**Environmental Issues Committee Meeting Minutes**

May 11, 2016, 12:00 pm to 1:00 pm

Columbia 249

**MEMBERS PRESENT**
**Faculty and Staff:**

Erin Moore—Architecture

Melynn Bates—American English Institute

Marie Swarringim—Campus Planning, Design, and Construction

Fred Tepfer – Campus Planning, Design, and Construction

Brian Gillis – Art

**Student:**Nicole Hendrix

**Ex-Officio:**

Eric Beeler—Student Sustainability Coalition

Steve Mital—Office of Sustainability

**Other Attendees:**

Sonya Carlson—Office of Sustainability

Alan Dickman – Environmental Studies and Biology
OTHER STUDENT- Divest UO Campaign/Climate Justice League

**WELCOME AND UPDATES**

Introductions.

Presentation by Nicole Hendrix from Divest UO Campaign/Climate Justice League, which is focused on getting the UO Foundation to sell investments that support fossil fuels and to commit to not purchase investments that support fossil fuels in the future. Currently, the UO invests about .05% or $4 million in fossil fuels. The campaign started in 2013. Leaders from the organization met with the Chief Investment Officer, Jay Namyet. There wasn’t much interest from the CIO, according to Nicole, he wanted to see more support on campus before taking any action. In the spring of 2014, in response to that meeting they conducted a poll on campus and found that 72% of the students who voted supported divesting from fossil fuels. In the winter of 2014, they approached the University Senate with a resolution to support divestment within 6 months and it passed unanimously. However, no actions have been taken to divest. In the spring of 2015, they held a rally on campus with Mayor Piercy to draw more attention to the issue and build more support. After they did that, they asked to have a second meeting with Jay Namyet. At that point he told them that the mutual funds were too complex and that divesting would jeopardize their ability to responsibly manage the funds. They asked what the next possible steps could be and according to Nicole, he said that Jay said he didn’t want to hear the words divest anymore and suggested they focus efforts on another issue, such as water. They showed us what President Schill’s response was to the campaign. In response, the campaign held a rally at Johnson Hall, which Naomi Kline attended and energized the students. That action turned into a 30-day sit in. The only planned on doing a day long sit in, but had so much support they just kept staying. During that time, they had two meetings with President Schill. He seemed receptive, but kept the same message that he didn’t have a vote on board and that he didn’t want to take a social stand as a University President. The President help set up a meeting with the Board on June 3rd, but also wanted them to set up a debate on the topic. They had a sign on the lawn, which EMU scheduling asked them to remove the sign based on an advertising policy and because it was a structural element. The UO took it down, the students put it back up and contacted lawyers and then they didn’t hear about it again from the UO. They hosted an action with the UO Foundation marrying the Fossil Fuel industry to announce a new phase where they are doing creative/disruptive art and to announce a multi-school divestment fund. The divestment fund has campaigns from 30 different schools signed up. Donors (alumni, faculty, etc.) that would normally support the UO, instead put money into the fund and the schools that choose to divest get to split the funds raised equally. The funds are raised through December of 2017.

Brian asked what the mechanics were behind why they said they couldn’t divest? Nicole said that they invest in mutual funds that are a group of investments, which can’t be separated apart from the other investments.

Brian asked if they were in a position to offer a solution to that problem. Nicole said that during their meeting with Jay, he wanted to see their recommendations for solution and other companies to invest in, but they felt they didn’t have the know how to determine what the best alternative would be. Steve added that they invest in investors, who they believe are savvy and then those people then turn around and make the investments. It appeared that they do not want to constrain those investor’s choices by letting them do what they do.

One push was to get UO to be a leader in this space, because we have a mentality that we are a green school. Now there are a number of other universities and colleges that have made the choice to divest.

Brian noted that he has respect for what they are doing, and didn’t want to tell them how to operate, because he wasn’t an expert in the area, but noted that as they scratch the surface the complexity of the situation comes out. There are a number of complexities at play whether it be the complexity of how to pull out, the complexity of finding an alternative, the complexity of not laying claim to social responsibility, whether it be tobacco, blood diamonds or migrant labor, which arguably we all probably collectively feel the UO has some obligation to exercise leadership on. He then asked why the campaign was coming to them and what the campaign wanted. Nicole said that they would like more public support and letting people know about the fund and donations, which is an incentive that they believe will resonate more with the Foundation. Brian suggested that they could create a cooperation situation where the people make it believe that it is there idea and then noted that the EIC is a Senate Committee, so in a way they have already supported the movement but also stated that the redundancy is powerful too. He suggested perhaps that every Senate Committee could sign onto a letter instead of just the sustainability meeting. Marie asked if they went to the Board meeting, they said they have and that they have a meeting with the UO Board of Trustees and the Foundation.

Marie asked if anyone from the UO had invested in the divestment fund and how large the fund was currently. The divest fund have received some donations, but they didn’t know how many or how much was in the collective fund.

Brian asked if there is a way to phase out over 10 years. Nicole said they suggested a 5 year timeline and said they were willing to work with them.

Erin thought that the UO legacy is and the points the UO has outlined around renaming Deady Hall get at that concept of compliancy. The policy offers language precedence.

Eric offered that it is interesting that the UO President is taking a stance against offering a lead foot social statements on academic freedom, but we do that all the time and for a good reason. Seems like a missed opportunity.

Steve suggested that he could envision a system where you divest and invest that money elsewhere, but then also set up an insurance policy of sorts that kicks in if the investment didn’t meet the alternate. They are complicated and cumbersome, but it mitigates that risk.

Marie noted that it is clear that this isn’t the most profitable portion of their portfolio, that it is more about telling them what they can or cannot do. Nicole noted that they had heard that.

Brian asked if there was a way to contact the biggest donors and ask them to divest or get involved. Nicole noted that the foundation information is not public.

Fred wanted to back up and asked fundamentally why we were asking this so that the group could gain insight on the direction to take. Nicole noted that their original messaging was around a moral imperative. Climate change is happening and oil companies contribute to that problem but the environmental devastation but also a social injustice to many communities. Fred said he would also add that climate change is disruptive and will be for the university because it threatens their long-term trajectory and goals.

Erin expanded that as a public institution their might even be a greater imperative to focus on that stewardship goal.

Brain noted some institutions that fought this may have quickly found that it was profitable to switch and that we may be reaching that fulcrum point.

Fred added that coal is gone, companies are going bankrupt and the others may follow behind. This could be a good time to get out.

Erin asked for action items.

Brian moved to draft some language in line with supporting the Senate’s decision/opinion to support the effort to divest. He noted that this is in line with the mission of this committee. Marie seconded his motion. Steve suggested that continued engagement would be better and thought that a set of questions might better keep the conversation going. The Think Out Loud Piece seemed to suggest that they were not as hard set as they were a few years ago.

Erin read portions of the mission that related to the charge of the committee and their role.

Brian suggested that this could facilitate dialogue. Nicole said that the Foundation seems willing to meet with students but that they don’t have that same willingness to include adult experts in the conversation, so they appreciated the invitation to them to participate in this meeting.

Brian suggested that the recommendation from the EIC group could be seen as an edict to reach out to other groups to gain their support as well. There was a bit more discussion and then the committee voted unanimously to create a draft that would be sent out and then if there was objection they could discuss, but if there wasn’t objection then it would be forwarded in the usual way.