

GREENSBORO COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY COUNCIL
greensboro-nc.gov/csc
Minutes, Regular Meeting

4pm, Monday, November 8, 2021
Virtual Meeting, using the Zoom videoconferencing tool

CSC Members Present:

Dr. Vicki Foust, Chair	Veda Howell	Jacques Pierre
Dr. Susan Phillips	Dr. Marcia Hale	Sophia Dubrovsky
Nicole Gaines	Taylor Jones-Curtis	

Staff and Others Present:

Will Yearn, CSC Advisor	Marikay Abuzuaiter, City Council
Chris Marriott, CoG Field Operations	Jim Young, CoG Libraries
Danny Halterman, CoG Water Resources	Jeff Sovich, CoG Planning
Richard Lovett, CoG Field Operations	Ellen Van Velsor, Citizens Climate Lobby
Natasha Campbell, HBCU Clean Energy Initiative	Henry Golatt, HBCU Clean Energy Initiative
Laura Oxner, A Simple Gesture / RePurpose Food Recovery	Tracy Furman, resident
Tim Leisman, resident	Georgina Alexa, resident

1. Chair Greeting / Welcome Visitors

Chair Foust called the meeting to order at 4:00pm and welcomed visitors and city staff in attendance.

2. Welcome Taylor Jones-Curtis (New At-Large Member)

Chair Foust welcomed new at-large member Taylor Jones-Curtis.

3. Approval of May 10 and September 13 CSC Meeting Minutes

Nicole Gaines moved to approve the minutes of the May 10 meeting, as presented. The motion was seconded by Dr. Phillips. The CSC approved the motion by a vote of 7 ayes, with one abstention.

Dr. Phillips moved to approve the minutes of the September 13 meeting, as presented. The motion was seconded by Veda Howell. The CSC approved the motion by a vote of 7 ayes, with one abstention.

4. CSC Vacancy - District 3 Representative

Chair Foust noted that there is currently a vacancy on the CSC, in the seat designated to represent City Council District 3. The City Council and City Manager's office have been informed of the vacancy and the process to fill this seat has been initiated. City Council Member Marikay Abuzuaiter stated that it would be up to Council Member Justin Outling to make the appointment that will fill this vacancy.

5. Update on Lighting Ordinance Proposal

Chair Foust stated that the CSC has prepared a memo addressed to Planning Director Sue Schwartz recommending that the City draft and adopt text amendments to the Land Development Ordinance. The amendments would be for the purpose of meeting the requirements of the Light Pollution Reduction credit in the LEED for Cities program. She noted that the memo needs some additional wording to specify that the proposed text amendments include designation of “Environmental Zones” that would indicate which level of standards would apply to lighting in various parts of the City. She stated that she would confer with Dr. Phillips and Mr. Sovich to prepare this addition to the memo, prior to sending it.

6. Update on Office of Sustainability Recommendation

Chair Foust stated that the CSC’s recommendations for establishing, funding, and staffing an Office of Sustainability are nearly complete and the current draft has been shared with Council Member Abuzuaiter. Ms Abuzuaiter has discussed the draft recommendations with Interim City Manager Chris Wilson in order to begin exploring how the recommendation could be implemented. Chair Foust added that the CSC would continue to refine the recommendations, with the aim of having them finalized in the near future.

Dr. Hale noted that the CSC’s Environmental Justice Task Force has developed a Draft Environmental Justice Recommendations report, to inform development of the Strategic Energy Plan. She noted that the latest draft report recommends that when the City establishes an office to manage sustainability functions, the role of the office should extend to promoting environmental justice and that the name of the office should reflect this aspect. Suggestions such as “Office of Just Sustainabilities” and “Office of Equitable Transitions” were offered. Dr. Foust stated that these points would be incorporated into the CSC’s formal recommendation.

7. Update on Air Curtain Burner Letter of Support

Chair Foust stated that she has prepared a draft letter of support for the by the Field Operations Department to purchase an air curtain burner to enhance yard waste mulching operations at the White Street Landfill. She noted that she would share the draft with the CSC and seek their assistance with revising it to final form.

Richard Lovett of the Field Operations Department stated that he is available as a resource if additional background information is needed in revising the letter of support. He also noted that he has contacted the City of Shelby regarding the air curtain burner they operate. Shelby officials have offered the opportunity for members of the CSC, Solid Waste Commission, City Council, and City staff to tour their air curtain burner operation and learn about it firsthand. They are typically processing much less material than Greensboro would be, but a tour could provide a better understanding of the how the process works and what the conditions are like while it’s in operation. He pointed out that Shelby’s facility has a much less restrictive air-quality permit than is in place at Greensboro’s White Street Landfill. Shelby is only required to monitor for airborne particulates, and their testing results show virtually zero particulates generated by operation of the air curtain burner, except during the 5 to 10 minute start-up phase. Shelby uses the air curtain burner to extend the life of their landfill.

Mr. Lovett stated that the air curtain burner model under consideration is available with an optional electric power generator unit, which can be used to convert waste heat from the process into electricity, as a side benefit. This power generation would be in addition to the biochar and ash that result from the standard air curtain burner process. Even without the co-generation unit, public sale of biochar alone would allow the City to recoup its capital investment in an air curtain burner within roughly 6 months. Biochar and ash are valuable as soil enhancements for agriculture. Biochar can also be used to remove PFOS and PFOA from water. PFOS and PFOA are artificial compounds that have been recently found as contaminants in Greensboro's water system. When yard waste is burned, the carbon bound within organic material is converted into CO₂ and soot (airborne carbon particles). But when the same yard waste is pyrolyzed in an air curtain burner, about 20% of the carbon is converted into biochar and the resulting amount of CO₂ is reduced by around 45%. Every pound of yard waste processed in an air curtain burner sequesters 3 pounds of carbon dioxide.

Dr. Phillips asked whether food waste could be processed in an air curtain burner. Mr. Lovett explained that although any organic material can be processed in an air curtain burner, with essentially the same results, the City would need to obtain a different permit in order to process anything other than yard waste at the White Street Landfill composting facility.

Dr. Hale asked if there have been any conversations with residents in the area nearby the White Street Landfill to understand their perspectives. Mr. Lovett said that the effort is currently focused on presenting information to the Solid Waste Commission and the CSC, as a means of gaining a fuller understanding of the technical aspects and environmental impacts of air curtain burners. A public engagement effort would be a future step in the process. Council Member Abuzuaiter noted that the Solid Waste Commission was established specifically to handle issues related to the White Street Landfill, and they are well attuned to the implications of any proposed changes to the way the landfill is operated. She and City Council Member Dr. Goldie Wells are liaisons to that commission. The Solid Waste Commission has requested more information about the science of air curtain burners, but has not yet decided on whether to recommend in favor of the proposal.

Sophia Dubrovsky asked whether the potential risks or impacts of operating and maintaining an air curtain burner have been identified and evaluated, and why more communities aren't using these devices. Mr. Lovett explained that although the basic concept behind air curtain burners dates back several thousand years, production of commercially available devices is a very recent development. Additionally, the State of North Carolina did not establish criteria for permitting and regulating these systems until the past year or two. So if we are able to move forward with buying and operating an air curtain burner, Greensboro would be on the cutting edge of waste management and carbon sequestration technology in the US.

Nicole Gaines stated that she hoped that if an air curtain burner is implemented, it would not become a "green-light" for developers to clear cut trees. Mr. Lovett stated that the intent of the air curtain burner initiative is not to facilitate or justify clear-cutting, but to manage and prolong the useful life of the City's yard waste mulching operation. Developers, or debris haulers would continue to be charged a fee for each load of yard waste they drop off at the landfill. Elizabeth Link added that the City's Land Development

Ordinance contains requirements to prevent indiscriminate clear-cutting and requirements for developers to preserve existing trees or plant new trees to replace those they cut down.

8. Break (10 Minutes)

The CSC adjourned for a brief break at 4:58 pm and reconvened at 5:09 pm.

9. Update on Strategic Energy Plan (SEP)

Chair Foust stated that all the major components of the Strategic Energy Plan have been written. The latest draft has been crafted to weave principles of environmental justice throughout. The draft is currently being reviewed by staff in various City departments for final comments and formatting fixes. She thanked Judson Clinton, the City's Urban Forester, and Elizabeth Link, Urban Designer, for their help with strategies related to trees. She could not specify an exact date for when the final draft would be publicly available, but noted that it would be very soon.

10. Items from the Public – Greensboro Solar CARES Project

Chair Foust noted that the agenda would be modified slightly to allow representatives of the Greensboro Solar CARES Project to provide a brief informational presentation, which was originally scheduled to occur during item 12. Incidentals and Announcements. Jeff Sovich introduced Henry Golatt and Natasha Campbell of the HBCU Clean Energy Initiative and Bob Powell of NC A&T State University's Center for Energy Research and Technology.

Henry Golatt stated that the HBCU Clean Energy Initiative (CEI) is a program of the HBCU Community Development Action Coalition, a national non-profit for community economic development. The Center for Energy Research and Technology (CERT) is NCA&T's interdisciplinary energy research center, created to foster collaborative research and development of new energy-related technologies. CERT has an existing program that is performing energy efficiency retrofits and weatherization of residential structures, mostly home to low and moderate income households. The Greensboro Solar CARES project, funded by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES), will add installation of rooftop solar arrays for eligible households already participating in the program. The intent is for the project to demonstrate the viability of this approach to reducing household energy expenses and advancing energy independence. The goal is to install rooftop solar systems for 15 low or moderate income households, at no cost to the homeowner, saving each household an average of \$718 in utility costs per year. The installation represents an investment of over \$15,000 per home.

The hope is that if this initial phase is successful, the project can then be scaled up, with investments from additional community partners. Phase II would continue energy efficiency upgrades and rooftop solar installation, while adding components for clean energy education and awareness, job training and workforce development, and small business development and contracting. The project would also include a monitoring and publicity element, to track the number of households reached, jobs created, energy cost savings, carbon footprint reductions, etc.

11. Discussion of 2022 Goals / Focus Areas for CSC

Chair Foust stated that due the limited amount of time remaining, this item would not receive a full discussion that was intended for today's meeting. Instead, the CSC will discuss goals and focus areas for 2022 during its December work session. She noted that one issue that has been suggested as a focus area is water efficiency, since the treatment and pumping of water accounts for over 50% of electricity use in City operations, and electric power production results in roughly 70% of the carbon footprint from City operations. Other potential focus areas include food waste and trees.

Chair Foust opened the discussion for CSC members to suggest additional focus areas. Jacques Pierre suggested that another focus area could be equitable access to fresh healthy food. Chair Foust noted that there are many organizations in Guilford County that do work related to food access, yet a significant amount of useable food is wasted. It seems that there is probably enough space within this issue for the CSC to develop some useful recommendations. Sophia Dubrovsky stated that the CSC might be able to play a role in connecting entities with excess food to people who need food, or organizations that distribute food to those in need. Chair Foust suggested that the CSC invite someone from the Community Food Task Force (<https://www.greensboro-nc.gov/government/community-food-task-force>) to present at an upcoming meeting.

12. Acknowledgement of Absences

None.

13. Incidentals and Announcements

- **Items from Chair** – None.
- **Items from Vice-Chair** – None.
- **Items from CSC Members** – Sophia Dubrovsky noted that the CSC would soon to discuss issues related to members who are nearing the end of their current term.
- **Items from Public** –None.
- **Items from Staff** – None.

14. Adjournment - Chair Foust adjourned the meeting at 5:59 pm.