

Wednesday, January 12, 2022

1-8-22 GrassRoots Institute - Climate Crisis Workgroup (GRI-CCW) Meeting Notes

Attendees: Carrie Durkee, Marcy Snyder, Marie Jones, Susan Nutter, Sandy Turner, George Reinhardt, Jim Tarbell, Judy Tarbell, Jessica Rose, Karen Bowers, Cliff Hoyd, Jim Schoonover, Eileen Mitro, Supervisor Ted Williams and Peter McNamee

1. 5th District Supervisor, and Chair of the Mendocino Bd of Supervisors, Ted Williams was introduced and asked to outline his vision and priorities for the next year. He identified the following:
 - A. Modernization of county government, which he said still retained many aspects of 1950s style operations and needed to be updated to address the challenges of the 21st century. He pointed to cumbersome procedures and obsolete processes that not only hinder efficient and effective operation of county government, but worse retarded the well-being of county residents and their ability to prosper. For example, he noted that he receives constant complaints about the county's permit processes being unnecessarily slow, confusing and bureaucratic.
 - B. The county's budget and financial operations are opaque and archaic; frustrating the ability of the Bd and the public to hold bureaucrats accountable for efficient, effective and responsive operation of county government. The county needs a long term financial plan and a process to manage the implementation of that plan to insure the public's interest is optimized. He noted that the current annual budgeting process doesn't provide an effective methodology to manage and remediate long term infrastructure depreciation. For example, depreciation costs of county roads far exceed funds available to maintain the roads.
 - C. Expanding IT Broadband capacity is critical for the county to be competitive going forward. The county has already done a lot of work assessing the need for broadband and the costs to expand capacity are a huge financial challenge representing hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars. The state and federal governments are increasing their investments in rural broadband, but it falls far

short of the need. The county needs to make some difficult strategic decisions about priorities for broadband investments.

2. Marcy Snyder said Climate Change is the workgroup's focus and she wanted to know how Supervisor Williams priorities intersected with climate change challenges?
3. Supervisor Williams responded that pretty much everything the county does impacts climate change and there are opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, become more energy use efficient, and build a greener county government in all aspects of its operations. Streamlining and modernizing county processes, expanding broadband, and instituting strategic financial management are critical to successfully confronting our climate change challenges.
4. Jim Schoonover asked how the new county strategic plan fit into accomplishing these goals? The county has a history of making promises for improvements in its operations and then not effectively following through to produce outcomes the public wants.
5. Supervisor Williams noted that the proposed county government strategic plan recently shared with the public needs a lot more development and refinement before it will be a useful tool to guide county management over the next five years. We need a lot more development of an implementation strategy for the broad priorities and goals presented in the proposed plan. Otherwise, the proposed priorities/goals are just a wish list and will have little actual strategic value towards improving county government.
6. To that end, Supervisor Williams ask if the GrassRoots Institute (GRI) and the Mendocino County Climate Action Advisory Committee (MCCAAC) would take on the task of helping the county identify how the county can reduce its carbon emissions, increase utilization of clean renewable energy, become more energy efficient, and better meet the needs of county residents? If so, he has some ideas that he would like to share with such a workgroup and work with them as to how addressing climate change can be integrated into everything the county does. He suggested that maybe we need to have a on-line Question & Answer web page, where the public can ask questions about what the county is doing and post suggestions. Likewise, maybe we need to have an organization like GRI do some public survey work to find out what actions the public would like to see the county take on in regard to addressing climate change.

- A. GRI & MCCAAC participants Eileen Mitro, Jim Schoonover, and Marie Jones volunteered to help Supervisor Williams as a workgroup to identify actions county agencies can take to integrate climate action into all aspects of county operations.
7. Marcy Snyder commented that strategic planning and policies are important, but more important is actually taking action that remedies and mediates the negative impacts of climate change. What action will be taken?
 8. Supervisor Williams agreed real action is long overdue. But before we are going to be able to effectively take action, the county has to overcome its long term financial limitations. The truth is, even with a \$350 million annual budget, every dollar is already committed and there isn't any large pot of un-allocated money to spend on new initiatives.
 9. Peter McNamee commented, if there isn't any unallocated money its critical the county change what it spends its funds on in order to operate more efficiently and effectively in a green sustainable manner. For example, WillDan's county energy audit pointed out that by switching from using wasteful incandescent lighting to using lower maintenance high efficiency LED lighting the county would reduce its electricity cost and carbon emissions. That's an example of using existing funds to both address climate change and free up funds that can be used to address unmet public needs.
 10. George Reinhardt pointed out that the county created the MCCAAC to advise it on climate change but it hasn't invested any staff resources to support the work of the advisory committee. Last spring the MCCAAC sent a report to the Bd of Sup incorporating suggestions for next steps the county should be taking, yet there hasn't been any real action taken on those recommendations. Can the county invest some resources in the MCCAAC to make it a more important part of county operations going forward?
 11. Supervisor Williams responded by summarizing that a recurring theme not just today at the GRI meeting but voice throughout the county is the need for change that is both workable and affordable. It will require a change in county government's attitude and the culture that evolved in regard to how county leaders and personnel govern. Hopefully, we can use the workgroup discussed today as a step in that direction.

12. CCW participants in the meeting thanked Supervisor Williams for meeting with them and sharing his thoughts and ideas. They too hoped this would be the first of many opportunities to collaborate with him.
13. Carrie Durkee asked if there were any announcements or reports that needed to be made.
14. Jim Schoonover reported that following disappointing action by the Cal. Public Utilities Commission to move forwards towards adoption of a new rate structure that disadvantages residential and business solar electricity distribution on the grid, the Solar Alliance is increasing its efforts to lobby Governor Newsom to intervene. Thousands of letters, emails and phone calls are flooding the Governor's office and they seemed to be having an impact. He urged everyone to call or write the Governor to urge he oppose the proposed NEM 3 rate changes.
15. Peter McNamee reported that since our last meeting there has been continued work by the Supervisors Gjerde and Haschak toward establishing a Regional Energy Network (REN) as an extension to MCOG. Also many of the proposals for expanding use of solar/battery systems and EVs & EV-chargers advocated by GRI have been included in the proposed county strategic plan. Jim Schoonover, noted that in addition, the county was working to develop an agreement with Enterprise car rental to provide electric vehicles (EV) for the county's fleet needs.
16. The meeting adjourned.