

# Carolina Sustainability Council

Meeting Minutes      September 22, 2021    Via Zoom

Council members in attendance were: Mike Piehler (chair), Ileana Fenwick, MC Gray, Elizabeth Havice, Nikhil Kaza, Asia Mieczkowska, Jeff Mittelstadt, Jonas Monast, Natalie Murdock, and Aaron Salzberg.

UNC staff in attendance were Vik Agabekov, Melanie Elliot, Cindy Shea, Steve Wall and Emily Williams.

Chair Mike Piehler began the meeting at 3:00 and welcomed members of the Council. Council members approved minutes from the February 2021 meeting. Piehler thanked outgoing Council member Diamond Holloman and welcomed new member Ileana Fenwick. Fenwick briefly introduced herself to the Council.

## Director's Report

Piehler began his report by informing the Council that the professional staff of Sustainable Carolina was now housed administratively under the Institute for the Environment. The Sustainable Carolina staff provided brief introduction to the Council. Piehler also noted that the process was underway to add a communications lead to the staff.

Piehler outlined some of the highlights and actions that had taken place over the last several months, including the establishment of the Champion Sustainability Fund, increased engagement activities through the website and social media and the Climate Action Plan (CAP). Piehler stated that Melanie Elliot would provide a more detailed look at the CAP later in the meeting.

Piehler turned his attention to priorities for the upcoming year. He stated work was underway to develop a Water Plan for the university as well as a strategic framework for Sustainable Carolina. Piehler emphasized the connection between sustainability actions and research and education. He referenced the capstone courses and internship programs as examples of student engagement with sustainability efforts. He provided examples of faculty research that contributed to increased knowledge for decision-making around sustainability decisions. Piehler concluded by noting that he would be presenting to the Chapel Hill Town Council that evening to provide an update on the Carolina CAP.

## Climate Action Plan

Melanie Elliot began her presentation by detailing the process that went into developing the CAP. She stated a final version is on the website but the plan is for it to be an adaptive process as changes are needed.

Elliot provided an overview of the university's greenhouse gas emissions inventory since the 2007 baseline. She presented data showing that stationary combustion was the largest source, but the emissions from this source have been decreasing. Other sources included purchased electricity, air travel, commuting and a combination of smaller sources. She noted that air travel reflects faculty and staff participation in research events and conference. Elliot emphasized that the commuting data was based on a survey and had a level of uncertainty because of the small sample size.

Elliot concluded that since 2007 the emissions have been reduced by 40%.

Council members engaged in a question and answer session with Elliot. Piehler asked about the impact of COVID versus intentional actions that led to the reduced emissions. Elliot responded that COVID had played some role but that the reduction in emissions was largely the result of planned actions. Elizabeth Havice inquired about more details related to commuting. Elliot noted that a student capstone class was focused specifically on that topic.

Aaron Salzberg asked about the existing agreement to purchase electricity from Duke Energy. Elliot explained that the primary purpose of the cogen plant is to produce steam for sterilization and heat for the hospital and labs on campus. Electricity is a byproduct from that steam production and is a small component of the overall university electricity use.

Fenwick requested more background on the cause of uncertainty for the commuting data. Elliot responded that the survey was the best tool available but only had 2000 respondents. Piehler thanked Elliot for the presentation and all her work on this topic.

#### Open Discussion

Piehler offered the opportunity for members to share updates on related work. Jeff Mittelstadt discussed an upcoming competition Launching Investment for Future Transformation (LIFT) involving blended finance and impact investing strategies.

MC Gray provided an update on the ongoing work of the student environmental coalition and the focus of developing a unified project for all of the organizations to work on together.

Piehler stated that the next meeting would be planned for December and would have a focus on the Strategic Framework.

Piehler adjourned the meeting at 3:55

The full meeting is available for viewing at: [UNC Sustainability Council - YouTube](#)