

Environmental Issues Committee

January 12, 2011

12:00 PM

Umpqua River Room, EMU

Members in Attendance:

Art Farley, Peg Gearhart, Alan Dickman, Nathan Howard, Lauren Wirtis, Steve Mital, Jennie Leander, Christine Thompson, Wes Thompson, Zachary Stark-McMillan, Chris Baird, Collin Ives, Doug Brooke, Jennifer Ellis

Meeting Minutes

Art Farley first asked Lauren Wirtis to make an announcement about scheduling the upcoming meetings. Lauren said that she would be sending out a Doodle to the EIC list serve to schedule both the February and March meetings and would let everyone know when those would be happening within the next week.

Art Farley asked for comments on the EIC's November meeting minutes or a motion to approve the minutes so that they could be posted. The minutes were unanimously approved by the committee.

Next, Steve Mital updated the committee about the status of the University of Oregon's (UO) carbon offset purchase with NW Natural at the Lochmead Farm in Junction City, Oregon. In negotiating with NW Natural and explaining the extent to which the UO's participation in their project now would lead to greater support from the university in the future, NW Natural compromised and offered a significantly lower price for their carbon offsets. NW Natural has asked that the price for the carbon offsets not be revealed.

The first topic of the meeting was request for feedback and support from the Climate Justice League (CJL) for a report on their "Take Back the Tap" (TBTT) campaign. Nathan Howard and Zach Stark-MacMillan are both active members of the CJL and have worked on the TBTT campaign. Nathan began by giving a brief introduction of the TBTT campaign. The CJL first started the initiative in Winter 2010 with the goal of "discontinuing the sale, purchase, and distribution of bottled water at the University of Oregon." Since then the TBTT campaign has successfully banned the use of student fees for bottled water, installed 28 new water spigots on campus, and distributed 1,400 reusable water bottles. The CJL is now working on a report that will outline the next steps it wishes to see the university take in banning bottled water. This policy proposal will be supported by campus survey results, petition signatures, ASUO resolutions, water testing results, bottled water sale number, and examples of other universities that have discontinued their use of bottled water. Nathan concluded by saying that the CJL would welcome suggestions from the EIC about the formation of their report and would appreciate a letter of support.

Alan Dickman asked if the CJL anticipated much resistance. Zach Stark-MacMillan said that the primary issue is that students continue to buy bottled water. Consequently, it is near impossible to persuade vendors not to supply an item that people are willing to purchase.

Steve Mital inquired if bottled water sales subsidize some other activity on campus. The idea of giving up bottled water sales would be easier if it doesn't undermine some other activity. Zach Stark-MacMillan said that the CJL did not know the answer to this. The only facilities that sell bottled water are the Erb Memorial Union (EMU), the residence halls, and vendors. Bottled water sales tend to be significant for each of these groups.

Christine Thompson asked if the CJL had spoken with the Athletics Department or with University Catering. Nathan Howard answered that monitoring the Athletic Department would be very challenging and that the incidental fee only prohibited ASUO funds from being spent on bottled water. However, Nathan noted, some universities have transitioned completely, such as the University of Portland. Christine followed up by saying that her main question was how bottled water restriction would be defined. Steve Mital added that the CJL could start with a policy that does not pertain to the Athletics Department for the time being. Nathan agreed saying that the CJL's goal is to achieve small accomplishments and create a growing awareness. Jennifer Ellis commented that the CJL could try to encourage the exclusive use of refillable water bottles at sports events and try to create a movement on campus.

Christine Thompson noted that the CJL could emphasize the setting up of facilities to complement the switch to using refillable water bottles. Colin Ives mentioned that, eventually, the Athletics Department could present a brandable opportunity for refillable water bottles and that it would be worth contacting Michael Salter or Ying Tan about holding a class to help with the design. Nathan Howard said that he knew that would be a good opportunity and that he had heard the Athletics Department had gone to the Office of Sustainability looking for ways to become more sustainable. Steve Mital commented that his office is working with Athletics on a Sustainability Plan.

Steve Mital suggested that the CJL send out a survey to evaluate what people on campus want. Nathan said that the CJL had recently emailed a survey the group had composed to Paul Shang (Assistant Vice President and Dean of Students) and would like for the EIC to recommend that Dean Shang allow the survey to be sent out. Nathan also asked for support in asking Tom Driscoll for information about the amount of water bottle purchased in the residence halls with money versus the amount purchased with points on freshmen meal plans. Steve said that he'd be happy to work with CJL to make these calls so that the EIC doesn't have to formerly make a movement to do so. Art Farley asked the committee if they were comfortable with that approach. All members of the committee agreed to it.

Christine Thompson also made note of the new policy library website. This includes a policy on making policies. There is a certain amount of information that has to be provided and considered, forms to fill out, etc. and it would be important for the CJL to look at that before submitting their formal policy.

Ramah Leith complimented the students for their work on the TBTT campaign. Art Farley thanked them for bringing the issue forward.

Next, Steve Mital made an announcement about the telecommuting policy review opportunity. The best way to tackle this issue would be to form a sub-committee of two or three EIC members who would review the policy and write a report of their recommendations. At the February meeting the subcommittee would submit the report to the EIC at which point the EIC could vote on the report's recommendations. Once approved and finalized, the report could be sent off to Human Resources which is responsible for the telecommuting policy update.

Peg Gearhart said that she would be willing to do it. Christine Thompson said that she'd be addressing the policy in her office anyways and would be happy to help. Art Farley concluded the topic by saying that Peg and Christine would be the subcommittee on the telecommuting and flexible work schedule policy and would report back to the EIC at the February meeting.

Steve Mital spoke about issues surrounding updating the University of Oregon's Comprehensive Environmental Policy (CEP), since it had not been updated since 1997 when it was first written. Steve said that he had spoken with Kay Coats about revising the document, had generated some notes and had a list of recommendations on which he would like the EIC's feedback. After this meeting Steve will use his list plus discussion in this meeting to form his official recommendations. Steve proposed six changes to the CEP:

First, a transfer of responsibility for policy "ownership" from Environmental Health and Safety to the Office of Sustainability. The Sustainability Office did not exist when the CEP was adopted.

Second, the category "carbon emissions management" should be added as an area of emphasis. Currently, there are six areas of emphasis: (1) Commitment to environmental education, (2) Environmentally responsible purchasing policies, (3) Efficient use and conservation of energy, water, and other resources, (4) Minimize solid waste production, (5) Minimize hazardous waste and toxic materials on campus, and (6) Environmentally responsible campus design and planning principles. A section on carbon emissions management would create a space in which to integrate the goals of the Climate Action Plan.

Third, transportation should be separated out of section five, Environmentally Responsible Campus Design and Planning Principles, to become its own section that addresses daily commuting and business travel.

Fourth, the section "Follow Up, Review and Update" should be altered so as to change and clarify the CEP's role in sub-policy creation, implementation, and enforcement. There should be a new focus on encouraging the best practices through a green office certification program and sustainable purchasing network rather than enforcement. When needed, the CEP can add sub-policies and/or appendices like the paper purchasing or green cleaning products guidelines.

The green office certification program would work in the following way. A checklist of behaviors and activities an office can perform to be more sustainable would be compiled by the Office of Sustainability. This checklist would be available on a web-based platform where an office manager could retrieve it, self-report, and get points for his or her office that would translate into silver, gold, or platinum certification. Hopefully, peer pressure from other departments and from students in the department would encourage positive behavior without the need for enforcement strategies.

Peg Gearhart asked how Steve Mital would plan to direct people to the website to start the certification process. Steve replied that he would hold a lunch for office managers and get feedback about the first draft of the checklist. Hopefully, these managers are ones who'd be willing to first go through the process and then word could be spread to other departments. The Office of Sustainability could put it in their newsletter as well. Peg noted that there is an office managers group on campus and it would be worth making a presentation to them.

Christine Thompson said is sounded like Steve Mital was saying he would prefer to encourage implementation rather than enforcement. However, it might be smart to leave the policy vague when detailing implementation. Steve agreed commenting that the policy would simply state that the Office of Sustainability is responsible for managing, updating and educating people about the policy.

Art Farley asked if there would be minimum standards in addition to the checklist that grants certification. Steve Mital answered that in order to get any form of green office certification there will be minimum thresholds consistent with current policy. Being awarded silver, gold or platinum certification indicates that the office has gone above and beyond the baseline standard. Steve continued to say that he first heard about this program at a conference with other universities and that those institutions would be good places to look to as a model.

Fifth, the reporting requirements need to be updated and clarified. To create this report the Office of Sustainability could use the Sustainability Tracking Assessment and Rating System (STARS) or an Environmental Management System that Environmental Health and Safety may develop. Currently, the University of Oregon

is putting together their first STARS report (as are approximately 300 other universities). Although STARS requires a minimum of one update report every three years, the UO will probably update more frequently. This report would best fit the criteria for the CEP report.

Christine Thompson asked how the CEP report would be related to the Climate Action Plan. Steve Mital replied that there is a section in the STARS report on carbon dioxide emissions. The same data that goes into reporting emissions data for the Climate Action Plan can be dropped into the STARS report. Christine noted that it might be best not to specifically commit to doing the STARS report in the policy, but to talk about a report requirement generally.

Sixth, rather than having sustainability-related policies as separate entities in different departments (i.e. the paper purchasing policy in Purchasing and Contracting Services, the “no idling” policy in the Department of Public Safety, and the green cleaning products purchasing guidelines in Facilities), it would work best to include those policies as appendixes in the CEP.

Christine Thompson commented that a better option may be to add a “reference to” so that each policy is not officially part of the CEP. There are many elements across campus that are sustainability-related, but should not be subsumed by the CEP.

Alan Dickman noted that he thought it would be useful to have an appendix with a comprehensive list of all of the other existing, associated policies.

Steve Mital agreed saying that, since each of those separate policies has a specific owner, subsuming them would be difficult. However, having a list of all of the other policies related to sustainability and a reference to where to find them would be useful.

Ramah Leith asked about whether the tobacco-free campus policy that would begin in the 2012 academic year would fit into the CEP. Zach Stark-MacMillan said he thought it would fit well in the “reference to” appendix. Christine Thompson added that a tobacco-free policy could fit into the section “Minimize Hazardous Waste and Toxic Materials on Campus,” but agreed that it would be better as a separate entity. Art Farley concurred stating that it would be best if the tobacco-free campus policy remained under the control of the University Health Center.

Christine Thompson asked Steve Mital if he knew what the timing would be like on the project. Steve replied that given the new policy on redrafting policies, he would be able to present a revised version for the EIC to look at and comment on by February or March as time allowed.

Art Farley closed the meeting by asking if there were specific issues that anyone really wanted to address.

Peg Gearhart mentioned that leaf blowers on campus and the pollution they produce was an issue that concerned her. Facilities said that raking would take too long and would be too expensive, but Peg thought it would be worth looking into.

Christine Thompson mentioned that she was doing work on a new sustainability policy regarding development and major remodeling, which she would be prepared to talk about at the next EIC meeting in February.

Nathan Howard added that he would like to talk about figuring out the best way to go about getting more bike parking and infrastructure on campus. Steve Mital noted that the Department of Public Safety (DPS) was about to hire a new parking and alternative transportation director. DPS was unable to find someone during the fall, so they are starting the search over. Eventually, it will be that person's job to address biking infrastructure.

Zach Stark-MacMillan mentioned the fact that the new Sustainability Coordinator would like to attend the next EIC meeting. Steve Mital said she would be more than welcome and that the committee could issue a formal invitation.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 PM.