

MEETING SUMMARY
NATURAL RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMITTEE
August 5, 2010

The August 5th meeting of the Natural Resources Advisory Committee was held in the Houston-Galveston Area Council Conference Room A at 3555 Timmons Lane, Houston, Texas. The meeting began at approximately 1:35 PM. Vice-Chairman Patrick Buzbee presided.

NRAC voting members present (25):

Bob Allen	Jim Kachtick	Brian Schmaefsky
Kathy Burris	Carole Lamont	Mike Talbott
Patrick Buzbee	Sarah Metzger	Lori Traweek
Glenda Callaway	Jack Miller	Kerry Whelan
Cathy McCoy (phone)	Tom Northrup	Pudge Wilcox
Ron Drachenberg	John O'Connell	David Hubenak
Nicole Hausler	Ellis Pickett	James Dannenbaum
Andrew Isbell	Ronald Schultz	
Jim Joyce	Linda Shead	

NRAC voting members not present (9):

Bill Bandiga (resigned)	Leroy Dettling	Orval Rhoads
Jeff Brennan	Reed Eichelberger	
Jamie Brewster	Andy Icken	
Dennis Caputo	Brett Kolaja	

Marilyn Christian delegated Bob Allen. Del Canon delegated Cathy McCoy. Delegated representatives can vote on Committee business; non-delegated representatives count toward quorum but cannot vote.

Current Vacancies:

Environmental Groups (1)

NRAC advisory member (0)

H-GAC Staff Present (9):

Carl Masterson, Jeff Taebel, Rachel Powers, Justin Bower, Bill Hoffman, Amy Boyers, Meredith Dang, Kristi Corse, Todd Running

Others Present:

Kay Willcox (citizen, Chambers County); Michael Lindsey (Montgomery County); Trent Martin (Harris County); Bill Hopkins (Memorial Super Neighborhood); H.A. Tony Williams (TCEQ Region 12); Linda Vasse (TCEQ).

Welcome and Introductions

Pat Buzbee welcomed those present and initiated self-introductions.

Certify Quorum

Pat Buzbee confirmed a quorum.

Approve Meeting Report

On a motion from an unidentified member, the August meeting notes were approved.

Membership

Carl explained that several members of the committee were nominated by their constituents. The Nominating Committee has reviewed appointments and recommendations and unanimously approved the nominations and asked for approval by the NRAC to recommend the nominations to the Board.

An unidentified member made a motion, and Brian Schmaefsky seconded. The motion was approved.

Subcommittees

Parks & Natural Areas

Linda suggested that committee members recommend the PNA subcommittee to people in their organizations, because the speakers and roundtable discussions are excellent.

She also provided information about the awards program application, which was due August 16.

Topics of the Day

The first presentation topic of the day was the **EcoLogical tool**.

Pat Buzbee introduced the speakers: ***Ms. Meredith Dang and Ms. Amy Boyers of H-GAC***

Ms. Dang indicated they were showing a new version of the EcoLogical project, as a follow up to a presentation at the February meeting. She presented background information on the project,

a GIS/spatially-based geographic information tool on land use for transportation developmental decision-making. They also presented their new brochures for the project.

The overall goal is a Regional decision support tool—GIS-based, using quantitative and qualitative metrics (extent and nature of ecotypes, etc), and reflecting local priorities. It will help guide transportation decisions based on upcoming population growth, with a spatial tool to balance mobility with ecological resources.

The project involved many local partners, and included Grant funding from FHA, GBEP, and others.

Ms. Dang answered several questions from the Committee. Mr. Dannenbaum asked whether the project had received input from HCFCD, and what point in the input process the project was at. Ms. Dang answered that HCFCD was a partner, and that TPWD was also consulted. This process is iterative and will be improved based on feedback from stakeholders as it goes forward. Mr. Dannenbaum followed up with a question regarding integration with the statewide rail planning process. Jeff Taebel indicated that TxDOT has asked H-GAC to be on the planning committee. Ms. Dang indicated that new data will be able to be integrated into the GIS layer.

Ms. Boyers provided a demonstration of the tool, which can be accessed at <http://www.eco-logical.com>. There are video tutorials on the webpage, along with written instructions. Amy demonstrated many of the functions and interface, including an explanation of the ecotype layer, defining queries, and the manner in which metrics are calculated.

The Committee asked a variety of questions regarding how the scoring system was set up, and on related issues. Committee members raised concerns as to whether this would delay projects. Ms. Boyers answered that it could potentially, but may also reduce delays during NEPA evaluations. It was suggested that groundwater recharge areas be incorporated into the system in the future. Ms. Boyers also indicated that information on parks would be incorporated soon, and that the data for the tool could be streamed to GIS from the website for GIS users. The addition of information will be handled by staff on an ad hoc basis. The ultimate arbiter may be the Policy committee or the H-GAC Board. Ms. Boyers indicated that they would like to also include information from other resources and agencies.

Mr. Taebel pointed out that the application got the second place award at the international ESRI competition. Linda Shead pointed out that there were some limitations to the current iteration of the tool, including a 100 acre minimum size limit.

The second presentation topic was on the status of EPA and TCEQ air quality permits. The speakers were *Ms. Linda Vasse, and Mr. Tony Williams, TCEQ.*

The speakers referenced the ongoing disagreement between the TCEQ and EPA on air quality permitting. Ms. Vasse could not comment directly on that, as she is not directly involved. She indicated that they have a good working relationship with EPA office in Dallas, and so far nothing has changed on the regional level.

Ms. Vasse described the Flex permit system, which allowed TCEQ to get grandfathered facilities into the regulated arena. In response to questions from the Committee, Ms. Vasse gave a short description of the dispute over the flexible permits. She and Mr. Williams indicated that they did not know if other states use a similar program, though there may be a similar EPA program. They also stated that not all facilities under flex permits are grandfathered, and that they did not have enough information to discuss the potential impact of greenhouse gas controls.

Environmental Program Highlights

Rachel Powers presented information regarding the Bacteria Implementation Group, last discussed at the May meeting. The BIG plans to present the Plan to the NRAC at its November meeting in hopes of developing a recommendation of support for the H-GAC board to consider.

Roundtable Discussion

Carl Masterson introduced the roundtable discussion. The following items were brought forth by Committee members.

- Linda Shead announced a landowners' workshop on 8/6/10 regarding conservation easements and land trust issues in Wallisville, Chambers County. In response to a Committee question, Linda indicated Katherine Armstrong's group was not currently participating, but that they were notified.
- Carl Masterson reported on discussions regarding term limits by the nominating committee, who would continue to discuss them and make recommendations in November.
- Jeff Taebel reported on the challenge grant from HUD, EPA, and DoT for up to five million dollars to begin integrating efforts by various entities to improve sustainability across many programs. H-GAC is coordinating an application on behalf of the region and a 25-partner consortium. Looking for \$1 million in match. More information is available on the website, and the conversation is expected to influence metric affecting future grants and guide positive change.

- Kristi Corse provided an update on the San Jacinto Waste Pits Superfund Site located near I-10 at the San Jacinto River. Dioxin contamination on and near the site has led to elevated levels in fish tissue, and is currently being addressed by the EPA and local entities.

H-GAC is helping with the community awareness subcommittee. Participation was good at the EPA's first meeting, and more meetings are upcoming. In response to a question regarding remediation, Ms. Corse indicated remediation has not yet begun, pending isolation of the site and public outreach. It was suggested this would be a good topic for the Regional Flood Management Council.

- Meredith Dang described the Vision for Tomorrow project. The H-GAC board has asked for input from the NRAC on this project, which is a visioning exercise for the 2035 state of the H-GAC region. A draft will be completed in September, and a final in October.
- Lori Traweck provided an update on environmental flows from the San Jacinto and Trinity Rivers into basins and bays. The science group was unable to come to consensus, so provided two sets of recommendations. The committee was subsequently unable to reach consensus and submitted two recommendations to the state. The State must adopt appropriate standards by June 2011, and TCEQ is proposing new rules in the TAC. A public input meeting is being held on Austin, Thursday, August 12, with a submitted comments deadline of August 13. The committee did reach consensus on five policy recommendations for the work plan: 1) Regional Water/groundwater/environmental flows planning, 2) Need for additional stream flow gauges in key locations, 3) need for specific funding for SB2 and 3 instream flow studies, 4) need for adequate time and financial resources for the process, and 5) request that the legislature recognize resource agencies for their contributions and encourage continued funding. The next step, beginning in September, is to develop a work plan. There are upcoming public input meetings. In response to Committee questions, Lori indicated there were problems coming up with correct indicator species and other scientific matters. The Committee made comments that the Region H discussions have also been interesting, and that the state is considering issues related to the state bonding cap and how it impacts new reservoir sites.
- Jim Katchik discussed the Galveston Bay Foundation discussion of the gulf oil spill, and the general issue of oil in marshes. One expert from the GLO related how marsh grass will not be greatly impacted by oil on the surface, but would if the oil is disturbed and mixed into the water and soil

- Andrew Isbell posed a question for the group regarding interbasin transfers. Various Committee members indicated that they are generally not allowed. It is legally possible but financially unfeasible because they become junior water rights. There was also discussion on the unavailability of comprehensive data regarding return flow volumes.

Next Meeting Date

The next regularly scheduled meeting date is Thursday, November 4, 2010, at 1:30 PM. Carl Masterson recognized Kerry Whelan for his service, upon his retirement.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 3:35 PM.

DRAFT