

## **Environmental Issues Committee**

October 28, 2010

12:00 PM

EMU Board Room

### **Members in Attendance:**

Peg Gearhart, Alan Dickman, Nathan Howard, Emma Newman, Jenny Leander, Heather Brinton, Lauren Wirtis, Kay Coots, Steve Mital, Deborah Exton, Christine Thompson, Wes Thompson, Colin Ives, Ramah Leith, Christian Pich

### **Meeting Minutes**

**Art Farley began by going over the Environmental Issue Committee's (EIC) charge, responsibilities, and voting rights on the committee.** Art stated that the primary charges and responsibilities of the EIC are to (1) "Recommend development of rules or policies directly related to environmental issues... to be adopted by the University administration and/or University Senate on behalf of the University Community" and (2) to "Recommend, facilitate and/or implement educational programs, training sessions, forums or workshops on environmental issues which could be offered to members of the University community and/or the general public."

Christian Pich inquired as to what role the committee played in recommending and/or enforcing policies. Art Farley replied that the EIC is an advisory body that makes recommendations to Frances Dyke (Vice President of Finance and Administration) and the University Senate, but is not an enactor of policy.

**Next, Art Farley began a review of the accomplishments of the 2009-2010 Environmental Issues Committee.** First, the EIC sent a letter of recommendation about the development of the riverfront asking that a broader-based plan be developed before continuing with construction. Second, EIC reviewed and commented on the proposed Climate Action Plan. Third, after the construction of the Jacquie center, the EIC discovered that there was not a recycling program present in the building. However, the committee confirmed in May 2010 that a recycling program *had* been put in place. Fourth, several of the EIC members visited Cascade Sierra Solutions to whom the EIC had allocated \$7,000 in carbon offsets to support the 'Idle Reduction' project at truck stops along I-5.

Lastly, Steve Mital discussed how the EIC addressed the environmental impact of the University of Oregon's (UO) paper purchasing policy. Printing and Mailing Services came to the EIC and asked for a review and recommendations on how to update the University's paper purchasing policy. The committee listened to various experts on what types of paper the University can(not) purchase, what types of paper are really environmentally friendly, who's responsible for purchasing paper, details about chlorine processes, and how the language could be cleaned up to be more effective. Over the summer Steve Mital and Art Farley met with Frances Dyke on the issue, and Steve said he imagines the new policy will be formally passed by the end of the term.

**Steve Mital, then, began describing several projects the 2009-2010 EIC had started and would hopefully be completed by this year's committee.** One issue is to finish a discussion about how to implement the Climate Action Plan. Thirty percent of the UO's carbon emissions come from travelling (either by faculty or athletic teams) and the committee should consider how to reduce these impacts.

The other issue still pending is the plan for the UO to adopt a 'No Idling' policy. Two years ago the EIC looked at 'No Idling' policies at academic institutions across the nation and crafted a policy for the UO. This policy is not enforced with tickets and fines, but is designed to try to reshape campus expectations and norms. Frances Dyke approved the policy and it was then sent to Facilities and the Department of Public Safety (DPS) for review. DPS raised concerns about the policy. The Office of Sustainability is working with them to resolve these concerns.

Emma Newman asked what the policy would entail. Steve Mital replied that idling would be discouraged on campus through outreach and educational campaigns. The Office of Sustainability and DPS would be responsible for educating the campus community about the program. Christine Thompson added that perhaps the program could focus on certain areas on campus where there are the most bikers and pedestrians.

**Next on the agenda, Steve Mital reviewed the standard practice of making the Erb Memorial Union (EMU) carbon-neutral by purchasing carbon offsets.** Four or five years ago the Student Sustainability Fund, a fund for student initiatives on campus, funded a project that would purchase carbon offsets to help the EMU achieve carbon-neutrality. Every year since then, the committee that recommends awards has voted to continue buying carbon offsets. Two years ago, the EIC reviewed the University's carbon offset purchasing policy and created standards that would guarantee that money spent on carbon offsets would result in real, local offset projects (this policy was included in the agenda). The main idea of the policy was that carbon offsets should be as local as possible so that the University could keep an eye on it and see the benefits. In March 2010 the Student Sustainability Fund recommended spending \$8,000 on carbon offsets for the EMU, which was recommended to Robin Holmes (Vice President of Student Affairs) who agreed. Presently, the Office of Sustainability is requesting feedback on its choice of offset provider and project.

Over the summer, Steve Mital looked into three different projects: Native Energy's methane digester project, Northwest Natural's methane digester project, and projects offered by Bonneville Environmental Fund. The two projects that met the University's criteria for carbon offsets were the methane digester projects at Native Energy and Northwest Natural. Northwest Natural's program is called 'Smart Energy' and its project located in Junction City benefitting Lochmead Dairy. Native Energy's project is similar but is located in Washington State. Steve asked for the committee's feedback on which project they thought would be the best to fund.

Peg Gearhart said that she liked the Northwest Natural project because the farm is local and the University's money would stay in the community.

Heather Brinton asked why the Bonneville Environmental Fund did not meet the criteria. Steve Mital replied that after he sent the Bonneville Environmental Fund the criteria, the group did not come up with a project to meet the requirements.

Alan Dickman asked if the \$8,000 donation would cover Northwest Natural's entire project or just part of it, to which Steve Mital replied it would only cover part. Alan followed up by asking when the project could be expected to be completed. Steve answered that as the broker, Climate Trust had already purchased offsets for the entire project, but was now trying to resell pieces of it on the retail market. Steve did not know if the project had already broken ground.

Emma Newman asked if the fund is required to spend money on carbon offsets, because it could be better to have the funds remain for projects on campus. Steve answered that the process for considering carbon offsets as a potential project was changed three years ago and the SSF committee now decides annually whether to continue buying carbon offsets. Emma wondered if this was because there were not enough proposals for on-campus initiatives. Steve replied that there is usually money left over that rolls over into the next year's fund and students on the committee have continually made the decision to fund carbon offsets rather than saving money to roll over to the following year.

Art Farley added that the reason the University buys carbon offsets is to address issues like travel for athletics, which can't be prevented. The UO's goal is not to claim carbon-neutrality by *only* buying carbon offsets, but to use them as a last resort. The downside, of course, being that the University has to purchase more each year to remain carbon neutral. To this comment Heather Brinton replied that she thinks the question really is: why don't we fund projects that happen on campus that will continue to benefit the UO and its community each year without requiring the annual purchase of carbon offsets? Christian Rich noted it would be worth comparing the cost and benefit of putting that same money into solar energy or photovoltaics. Steve Mital said that \$8,000 buys a lot of carbon offsets and would only generate a small amount of carbon savings if the money were used to site photovoltaics.

Art Farley asked if the committee would like to recommend that Steve Mital accept the Northwest Natural methane digester project. Heather Brinton said she would move to recommend it and Alan Dickman seconded the vote. Art asked for an 'aye' from the committee. Approval of the Northwest Natural methane digester project was unanimous.

**Art Farley opened up a discussion about what the committee would like to address in the 2010-2011 academic year.** Issues from last year included: the green cleaning materials policy and update the comprehensive environmental policy for the University. Art then asked for suggestions from other committee members. Heather Brinton suggested addressing travel reimbursement and offsets. Alan Dickman added considering electric vehicles for DPS to address their issue with the 'No Idling' policy and Steve Mital said that Bill Kasper could address that issue when he comes in during the next meeting to talk about the green cleaning supplies policy. Peg Gearhart mentioned education and support for alternative modes of transportation to campus and Christine Thompson noted the importance of looking to the Climate Action Plan (see: <http://sustainability.uoregon.edu/office-sustainability/climate-action-plan>) as a guide to what the University has stated are its sustainability goals. Steve Mital closed the discussion by saying he would put together a document with the issues prioritized and make a recommendation about which issues would make the biggest impact.

**The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 PM.**