

Community Benefits Committee (CBC) Meeting | Sept. 17, 2024

Website:

<https://dep.wv.gov/oil-and-gas/abandoned-well-plugging/inflation-reduction-act/community-benefits-plan/Pages/default.aspx>

Attendees:

Charles Burd, Gas & Oil Association of West Virginia
Autumn Crowe, West Virginia Rivers Coalition
Tom Huber, West Virginia Royalty Owners Association
David McMahon, Surface Owners Rights Organization
Justin Williams, Affiliated Construction Trades
Jason Harmon*, Deputy Chief, Office of Oil & Gas, WVDEP

Observers:

Alana Hartman Asst. Chief, Office of Oil & Gas, WVDEP (notetaker)
James Martin, Chief, Office of Oil & Gas
Laura Jennings, DAQ
Kristy Hahn, DOE
Rob Rice, WVDEP

*CBC chairperson

Notes

- Agenda was approved (moved & seconded & voted)
- Meeting minutes were approved (TH moved, AC seconded)
 - Charlie Burd's statement was clarified to be that most operators in his organization have 300 wells or less, but one has several thousand. There are about 12 that own ~2600 horizontal wells.

Reports: Chair

- Methane Emissions Reduction Program (MERP) grant RFP submittal: We prepared the Expression of Interest to invite applicants to be the Administrator, but we were told it must go out as an RFP (Request for Proposals); this opens it up to non-engineering firms. We are working on this; it will introduce a delay. **JH will share the RFP when it is finished.**
- Public meetings: We will proceed as if these meetings are under the "open meetings" rules. All are open to the public; there is a link on our website and published on WV SOS office. It will become a permanent meeting link once we start our regular meeting time.
- Membership compensation: the solution is to become temporary employees of the agency. If anyone has questions about the ramifications, e.g. do we need to make disclosures to the Ethics Commission, we can discuss them. If you want your time to be volunteer, you don't have to be paid. \$200/meeting is available plus travel expenses reimbursable up to \$175, like legislators are paid for interim sessions.
- Website is up, URL was shared with you. We will post minutes of the last meeting there and the agenda for next meeting, at least 5 days prior to the next meeting. Clarification of the purpose of the Orphan Well Reporting Form - this will not be the nomination tool for the purpose of this grant. The audience is mainly people who have a well on their property that would like to know more

about it. If we need to adapt how it works, we can consider that. DM also commented that the API number can be obtained higher in the form, to speed up the answer.

Old Business - CBC purpose[s] recap:

1. To serve as an advisory board to direct the actions of this group; the Administrator will coordinate most of the future activities. This is DEP's alternative to being in the position of using grant funds for our regulated community. CBC will approve the prioritization model.
 - a. If we don't get a rush of nominations, we'll have to work on publicizing the opportunity. An Oil & Gas workshop could be a possibility, had done those in the past.
 - b. JH described the committee makeup that will review bids for the Administrator role.
2. Work on work force development; review the Community Benefits Plan to ensure we're on track. We are delayed on Administrator selection, so we need to begin the public meetings.

New Business - Identification of focus areas/strategies for public engagement

- Explain to the public why they should come/why they should care: "What should we include in the prioritization model?" "What matters to you?"
- Public meeting spaces: focus on geographic areas that have the highest concentration of MCWs. Reviewed map: all except southeast, eastern and northern panhandles
 - 5-6 locations
 - Glenville - has university (non-biased), smaller operators nearby
 - Parkersburg area, WVUP or similar organization
 - Sistersville volunteer fire dept was recently used
 - Fairmont [Elkins, Buckhannon]
 - Beckley, Logan, Huntington
 - Consider offering an online option to submit comments for those who can't make it to a meeting, also captures eastern panhandle group
- Date/time (**DEP to plan these** since Administrator selection will be delayed)
 - some should be lunchtime, some evening
 - Need majority of dates selected before generating a press release
 - Wednesdays aren't good due to church, Monday night football bad, so Tues or Thurs best.
 - Nov 7, 12, 14, 19, 21 are options on Tues and Thurs in November
- Those to inform:
 - County farm bureaus (TH can help publicize to them - email lists and call chains)
 - County Commissioners, legislators that serve a particular region
 - Groups with an environmental focus: AC can help publicize to watershed network and WV Climate Alliance
- May need security
- Format? Presentation style with opportunities for people to make comments? Open house style with stations? Who will collect the comments?
 - Stations work well to eliminate grand-standing
 - Public Information Office may have advice
- **JH will draft a message saying what we're trying to do, then a later message about specific places/times of public meetings**
 - DEP press release, radio ads, other publicity methods

New business, cont'd: Workforce development (standing agenda item)

- Experience is important in this type of work, often passed down through family

- JW discussed some challenges to address:
 - Planning for employee needs in longer term future; 10 years of work better than 2 years
 - Existing companies could consider expanding to this area - get that information out to contractors/contractors associations, Glenville, CTCs
 - Projects that will be financially viable for them, e.g. AML (Abandoned Mine Lands) learned that larger packages can be helpful because the variability would even out
 - Training - and then contractors need to be employing them at competitive wages after they are trained
 - Besides competing with plugging projects in other states, also NewCorps, chips plants being built in Columbus, highway work
 - JW recently served on panels regarding nuclear, AML, well plugging, infrastructure
 - DEP could send out pre-bid announcements through Justin's networks so people could explore the idea. JW cited AML approach of an open house with project package to scrutinize & ask questions.
- Penn State offers Top Corps, which may be broadening to include well plugging
- DM had shared in an email on 8/29/24 the following apprenticeship approach in PA: https://www.theprogressnews.com/news/state/first-in-pa-registered-apprenticeship-program-to-plug-abandoned-oil-and-gas-wells-announced/article_763ff070-63cb-11ef-87f4-e777a74001ab.html
- Discussion of roles/jobs, some of which require experience/art (rig operator), but other roles (rig hands) are primarily labor, then people may move into the more experienced roles. Also truck driving, water hauling, etc.
- JH will create a survey for our plugging contractors to learn what their needs are
- DM cited exit interviews: Those who left the field said "it is hard work"
- CB can reach out to IOGCC to see what other training programs are in nearby states.
- AC will share Baker Welsh's model for workforce component in CA
- CB can reach out to Dorinda Byers

Alana reviewed action items (see below)

Open discussion:

DM is concerned about number of drillers who will apply for this; they may not be accustomed to applying to the government for grant money. Start simple with a one-page form. JH agreed, and noted we will all need to promote the program, possibly having to allay fears the government won't be using this as a tool to come after them. It was noted that some producers have drilling and also plugging companies.

Adjournment at 11:27 a.m.: TH moved, JW seconded, all approved.

Action items

- Jason will share the RFP (Request for Proposals) for the Administrator
- Members may complete the paperwork to receive reimbursement, if desired.
- DEP will begin planning the public meetings' locations and dates
- Jason will draft a message about the public meetings, saying what we're trying to do, then a later message about specific places/times of public meetings
- Members will seek input on workforce development needs from the stakeholders, as noted in red font above

Next meetings: October 15, 2024, 1:00-2:30 p.m. and November 19, 2024, 1:00-2:30 p.m.