

Orange County Climate Council Meeting Summary

September 24, 2019

3:30pm - 5:00pm

Southern Human Services Building, 2501 Homestead Rd, Chapel Hill

Attendees: Brennan Bouma, Jen Della Valle, Raymond DuBose, Tyrone Fisher, Hongbin Gu, Laura Janway, Mark Marcoplos, Melissa McCullough, Sarah Pitts, John Richardson, Donna Rubinoff, Dan Schnitzer, Sammy Slade, Dr. Stephen Halkiotis, Mary Tiger, Joshua Van Mater, Jenn Weaver

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- I. **Call to Order** - Orange County Commissioner Marcoplos called the meeting to order at 3:35pm. Marcoplos asked members for permission to moderate the day's discussions as leadership for the Council had not been determined. Council Members agreed.

 - II. **Welcome, Introductions, and Context** - Council members introduced themselves, and Marcoplos provided a brief overview of the formation of the Climate Council. After the destructive 2018 hurricane season Marcoplos joined with Slade, Weaver, and Rachel Schaevitz to create an Ad Hoc inter-governmental committee on Climate Change. They collected an initial report on the key climate change initiatives and goals of the governments they represent, and at the January 2019 Assembly of Governments meeting they brought forward the idea of expanding and formalizing their effort through creating an Orange County Climate Council. With the approval of the Assembly of Governments, staff of the four local governments began work to create and approve a general member list and then began recruiting individuals within each slot. Marcoplos noted that not all slots had yet been filled and efforts were ongoing to identify representatives, including two of the four At-Large representatives from the 4 participating local governments. Marcoplos acknowledged that these positions attracted applications from many well-qualified County residents, several of whom were present in the room as observers of the meeting. He indicated that anyone who was interested in the discussions and decision of the Climate Council would be included on a distribution list and would receive regular communications.

The general charge of the Climate Council as identified by the original Ad Hoc committee is to accelerate joint action on climate change within Orange County.

- III. **Council Structure and Meeting Schedule** - Council members then established a structure and meeting schedule to clarify the process for convening the Council and setting meeting agendas.

As a first action, Marcoplos suggested that the Council appoint a Chair to facilitate meetings and help set meeting agendas. He indicated his interest in serving in this capacity, and Slade nominated Marcoplos to serve as Chair for the first year. Dr. Stephen Halkiotis seconded the nomination, and there being no other candidates nominated the Council members

voted unanimously to appoint Marcoplos as Chair. The selection of a Vice-chair would be made at the next meeting, and any nominations for this position should be sent to Bouma beforehand or brought to the next meeting.

It was suggested that members choose alternate representatives in order to ensure that the discussions of the Council included the perspectives of all member organizations. The names and emails of alternate representatives should also be sent to Bouma. A question was asked about whether there would be any restrictions around Climate Council members meeting up or attending the same events outside of an official meeting with appropriate public notice. Bouma offered to research that question and notify the Council of any such restrictions.

Marcoplos suggested that the Council meet every month this fall (Sept, Oct, and Nov) to more quickly establish focus areas and then perhaps hold a public information session in early 2020 to report the Council's steps. The Council's meeting schedule could then slow down to every other month to provide progress updates as initial projects are implemented. Bouma will create and distribute a poll with potential meeting times both during and after business hours for the week of October 21st.

Marcoplos also clarified that the Climate Council has no dedicated funding source, but that there would likely be opportunities for joint action that would lower the costs for participating organizations.

IV. Discussion of approach and first steps - Council members then discussed the processes and perspectives the Council could use to approach climate issues and actions, and agreed to the first steps that would be taken.

Bouma began this discussion laying out the 2 basic categories of climate action and asking the group where they felt the primary focus should be: 1.) Climate mitigation actions, which reduce our contributions to climate change; and/or 2.) Climate resiliency/adaptation actions, which prepare for the impacts of climate change. Richardson and Rubinoff indicated an interest in a balanced approach to these two categories of climate action. To them, the impacts of climate change were already beginning to be felt and even if the County were carbon-neutral tomorrow we would still expect to be dealing with the impacts of climate change since this is a global issue. Furthermore, the Council's effort might enhance the ongoing state-funded efforts to update the Eno-Haw Hazard Mitigation Plan which outlines what can be done to prepare for and respond to the most likely hazards Orange County could experience. Slade acknowledged the need to prepare, but responded with the contrasting opinion that there are other groups focused on resilience actions and emergency response, whereas mitigation actions would benefit from the Council's focus and recently-released climate science indicated that the next few years will be a critical time to dramatically lower climate impacts. McCullough added that a mix of mitigation actions and resiliency actions might be good to consider given the important role local governments play both of these areas. Marcoplos summarized the discussion saying that there is merit to the Council pursuing both mitigation and resilience actions and that mitigation actions might be most urgent for this group to focus on.

Weaver and McCullough emphasized the importance of building connections and laying out a positive vision for Orange County's future regardless of the focus on mitigation or resilience, with the idea that people respond better to positive messaging about the

benefits of action. Halkiotis made the point that communicating effectively about current and future climate actions is also critical.

Gu and Rubinoff then made the point that the decisions that the Climate Council makes should be driven by technical information and data. Marcoplos said that the groups around the table all had valuable data and experience to lend to the project selection process and referred to the list of projects in the initial report of the Ad Hoc committee as an example of that experience. Slade agreed that the process of identifying joint actions of the Climate Council should be well-informed and added that they should also reflect the most current climate science and climate justice guidance. McCullough and Tiger added that if the Council decides to take time to create a data-driven action plan, then they would be in favor of moving forward with initial actions based on the best available information in the meantime given the urgency of the issue. Richardson mentioned that this strategy was in line with the current climate action plan update process going on in Chapel Hill. They plan to have their action-centered plan update completed by June of next year, but are continuing to act in the meantime. Gu clarified that a full plan might not be necessary, but an objective analysis of the joint projects the Council considers would help to determine which would have the highest impact. Bouma stated that he and a volunteer are nearing completion of a county-wide greenhouse gas inventory for the 2017 calendar year, and that this may be a helpful resource to guide decision making once it is complete.

Council members then offered additional thoughts on the best approach. Slade noted that there may be new federal climate action funding programs in 2020, and the council could help position Orange County to take advantage of those resources. Schnitzer stated that it may be good for council members to share not just success stories, but areas where they've tried something and have run into issues. He also said that there are a lot of things that Orange County residents have the power to do right now, and the Council could help identify and communicate those. Van Mater then reinforced the previous idea about the importance of positive messaging, saying that from a High School student's perspective climate action messaging that is hopeful, clear, and simple is the best-received. He offered the "Skip the Straw" campaign as a good example and said that even though it only addressed a small part of the larger issue of plastic waste in the ocean, it provided a good starting point to engage people. Weaver and McCullough reinforced this comment and mentioned that the Council may want to request the assistance of social marketing experts. Rubinoff then tied in the idea of social marketing into the previous discussion about the need for a data-driven process, saying that data does not have to slow down the process and can be motivating in itself, similar to popular fitness trackers. This type of data could be tied into positive messaging about how close we are to a goal, instead of the more negative and intangible tracking of how much we have reduced against a previous baseline year. Richardson expanded on the idea that local governments directly contribute only about 2-3% of the total emissions of the County, so the Council might consider ways to impact larger sources of emissions. He also said that choosing 2-3 major actions or messages to focus on would be much more impactful than going with a long list. Marcoplos agreed that the Council's actions should extend past the direct contributions of government operations. Gu reinforced the idea saying that setting policies that lower emissions are a good way to do that, but that policy decisions in particular will need to come from a strong platform of data analysis. Della Valle emphasized the benefits of having a clear role and goals for the Council. Schnitzer offered his strong opinion that the schools are an excellent area on which the Council could focus as there are lots of opportunities to make short-term emissions reductions and long-term improvements to climate awareness among Orange County

students and households. Weaver echoed that the schools are a good area to focus on for those reasons and because they are a diverse representation of our community.

- V. Adjournment** – Marcoplos asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting and this was provided by Slade and seconded by McCullough. The Council voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 5:00pm.