referred to a public service announcement on health effects from soil contamination. The health issues are very serious, there are nervous system disorders that are becoming much more prevalent, birth defects, autism, down syndrome. The numbers are alarming for this region – why? There's no mandatory soils testing in this county:

- Developments are not required to be tested for contaminants.
- No mandatory soils testing for moving soils.
- No mandatory testing of soils from any source dumped into the wetlands. Wetlands carry ground water as well handle flooding. They also remove contaminants and if left alone would do the job wonderfully, but are being destroyed by development.

Cindy described her vision for enforcement. Our code enforcement have no power to write tickets or collect fines. We need to set up a Pierce County Department of Ecology that focuses on enforcing environmental laws, with qualified staff who rely on the science. Money is not a major issue because between different departments in the county, there are enough qualified staff to put together a Pierce County Department of Ecology. All development applications would go through them first and this department would determine where it is safe to build and where you may not destroy the water flow, based on science. We did get approval for this and approval to establish an environmental court. The governor has stated that no matter the economy, we are proceeding with this effort by 2020.

Question: How will the soil contamination you mentioned impact community gardens?

We recommend getting used lumber from buildings that are being torn down and reusing the lumber to build raised beds with clean soils. We recommend testing soils, to make sure they're not contaminated. You don't know where soils come from, often.

Question: Are contaminants in water taken up into our food sources?

Some can be. Contact the Master Gardners to find out more about what plants absorb what contaminants.

Water Action Plan Draft: Pollutants from Households

Gig Harbor/Key Peninsula workgroup members Joyce Murray, Dale Sandretzky, Erin Ewald, Frank DiBiase, Laura George, Rick Sorrels, Roger Erickson, and Stephen Wecker helped develop this plan.

Erin described that rural areas of Pierce County have seen a lot of growth, and are concerned about pollution from homere affecting ground water and the Puget Sound. We are looking at stopping pollution from households by encouraging use of alternative, non-toxic products. We are looking to partner with some of the existing programs and expand on their work and ideas. One xample is the Blue Thumb Gardening Program that has been very successful in Thurston County.

Another focus is on medications that are either disposed of in the garbage or incinerated at the hospitals. A buy-back program could encourage medications to be returned to the pharmacy.

Another focus is to work with Natural Yard Care and other alternative programs, and encourage people to go into Home Depot & Ace stores and ask for these non-toxic products, and this will slowly create greater demand for less toxic products.

****Remember to email all suggestions to Marianne so that she can email them to group members.***

Suggestion from Davis: Has anyone made any official connections, with a P. R. person with the companies like ACE Hardware you mentioned to get this started? I think this would be advantageous to have some of these local businesses to be a part of the partnership.

We have a lot of research yet to do before we contact the stores.

Suggestion: you could use research other groups have done. A groundwater protection group on Vashon Island developed education materials rating product, and worked with local utilities stores on outreach. They had materials in stores that sold garden chemicals and fertilizers, and less toxic products. Ray Hanowell offered to find copies of the materials.

Water Action Plan Draft: Toxic Materials from Gig Harbor Hospital

Gig Harbor/Key Peninsula workgroup members Joyce Murray, Dale Sandretzky, Erin Ewald, Frank DiBiase, Laura George, Rick Sorrels, Roger Erickson, and Stephen Wecker helped develop this plan.

Rick described hospitals as toxic places - they have radioactive items that you are intentionally exposed to, they have all types of nasty chemicals, infected body parts and pharmaceuticals that are flushed down the toilet. Out of sight, out of mind, but where does this drain go? There has never been a hospital on the Key Peninsula or Gig Harbor Peninsula - there is currently one being built and we are concerned about where all of this waste is going to go. GH is hooked to the city sewer system is currently going through an upgrade permit, but many of the toxic materials we are concerned about are not covered by this permit. We are concerned because the treatment plant was designed to take care of human waste, not chemicals. The vast majority of our work will be creating an inventory of toxic materials. Once this is created we'll take the information and check the hospital's plans to see if their sewage system is able to handle the materials.

Suggestion: Will you try to make the hospital accountable for their own filtering system? They are non-profit and would be able to apply for a grant.

Next Steps: Action Plans

Marianne praised how the action plans compliment each other – they range from smaller scale personal actions that are doable now, with little money, to more systemic changes, such as the Pierce County Department of Ecology proposed. We'll be able to describe how all of these plans work together to protect environmental health in Pierce County.

Those of you who have not been directly involved in developing an action plan, please get involved, figure out what it is you want to work on. Let's use your knowledge to figure out how to best most effective, use your contact to build support beyond the Coalition.

Please email suggestions either directly to action plan committee members or to Marianne so that she can email them to group members.

Marianne handed out participant incentive forms, for Coalition members to receive gift cards. This is the last meeting for gift cards. This phase of the Coalition was originally slated to end in September but we were able to extend the timeline and had enough money in the budget to cover gift cards through this meeting. With the EPA Care Grant we're not allowed to use any of the money to work on applying for any other funding.

Funding Committee: Next year we will be looking for additional funding, as well as applying for an EPA CARE Level II grant. We'll want to find ways to leverage other funds. To do this, the plan is to create a funding committee of coalition members and myself, who will identify and apply for grants.

Communication Committee: As shown on the Coalition timeline, part of the plan is to create a communication committee. It's time to start talking to others who are interested in these issues and find out who can help develop and implement your action plans. It'll be good to coordinate who's talking with who, so there is not too much duplication.

Final Report to EPA: Another thing we will be doing is a final report on this project to the EPA. If you have photos of any of the issues that we are working on, it would be good to have them included in the report, to help people who have never been here understand the issues. Before and after shots, of the problems and your vision for the project(s), would be great. Please review the draft report to make sure it reflects what you observed.

Evaluation of Coalition process: In January – February we will be evaluating the Coalition process, to find out what worked and what didn't work. This information will be included in the final report to the EPA, so others can learn from our experiences.

Translation of priorities and action plan strategies: In our current budget we have a little funding to translate Coalition priorities and strategies, and hold focus groups with non-English speaking residents, to see what resonates with these community members.

Marianne asked Coalition members to let her know if they'd like to be part the communication or funding committee, or help with evaluating the coalition, or the translation focus groups.

Davis thanked everyone showing up and contributing . Although the projects are a little different from each other he sees it as one big project. He suggested looking at the bigger picture, see what connects the plans, and pick out the common things that could be addressed by everyone. He offered to help with the draft plans.

Is this the last meeting? Can that be? We're in withdrawal... We should meet again the end of January to check in and see where we're all at. Marianne will set up a meeting for the entire Coalition toward the end of January, adding that it would be great if action plan committees kept connecting and developing their action plans, in person, by email, or phone.

Question: What will be our deadline to finalize our drafts to submit to the EPA?

Charlotte suggested that we be sure to allow enough time. Marianne agreed, that we'd need time to get input from as many Coalition members as possible on the Level 2 grant application, which will probably be due mid-March. Let's set **February 15th** as our deadline final action plan draft, if you'd like them submitted as part of the EPA CARE level 2 proposal.

Davis added that the action plans can still be drafts, they can change as you progress. You need something to measure what you would like to see happen, you need to be able to measure success. For example you don't even have to say what the numbers are. You can say these are things that at the end of my project I'd like to measure. This will provide the action plan measureables in the application that goes forth. They should be accountable and a quantifiable results.

Marianne added that we'll also have to develop a budget for this action plan package to be submitted to EPA. The funding committee can work with the action plan workgroups to write this budget.

Next meeting: end of January, 2009.