

Plastic Waste Prevention Advisory Council

June 17, 2021 Virtual Meeting

2:00 – 4:00 pm

Meeting Minutes

Link to meeting recording:

<https://register.gotowebinar.com/recording/recordingView?webinarKey=3754408212811704077®istrantEmail=sharon.baxter%40deq.virginia.gov>

Advisory Committee Members Present:

Ken Plum, Virginia House of Delegates
Kathy Neilson, Chief of Staff to Senator Chap Peterson
David Paylor, Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
Joe Hilbert, Virginia Department of Health
Keith Martin, Virginia Chamber of Commerce
Brett Vassey, Virginia Manufacturers Association
Dr. Rob Alexander, James Madison University
Jennifer Cole, Clean Fairfax
Anne Johnson, Resource Recycling Systems, Inc.
Dr. Jennifer Russell, Virginia Tech

Meeting Participants:

Matthew Strickler, Secretary of Natural Resources
Meryem Karad, Assistant Secretary of Natural Resources
Katie Sallee, Special Assistant to the Secretary of Natural Resources for Policy and Communications
Keith Christman, American Chemistry Council (Virginia Manufacturers Association alternate)
Chris Bast, Chief Deputy, DEQ
Sharon Baxter, DEQ
Meghann Quinn, DEQ
Keith Boisvert, DEQ
Morgan Goodman, DEQ
Marilee Tretina, DEQ

2:00 Call to Order

Meryem Karad called the meeting to order by outlining the history of the Advisory Council as well as its mission and calling the roll. She noted that members of the public interested in speaking during the Public Comment period should sign up via the chat function.

2:10 Introduction

Secretary Strickler provided introductory remarks, outlining the importance of the Advisory Council's work, and thanked the members for their service. He noted that the issue of addressing plastic pollution in the environment is a challenge for the Commonwealth as well as the nation. He noted that his vision

for the Advisory Council is to use their expertise and strategic thinking to help lead the Commonwealth toward the establishment of at least some aspects of a circular economy and industry standards for it. He also noted that the Governor recently signed Executive Order 77, Virginia Leading By Example To Reduce Plastic Pollution and Solid Waste.

2:15 Council Introductions

Delegate Plum, sponsor of the bill that created the Advisory Council, outlined the challenge behind its creation – balancing consumer demand for convenience via plastics with environmental quality. Each member of the Council introduced themselves and noted their relevant expertise and interests.

2:30 Chair and Vice-Chair Nominations

Ms. Karad explained the roles of the Chair and Vice-Chair and gave an overview of the report that would be submitted by the Council. Dr. Rob Alexander motioned for Anne Johnson to serve as Chair and Brett Vassey to serve as Vice-Chair. The motion was seconded by Jennifer Russell and approved by all. Dr. Alexander volunteered to assist with meeting agenda preparation. Meghann Quinn, Department of Environmental Quality, will serve as the advisory council's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Officer.

2:45 FOIA Presentation

Katie Sallee provided an overview of the Freedom of Information Act to the members (see attachments). Ms. Sallee noted that going forward, all Advisory Council meetings will be noticed on the Virginia Regulatory Town Hall (townhall.virginia.gov). She noted that any time more than two Advisory Council members meet (including via email), that constitutes a "meeting" under FOIA and must be noticed and have an agenda and minutes prepared. Ms. Sallee noted that there must be a quorum (6 people) for the Advisory Council to meet; going forward the meetings will be in-person, unless the General Assembly changes the law. Finally, she noted that the Advisory Council can only vote and make decisions at meetings.

3:15 Executive Order 77, Virginia Leading By Example to Reduce Plastic Pollution and Solid Waste Presentation

Chris Bast provided an overview of Executive Order (EO) 77's requirements, implementation progress to date as well as future planned outreach to state agencies (see attachments). He emphasized plans to create a community of practice among state agencies as well as to engage others outside of state government. There was discussion among the members about certain issues such as composting, the need to learn from the successes of others, the need for guidance for state agencies to inventory their plastic purchases and the need for a clarification on what recycling means in the context of the EO. Mr. Bast pointed out that while the initial implementation guidance will be released on June 21, the implementation process will be iterative and the phase-out schedule allows for markets to develop and new solutions to be developed.

3:30 Goals and Report/Next Steps

The Chair and Vice-Chair agreed to coordinate on dates for the remaining 2021 meetings of the Advisory Council. Ms. Karad discussed expectations for the Advisory Council's required report to the Governor and the General Assembly. She noted that the report is the Advisory Council's and suggested that they

use their meetings to hear from stakeholders. Dr. Alexander commented that using systems thinking will be key to making any progress by identifying small system interventions with large impacts. Ms. Karad noted that the Advisory Council has a great deal of flexibility in terms of what the actual report looks like in terms of length, number of recommendations, types of recommendations, etc.

The Advisory Council talked about potential presentation/discussion topics for future meetings. Mr. Vassey suggested that a representative from the Food and Drug Administration or Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services be invited to speak about food packaging as well someone to talk about funding issues related to recycling by localities. Ms. Johnson suggested inviting a representative from DEQ to speak about plastic pollution in the Commonwealth, how plastic is used in Virginia, differences in recycling capacity between rural and urban localities, and the cost of cleanups to municipalities. Ms. Cole requested a briefing on state agency recycling efforts. Mr. Martin suggested hearing a presentation on which items are commonly found in litter in Virginia as well as the availability of recycling and composting infrastructure in the Commonwealth. Dr. Alexander stressed the importance of systems thinking as each member of the Advisory Council has expertise in one area but they all need a broader understanding of the issue. Ms. Johnson noted that it might be helpful to hear about how solid waste is managed overall.

It was agreed that Sharon Baxter will consult with the Chair and Vice-Chair about setting up the remaining meetings and arranging for speakers.

4:00 Public Comment

Katie Register, with Clean Virginia Waterways, which is located at Longwood University, wanted to let the Advisory Council know about resources that may be helpful to the Advisory Council. She noted that her organization has data from the last 27 years of cleanups and noted that 80%+ of the litter collected is plastic and the top ten items collected are mostly food and beverage containers. Two months ago, they started a survey of all voluntary cleanups from across the state. Ms. Register also noted that an update of the Virginia Marine Debris Reduction Plan, supported by the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program, is currently being updated for 2021-2025 and will be published in the fall; one of its major strategies is reducing plastic pollution (she provided the links: Introduction and Background: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1y5i5Yo3vD1nPwB-82OjdbmGkz8lj5wg5/view?usp=sharing> and Goals: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/15AIO6yHOQYvHFrBQoHHTSIQkC8aU-aVu/view?usp=sharing>). Ms. Register noted that the Virginia Plastics Pollution Prevention Network was created last year and includes about one hundred organizations from around the state who are working at some level on reducing plastic pollution.

Pat Calvert, with the Virginia Conservation Network, noted that reporting is critical in order to make progress and transparency will be key. He also noted that we need to define what a circular economy in terms of plastics mean.

Glen Besa asked whether the Advisory Council's work is connected to the report DEQ is required to develop on advanced recycling; Ms. Karad noted that the Advisory Council is not formerly connected to the report but could provide input. Ms. Johnson responded that the Advisory Council would make themselves available to DEQ as it develops the report.

Jennifer Cole asked a question about the Advisory Council's voting requirements; Ms. Karad said that she believes the Advisory Council operates on majority rule but will confirm with the Office of the Attorney General.

4:10 Adjourn

Ms. Karad asked for a motion to adjourn, and it was so moved. The meeting was ended at 4:10 pm.