



The Task Force to Strengthen the Health and Promote the Environment of South Carolina

2100 Bull Street
Columbia, SC 29201

Environmental Protection Subcommittee

July 22, 2021

Minutes

The SHaPE SC Environmental Protection Subcommittee met on **July 22, 2021, at 1:30 pm** at the Nexsen Pruet offices located at 1230 Main Street, Suite 700, Columbia, SC. The meeting was called to order by Mr. Tommy Lavender, Subcommittee Chair, and the following members were in attendance:

Tommy Lavender, Art Braswell, Emily Cedzo, Jill Miller, Rebecca Haynes, Sara Hazzard, Megan Chase (for Erika Hollis), Mark Nix, Myra Reece, Gary Spires, Bill Stangler

Not in attendance:

Dr. Jeffery Allen, John Durst, Michael Fields, Todd Glover, Clint Leach, Harold Mitchell, Ken Rentiers

Also in attendance were Bernie Hawkins, Facilitator (SHaPE SC), Cassandra Harris, DHEC's Director of Strategy and Engagement, Lawra Boyce, Senior Consultant with DHEC's Office of Operational Excellence, Katie Titus, SC Chamber of Commerce, and members of the public.

Item 1: Call to Order/Welcome

Chairman Lavender called the meeting to order, welcomed members to the meeting, and started the meeting by stating that notice of this meeting was provided to all persons, organizations, and news media, which have requested notification, as required by Section 30-4-80(e) of the South Carolina Code of Laws. He asked members to introduce themselves. He then directed subcommittee members to the agenda and asked if anyone had any comments to share before getting started. He then called upon Lawra Boyce to provide a summary of the minutes from the last meeting.

Item 2: Review of Minutes

Ms. Boyce directed members to the minutes, which had been previously provided. Ms. Boyce provided a brief review of the minutes from previous meeting. Mr. Lavender asked the members if any corrections were needed and asked for vote to approve the minutes. Upon receiving no objections, the minutes of the July 1 meeting were approved.

Ms. Boyce also summarized the materials that were provided to the subcommittee for review based on the discussion of the previous meeting. The materials included organizational charts of DHEC's three deputy areas, an overview of DHEC as an agency, budget information, a report of a 1999 study of the organization of public health and environmental functions in Kansas, and a memorandum provided by

Ken Rentiers, Deputy Director of SC Department of Natural Resources, who was unable to attend the meeting.

Mr. Spires asked if there was a list of items that the group had already agreed upon based on previous discussed. Ms. Boyce displayed the list below:

Current Strengths	Current Challenges
Stakeholder input	Unfunded mandates
Internal coordination and customer service	Retention of qualified staff
Leveraging resources (doing a lot with a little)	<i>Programs/services?</i>
<i>Programs/services?</i>	
Gaps	Opportunities for Improvement
	Educating community members, regulated community, and legislators
	Using compliance tools effectively for meaningful outcomes

Mr. Lavender asked Bernie Hawkins to remind the subcommittee of its charge.

Mr. Hawkins reviewed the Task Force Charter and what it mandates the subcommittees and overall task force to examine and the scope of duty: analyze current agency operations and develop recommendations for how they would improve quality and accessibility to services within the current structure and function, a reorganization within the current agency structure, or a separation, merge, or otherwise realignment of agencies.

Chairman Lavender asked the subcommittee members to focus on DHEC’s current structure for the purpose of this meeting by considering the three existing DHEC deputy areas – Environmental Affairs (EA), Healthcare Quality, and Public Health – as Venn Diagrams to identify the overlapping functions between them. He asked Myra Reece to provide an overview of EA’s interactions with the other deputy areas.

Item 3: Overview of Environmental Affairs’ links to Public Health and Healthcare Quality

Ms. Reece stated that health and environment are intrinsically linked. She said the three deputy areas are equally critical, but interaction is mostly on mission-critical tasks. She provided examples of interactions such as responding to healthcare facilities after medical evacuations due to flooding. The EA team includes specialists in hydrogeology who inspect those facilities for sewer line breaks and other potential interruptions in services. She also spoke about the coordination of environmental staff and health staff at the regional level, especially when handling controversial permitting decisions. The medical directors, health directors and environmental directors work together to address community concerns related to potential environmental exposures and impacts to public health, while also sharing information about services provided by our clinics.

She stated that toxicology is becoming more of a need in permitting decisions. This is a shift from historical permitting decisions, which were simply based on whether or not a facility’s operations could meet the pollution standards. Modern permitting decisions are more complex and involve evaluating and communicating potential health risks, which requires environmental toxicologists.

She said that in the past DHEC had more available resources and was able to support an office of scientists and statisticians that focused on bridging public health and environmental issues. They evaluated health data, such as asthma rates, and environmental data, such as the number of ozone action days, to find correlations and associations. Over time, as resources have dwindled that service and expertise has gone away. With limited resources, priority must be on simply fulfilling the mission-critical activities. The deputy areas within the agency aren't able to interact as much as they did when resources were more prevalent. Another result of dwindling resources is loss of specialized experts in the regional offices. Regional staff are now generalists responsible for compliance inspections for several different programs. There are opportunities for the three deputy areas to interact – and they have in the past – but limited resources and lack of sustainable funding have forced the programs to focus on ensuring the mission-critical activities are completed.

Mr. Hawkins surmised that the environmental programs may need their own epidemiologist and toxicologist who are familiar with those programs to address the unique and challenging current and future needs. Ms. Reece agreed and elaborated by saying that emerging contaminants are becoming more and more of a challenge because of the need to understand risk of exposure and be able to communicate risks to community members.

She stated that Lead exposure and risks is an example of coordination between EA and Public Health. Lead in children's blood is a reportable condition. Lead is also monitored in drinking water. Environmental staff work very closely with public health staff as part of a coordinated investigation to determine potential sources of lead exposure.

She stated another example of coordination between EA and Public Health is with mosquito control. Because mosquitos carry and spread diseases, public health staff conduct epidemiological studies of potential community spread. Environmental programs track populations of mosquitos and other vectors and coordinate with counties who are responsible for mosquito control.

Mr. Hawkins referred to a recent discussion of the Health Subcommittee. He said, in terms of coordination with Environmental staff, they also mentioned a Hepatitis C outbreak where they relied on environmental staff to help with community networking and outreach.

Ms. Reece also stated that the agency has made a concerted effort to conduct joint inspections of certain types of regulated facilities where possible.

Item 4: Discussion of Intra-agency interactions, Gaps and Opportunities for Improvements/Efficiencies

Mr. Lavender asked for clarification about how much overlap the environmental programs have with public health and healthcare quality on a day-to-day basis. He also asked if the environmental programs would have much interaction at all with public health if they had their own toxicologist. Ms. Reece stated that there may be less reliance on public health for toxicology needs, but that the relationship with public health would still be critical to address health equity issues related to complex issues such as air toxics or emerging contaminants.

Ms. Chase indicated that she is an environmental toxicologist and suggested that putting more resources to that body of science would bolster the relationship between environment and public health and further promote the coordination of decision-making and communication. Ms. Reece noted that environment is one of the social determinants of health.

Mr. Spires asked if DHEC had requested funds from the general assembly to support a toxicologist. Ms. Reece indicated that the agency had not but are in the process of prioritizing needs. Mr. Spires then

suggested that a request for a toxicologist may be better received from an environmental services agency than from DHEC where it could have the potential of getting moved into public health.

Ms. Haynes stated that the environmental community has been talking a lot about toxicology, risk assessments, and emerging contaminants, and noted the Kansas report also pointed out the silos of function as being a challenge and discussed the costs of overhead expenses and splitting the agency.

Mr. Stangler stated that he believes an environmental toxicologist on staff would not create a barrier to public health but rather would serve as a conduit of information and knowledge between the two.

Ms. Haynes stated that the issues that have been discussed related to limited resources will not be addressed by splitting the agency. She also pointed out that the Kansas report estimated that a split of the agency would take about two years.

Mr. Lavender asked why so many environmental staff were assisting with the pandemic response since the majority of DHEC staff are public health. Ms. Reece stated that the environmental staff were serving in leadership roles so that the public health staff could provide more services.

Mr. Spires asked if the agency's support services, such as legal, information technology, financial services, human resources, etc. were assigned to deputy areas. Ms. Reece indicated that the agency attorneys are assigned to deputy areas and that it works very well. She indicated that other support services are more centralized, while in the past support services were embedded in deputy areas. Mr. Hawkins stated that a common concern is that support services have been removed from the deputy areas and suggested that it may be more efficient for the deputy areas to meet the mission if they had more control over how the resources are allocated.

Ms. Miller pointed out the many strengths of the agency and the improvements in communication with partners in recent years. She asked the subcommittee to really focus on what is broken with the current system and to consider that separating for the sake of separating may not be the best. She indicated that several programs make sense to stay in the same agency, but suggested the possibility maintaining one agency governed by two separate boards – one made up of health experts to decide on health matters and one made up of environmental experts to decide on environmental matters.

Ms. Hazzard stated that she agrees with a lot of what has been mentioned and suggested asking DHEC staff where they see current and potential opportunities to bridge environment and public health.

Ms. Cedzo stated that the fundamental issues that have been discussed are lack of resources and funding. She suggested that the lack of internal collaboration and coordination is likely also related to lack of resources and funding. She suggested the structure may not truly matter if those two issues are not addressed. She also recognized that external stakeholders may not have the insight to make recommendations for improvement and suggested that staff have opportunities for input. A member of the public asked if the support services had been mapped out and if a funding analysis had been conducted, stating that legislative staff may want to see the costs of breaking up shared services.

Mr. Hawkins asked if there was a competition between program areas within the agency for salaries. Ms. Reece said that did occur as some programs have more money than others. She stated that several staff have indicated that they knew they would not be able to increase their salary unless they changed program areas because there are so few salary adjustment opportunities. She stated that EA salaries are not comparable with, and much lower than, salaries within DHEC or other state agencies.

Item 5: Discussion of format of draft recommendations

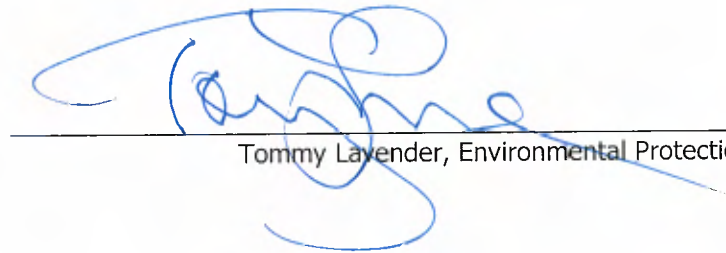
Mr. Hawkins indicated the goal of the next task force meeting on Aug. 10, 2021, will be for the subcommittees to report out their major themes for (1) service improvements, (2) structure improvements, (3) realignment improvements, and identify areas of consensus and disagreement.

Item 6: Summary and Next Steps

Mr. Lavender indicated that the next meeting would be focused on the coordination and interaction with other state agencies. The subcommittee members agreed to meet again prior to the Aug. 10 task force meeting to discuss specific recommendations from the subcommittee. Being no further business, Subcommittee Chair Lavender adjourned the meeting.

Based on post-meeting feedback provided by the members, the next Environmental Protection subcommittee meeting is **scheduled to be held in-person on Aug. 5.**

Recordings of Task Force and Subcommittee meetings can be found at the SHaPE SC website.



Tommy Lavender, Environmental Protection Subcommittee Chair
SHaPE SC
August 5, 2021