



MEMORANDUM

TO: Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency Board of Directors

FROM: Ashley Featherstone, Director

RE: Minutes for September 10, 2024

DATE: November 7, 2024

Enclosed, please find the Minutes for the Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency Board meeting held on **Tuesday, September 10, 2024, at 4:00pm**. The next meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, November 14, 2024, at 4:00pm** in the meeting room located at the Buncombe County Permit Office at 30 Valley Street, Asheville, NC 28801.

This meeting will be live streamed via Microsoft Teams at <https://bit.ly/abair1124>. The board meeting documents will be available on the Engage Buncombe site at <https://engage.buncombecounty.org/s8486>. The meeting will be recorded and can be viewed later.

A reception will be held from 3:30 to 4:00 pm prior to the board meeting to recognize Dr. Evan Couzo for his service to the agency. The recognition will take place at 4:00 pm at the beginning of the Board Meeting. All Board Members, Advisory Committee Members, and others are welcome to attend the reception.

The Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency Board of Directors met on Tuesday, September 10, 2024, in the meeting room at the Buncombe County Permit Office located at 30 Valley Street, Asheville, N.C.

The attendance of the Board members was as follows:

Members Present:

Joel Storrow

Karl Koon

Evan Couzo

Garry Whisnant

Ned Guttman

Members Absent:

Staff Present: *Ashley Featherstone, Director; James Raiford, Permitting Program Manager; Mike Matthews, Air Quality Specialist II; Betsy Brown, Air Quality Coordinator; Steve Ensley, Air Quality Monitoring Coordinator; Alex Latta, Air Quality Specialist II; Allison Glass, Air Quality Specialist I*

Others Present: *Amy Broughton, County Attorney; Angelica Tyler, CAPE; Mackenzie Koon, resident; Caitlin Crossett, UNCA*

Mr. Storrow called the meeting of the Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency Board of Directors to order on September 10, 2024, at 4:00 pm. He thanked Mr. Koon for presiding over the previous board meeting on July 11, 2024.

The order of business was as follows:

1. Public Comment Protocol Announcement

Mr. Storrow read the public comment protocol.

2. Adjustment and Approval of Agenda

Mr. Koon made a motion to accept the agenda as written. Mr. Whisnant seconded the motion.

All present – yes.

The motion passed 5-0.

3. Consent Agenda:

A. Approval of minutes from July 11, 2024

Mr. Whisnant made a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Koon seconded the motion.

All present – yes.

The motion passed 5-0.

4. Unfinished Business:

None

5. Director's Report:

A. Air Quality Staffing Update

Ms. Featherstone introduced Steve Ensley and Allison Glass to the board. The Agency is finishing up our reorganization. Ms. Brown is retiring after the end of the year. We plan to hire a replacement for her in time to overlap with her last month for training purposes. This is considered a critical position that is responsible for the grants, the budget and expense allocations related to grant funding. It takes about 2.5 months to post and fill a position; we plan to post the position soon with the intent to hire in December.

We are working on being more efficient and doing more cross training. New staff have brought in new ideas. Ms. Featherstone thanked the board for funding the 7th position, which has been very helpful during the transition.

B. New Board Member Orientation Document

Mr. Whisnant had requested that staff create a new board member orientation document. One has been created and was sent out in the board packet. It has not been posted on our website. We can use this when we have a vacancy and not just for orientation. Ms. Featherstone sent a copy to the city when we requested a new board member to replace Dr. Couzo. City staff said that it was helpful.

The last sentence with the internal board SharePoint site link will not be included when the document is used for general information or advertising, only for board members.

Board members were supportive of adding the document to the Agency website.

C. 35 Woodfin Update

The county has started construction on 35 Woodfin. They plan for the renovations to be completed by the end of January and to begin moving departments into the building in March. The plan is to move the Tax Department first. If all goes as planned, we expect to be moved in late March, early April. There are meeting rooms there similar to the current one, with screens and technology. We would share those spaces with other groups, such as the Planning Board, Board of Elections, and an Affordable Housing Subcommittee.

Family Justice Services are in the building now and will remain. 35 Woodfin used to be the county health department, but Health and Human Services or HHS employees have been moved to the newer building at 40 Coxe Avenue.

The building is three floors, and our spaces will mostly be on the second floor. Air Quality will have a lab located in the lowest level or basement. Permits and Inspections and Environmental Health will have offices and

space out front as they are the most forward-facing departments; likewise, Mr. Matthews will have an office on the first floor.

We anticipate better customer service with a kiosk to help visitors navigate the space. We hope to have a greeter similar to HHS at 40 Coxe. There is also a kiosk where visitors can take a ticket to be called. Strategy and Innovation is looking at these possibilities and options to assist visitors and the logistics of space. There is a limited amount of space. The Tax Department and Elections are also going to be in this building.

Ms. Featherstone expects that the board will meet in the current room at 30 Valley Street in March but may meet at 35 Woodfin by the May board meeting. We will see how the timeline goes with the construction.

D. Rules update -Vehicle Emissions Inspection and Maintenance (I&M) Program

The State Division of Air Quality, DAQ, is amending the rules to remove the remaining 19 counties that are part of the Vehicle Emission Inspection and Maintenance Program. They have gradually removed many of the counties from that program. Buncombe is in the last group of counties still under that program. The group includes Mecklenburg. The legislature required DAQ to look at removing all the counties from the program. This must be approved by the EPA before it is final. They have been taking public comment on this recently. This was passed by the state legislature last fall. The state had 12 months to modify the State Implementation Plan, SIP. The EPA has 18 months to review. The state has to demonstrate that the areas do not have the potential to exceed the standards for ozone and PM.

The local programs do not get funding from this program, but the DAQ does receive funding from this program. We do get a portion of the state gas tax.

There is an increase in emissions associated with removing this requirement, but with vehicle turnover, cleaner cars and more EVs, the state is recommending removal of the program.

E. DAQ PM Update

The DAQ is doing outreach about the PM standard that was revised by the EPA. This new standard has been discussed at prior board meetings. DAQ gave a one-hour webinar, and slides from that webinar are in the board packet. They provided the updated design values for the state which includes 2023. The new design value for our area is 6.3 micrograms per cubic meter, which is well below the new standard of 9 micrograms per cubic meter. There are two areas with design values over 9. There is something called an exceptional events demonstration which the state will be doing as wildfires did affect the values in those areas. It is a process and strategies are being discussed. There will be another year of data and a new three-year average before the EPA makes a final attainment determination.

F. Monitoring Update

In reference to the map showing the design values for PM2.5 for areas of NC, Mr. Raiford noted that DAQ takes the data and compares it to times when there were wildfire events. This helps them make the argument that the data would be considered an exceptional event, and that data should not be included in the design values. Those two areas that were shown on the map to be over the new standard would be in compliance with the standard when you exclude the exceptional events.

Mr. Raiford also showed a graph with the history of the PM2.5 standard and the design values for our area. The design value is calculated from three years of data gathered from a particular monitoring site. Our air quality has definitely improved over the years. We had one lower year that was due to Covid when there was less influence from cars. This contributed to a lower design value for a few years but has now dropped off of the calculation. Unofficially we have been averaging 6.1 micrograms per cubic meter for the current year.

We are required to have 75% data completeness. Year to date the data completeness for PM is 96.9%

A graph with the history of the ozone standard and design values was also shared. The area has remained well below the standard with a similar dip in the number due to the Covid influence. Since 2015, the standard for ozone has been 70 parts per billion, ppb. We have not been above that in many years. The most recent standard for 2021 through 2023 is 61ppb. If the current year stays where it is, our design value may drop down to 60ppb.

As mentioned in previous board meetings, there has been a change in the MSA or Metropolitan Statistical Area. Haywood County was dropped from our MSA, and the ozone monitor operating there is no longer counting for this MSA. As a result an ozone monitor will need to be added to Buncombe, Henderson or Madison County. We have the larger population density here so there is a good chance that it will be in Buncombe County. This is a process that will take time. Steve Ensley will work with DAQ and EPA staff about the location of the site. Environmental justice will be a part of that decision. Fortunately, our new staff have monitoring experience and Mr. Latta is also getting trained to help with monitoring. We will have a very strong monitoring team, and we will continue to cross train.

We received a 2023 Inflation Reduction Act, IRA, Direct Award for \$233,000. This grant will cover a F150 Lightning truck to replace an older vehicle used by our monitoring team, a backup T640X PM monitor, ancillary PM monitoring equipment, and partial funding for one staff member for two years. We have hired the staff, ordered a needed ancillary piece of equipment, and will be ordering the rest of the equipment over the next

several months. This extra money allows us to support our monitoring program without pulling extra money out of the fund balance.

We have new ozone equipment, but the state does not have the Standard Operating Procedures ready for that equipment yet. We may be running the older ozone equipment through another ozone season.

We have benefited from several rounds of extra funding under ARPA and the IRA. With those funds we have replaced our monitors and purchased backups to update our monitoring equipment. These would otherwise have been purchased with funds from our fund balance. Ms. Featherstone pointed out the Nasal Ranger was purchased with some of these funds. It assists with odor evaluation. We feel like we are in good shape with our equipment now. If there was a new ozone monitor sited in Buncombe County, we would likely have to pull funds from the fund balance to purchase one so that we would still have a backup ozone monitor.

G. EPA Thriving Communities Subgrants

This is also an Inflation Reduction Act program. We have been looking at a clean heat program with some of our county partners. Buncombe County and the City of Asheville are doing the Electrify Asheville Buncombe campaign. They kicked that off in the spring. They are promoting new more efficient heat pumps and electrification. There are tax credits and financial incentives. Rebates will be coming out, and there is financing available. The clean heat program would provide funding to help some of the lower income communities who might not be able to take advantage of tax credits or rebates. This would be a potential way we could get some funds to our area, reduce emissions and contribute toward the Electrify Asheville Buncombe campaign. We have always wanted to have a woodstove changeout program. Our MSA does have higher emissions of PM2.5 from residential wood smoke. The grant is not out yet. EPA is planning to submit a request for proposals and begin accepting applications this fall. If we can connect with county Sustainability and other community partners that go out into the community and do weatherization work including installing heat pump water heaters and replacing older furnaces and woodstoves, we might be able to apply for some of this funding. These community subgrants are only \$350,000 so they are much smaller in scale than other funding opportunities. They are supposed to be simplified and come from an organization in the Research Triangle Park that is putting funds out so governments can partner with community organizations.

H. Update on Upcoming City Appointed Board Vacancy

Dr. Couzo is moving at the end of the year. The City has received a couple of applicants. They plan to take that up at their October 8th meeting. Since Dr. Couzo will be here for the next board meeting, November 14, they said if they appoint someone at their October 8th meeting, they will make that board appointment effective November 15th.

I. Facility Permit Modifications

Facility Name	Type of Facility	Facility Classification	Location	Changes from Existing Permit
New Belgium Brewing Company, Inc.	Beer Brewing Facility	Synthetic Minor	91 Craven Street, Asheville	Replacing burners in the boilers to allow facility to combust biogas in addition to natural gas

New Belgium Brewery is permitted for two boilers that they use for their process. They also have a wastewater system which creates biogas. Currently they burn that biogas in a flare. They want to use the biogas to supplement the natural gas used to fuel the boilers. Before that modification, the natural gas boilers were exempt from our rules. However, with that change they are no longer exempt from our rules and must be included as permitted sources in the air quality permit. The biogas not mixed with the natural gas used by the boilers will still be flared.

Mr. Koon made the motion to approve the permit modification for New Belgium Brewing Company, Inc. Dr. Couzo seconded the motion. All present – yes. The motion passed 5-0.

6. New Business:

None

7. Other Business:

A. Legal Counsel Report

No report

B. Advisory Committee Report

August 15, 2024 meeting

Dr. Couzo said that the committee met in person in August.

Ms. Featherstone informed the committee of information that was presented earlier in this meeting’s Director’s report.

Dr. Couzo gave the committee updates on the PurpleAir project and the PM sensor projects. The PurpleAirs are still operating. He wants a year’s worth of data to analyze. He is looking at PM2.5, but also temperature and humidity across the city. He will keep in touch with faculty at UNCA and they will analyze the data when they are ready.

The EPA wants an annual report soon on the Raspberry Pi sensor project so he will have some results to share at the next board meeting. Those sensors were deployed across the city to look for disparities in exposure based on

neighborhood. He will also share the report that he submits to the EPA with the agency and board.

C. Calendar

1. Next meeting November 14, 2024

This will be Dr. Couzo's last board meeting with the Agency.

D. Announcements

In the past we have taken pictures of the Board members. Ms. Featherstone said we used to do annual reports which included a picture of the board and the staff. It is nice to have a picture for our website. Please plan for that at the next meeting. She also wants a staff photo.

We will discuss the board dates for 2025 at the next meeting. It is possible to schedule a different day and time for our 2025 board meetings than we have had in the past. The board meets every other month beginning in January.

8. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

9. Adjournment

Mr. Koon made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Whisnant seconded the motion.

All present – yes.

The motion passed 5-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:42pm.