



Board of Commissioners

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To: Benton County Board of Commissioners

FR: Benton County Environment and Natural Resources Advisory Committee (ENRAC)

RE: Recommendations for the Future of ENRAC

The Benton County Environment and Natural Resources Advisory Committee (ENRAC) would like to share our perspectives and recommendations for the future of ENRAC as a committee. The catalyst of this letter is based upon the current number of ENRAC members, future leadership challenges, and current focus of ENRAC that may be shifted to another County committee.

Currently, ENRAC has only four official members. Though, one of the four stated they will resign if the fundamental challenges of the ENRAC structure and processes are not significantly altered. Further, the Chair will have to step down from that role due to family and professional time constraints. Also, the current Vice-Chair has to resign as she recently moved out of the County. Lastly, the current focus of ENRAC is exploring opportunities to positively address sustainable materials and solid waste management. However, County staff shared this topic may become the focus of another County committee in the near future. In sum, ENRAC members conclude that the County should not invest time to recruit future ENRAC members before addressing the structural concerns below.

Perspectives on Current Bylaws, Structure, and Process

- ***Lack of Focus:*** Without specific County direction, ENRAC self-selects interests and topics. The ENRAC bylaws do include a mission statement, but the topic of “environment and natural resources” is simply too broad. Previous topics ENRAC pursued include water quantity, air pollution, agricultural land preservation, solar panels in rural areas, and countless others. With so many options – all critical to a healthy, vibrant environment – members find selecting just one topic to explore and pursue to be difficult, at best.
- ***Lack of Clear Process of Interaction with Leadership:*** With the exception of the request to comment on the Coffin Butte expansion, ENRAC does not receive direct requests or charges from Commissioners or Departments. In addition, members lack clarity on potential deliverables or what would be helpful for the County. Staff is a conduit to County leadership and provides general guidance, but there is not a clear process of interaction identified in the bylaws.

- **Challenges to Engage All Members:** Not every ENRAC member has the same expertise or interest in all topics or implementation opportunities within the environment and natural resources. That is, not only do members have expertise in specific environmental issues, we also vary in our professional contributions. Some are researchers, while others are interested in public engagement methodology. With such a breadth of focus and lack of direction, ENRAC members do not always feel engaged, and that puts a strain on membership retention and recruitment.

Recommendations Moving Forward

As changes are required, members do not feel the County is ignoring its commitment to natural resources. Rather, ENRAC recommends rethinking a future advisory committee/s with more specificity and structure. To address the concerns identified above, future bylaws should include:

- A process of clear requests and direction from Commissioners and/or County Departments on an annual or quarterly basis. That is, ENRAC is presented with an ask along with specific expected deliverables and timetable. This would alleviate the self-selection process and provide members with a sense of connection and contribution to the County.
- Requests address a specific environmental or natural resource issue and/or engagement process that includes most or all ENRAC members. For example, a topic is presented to ENRAC that requires research, analysis, and public engagement opportunities to take advantage of members' varied interests and expertise.
- A more structured, direct interaction with Commissioners or a specific Department. This framework would provide members with a greater sense of purpose and contribution to the County's endeavors and the overall health of our natural resources.

Option #1: *Temporarily Disband ENRAC and Significantly Alter Current Bylaws*

Option #2: *Dissolve ENRAC and Explore Structural Options to Support the Environment and Natural Resources*

Option #3: *Disband ENRAC and Comprehensively Integrate Environmental Issues within Existing Committees and Structures.*

Regardless of your decision, please understand ENRAC members appreciate the opportunity to provide you and County entities with our perspectives, research, and recommendations.

Thank you,

Jason Schindler, Chair

Sydney Tamplin, Vice-Chair

Charlene Carroll

Ankit Koirala

Damilola Olajubutu

Therese O'Rourke