

## **Brief History of the Bluegrass ADD's Natural Resources & Environmental Protection Advisory Committee**

The Bluegrass Area Development District was created in November, 1971 with Jas S. Sekhon as its founding Executive Director. Mr. Sekhon continued to serve in that capacity until his retirement in late 2005.

Under Mr. Sekhon's leadership, the ADD's Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Advisory Committee was formed. The committee got its name from the cabinet within State Government which, about this same time period, changed its name to that of the Natural Resources & Environmental Protection Cabinet. The program areas of the Natural Resources & Environmental Protection Cabinet were intentionally mirrored by Bluegrass ADD's advisory committee's mission statement.

While records are sketchy that far back, the ADD's Natural Resources & Environmental Protection Advisory probably got started about late 1972. No doubt, it operated without bylaws in those early months. The bylaws of the ADD's Natural Resources & Environmental Protection Advisory Committee were formally adopted on April 25, 1974. Guy F. Ormsby, then the county judge of Bourbon County, served as the advisory committee's first chairman. Don Hassall was the original Bluegrass ADD staff liaison to the ADD's Natural Resources & Environmental Protection Advisory Committee, and he remains as staff liaison to this day. Lenny S. Stoltz presently serves as the Executive Director of the Bluegrass ADD, and his leadership extends to the advisory committee level.

Until early 2002, the committee met monthly for almost 30 years. From the writer's recollection, only one meeting was canceled during that time and that was because of a snowstorm during which travel was all but impossible. Because financial support for the operation of the committee was dwindling, meetings changed, in early 2002, from monthly to bi-monthly.

The membership of the ADD's Natural Resources & Environmental Protection Advisory Committee has been very faithful in their attendance over the years. Membership terms are limited to a single year after which all members are "up" for reappointment or appointment by the ADD Board of Directors at its Annual meeting.

Today, the committee has a single member who has served 34 consecutive one-year terms and several others who have served more than 20 consecutive one-year terms. Over the years, the attendance ratio has hovered around 65 to 70 percent from year to year. For members to travel for up to one hour at their own expense to attend a meeting and to serve their community and their region without remuneration speaks volumes about the quality and the character of members who have served on this vital advisory committee over the years.

In many ways, the Bluegrass Area Development District's Natural Resources & Environmental Protection Advisory Committee has been and continues to be considered to be a *blue-ribbon committee*.

Each Bluegrass county has at least one member on the committee. According to the committee bylaws, larger counties are entitled to more representatives. At present, Fayette County is entitled to five representatives; Madison County, three; Boyle County, two; Clark County, two; Franklin County, two; Jessamine County, two; and Scott County, two. There are also up to ten *At Large* memberships on the committee. According to the bylaws of the area development district, the chair of the committee must be a member of the ADD Board of Directors. Invariably, this has meant that a mayor or a county judge-executive has served as committee chair for virtually all of the 34 years of the existence of the committee. For a citizen advisory committee that is now more than one third of a century old, the committee has had a very limited number of chairs. Over the years, chairs have been:

Bourbon County Judge-executive Guy F. Ormsby  
Danville Mayor John W. D. Bowling  
Jessamine County Judge-executive W. Neal Cassity  
Boyle County Judge-executive Tony Wilder  
Anderson County Judge-executive Tommy Cotton  
Harrodsburg Mayor Carol Dean Walters  
Mercer County Judge-executive Charles McGinnis  
and now, Mercer County Judge-executive John Trisler

As stated in the committee bylaws, the topics of interest to the advisory committee are: water, wastewater, water pollution control, air quality, solid waste and solid waste recycling, land use, soil resources, forest resources, agricultural resources, land reclamation, mineral resources, and other related topics. In recent years, the committee has also tried to keep abreast concerning the chemical weapons destruction effort that is finally approaching a construction start in Richmond/Madison County.

The advisory committee reviews local, regional, and statewide projects that come to it through what was formerly called the *A-95 Review Process*. The current name for the review process is the *Kentucky Intergovernmental Review Process*, and the committee reviews what are called KIRPs. This acronym stands for *Kentucky Intergovernmental Review Projects*. Most projects that come through the advisory committee review process are endorsed, but occasionally a project will receive a non-endorsement *or* an endorsement subject to certain conditions being met.

Of course, under the Kentucky Intergovernmental Review Process, the Bluegrass ADD is only one of a number of agencies and organizations that are given the opportunity to comment upon projects seeking funding (loans, grants, or, in rare instances, federal mortgage insurance).

Once the ADD's Natural Resources & Environmental Protection Advisory Committee reviews projects, recommendations concerning the projects are referred to the ADD Board for acceptance (or rejection). The key measuring sticks used are: 1.) whether the project is consistent with local and/or regional plans, and 2.) whether the project is duplicative of some other project or effort. When a project is non-endorsed, the committee is reminded that it must give a substantive reason for its recommendation for non-endorsement. Neither the committee nor the ADD Board necessarily has the *last say*.

During a normal meeting, there is a time for KIRP reviews, a time for old business and new business, a time for special reports, and a time for a guest speaker. Over the years, the topics of guest speakers have run the environmental gamut.

In addition to the committee's efforts to keep informed about environmental issues and the passing along of the more important of that information to the ADD Board of Directors, the committee can look back to issues in which its efforts made a real difference.

Several decades ago, the USDA's Farmers Home Administration had a policy of encouraging and even facilitating the construction of rural subdivisions and multi-family developments *far* from the nearest city and on small building lots and with small diameter water lines and septic tank wastewater treatment. The advisory committee saw this as something that purported to solve one problem (that being the scarcity of affordable housing in rural areas), but the committee also saw this as encouraging sprawl development with inadequate infrastructure. The ADD Board, acting at the advisory committee's recommendation, opposed the USDA efforts. The US Department of Agriculture stopped that program after a few years, but the Bluegrass Region still suffers from some of the problems that USDA policies created, such as premature urbanization, lack of fire protection, chronic septic tank woes, etc.

The advisory committee has consistently encouraged the creation and the faithful operation of local planning commissions. Today, each of the seventeen Bluegrass Area counties has a local planning unit of some kind. In fact, the Bluegrass Area contains almost one half of the local planning commissions presently active within the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Much more recently, the advisory committee took a stand about the ongoing controversy concerning how to solve the regional water supply crisis in Central Kentucky. Kentucky American Water, who had been a prime participant in the emerging Bluegrass Water Supply Commission, decided in March, 2006 that it would move ahead in the direction of solving its own water supply deficit but would do so *apart* from the ten municipalities that make up the regional water commission.

The advisory committee encouraged the ADD Board to take a stand and to publicly encourage Kentucky American Water to “return to the fold” of regional cooperation. Only a few weeks following the ADD Board’s acceptance of the advisory committee’s advice, Kentucky American Water invited the Bluegrass Water Supply Commission to explore with it options that could still lead to an sharing of the equity ownership of water supply infrastructure that would meet the water supply needs of the entire region and not just of Kentucky American Water.

Almost without fail, advisory committee meetings are held at the ADD’s Lexington office at 699 Perimeter Drive, Lexington, beginning at 4:15 p.m. on Wednesdays. Invariably, meetings conclude by about 6 p.m. Rarely, field trips have been planned as a part of a committee meeting, but such “outings” are not the rule.

On months with five Wednesdays, meetings are normally held on the third Wednesday afternoon of the month. On months with four Wednesdays, meetings are normally held on the second Wednesday afternoon of the month. The committee endeavors to meet about two weeks before the ADD Board meets so that the committee’s written report can be included in the packet of materials delivered to members of the Bluegrass ADD Board.

An autobiographical sketch of members of the committee is prepared and distributed to the committee membership near the beginning of each one-year term of the committee. Every effort is made by the ADD staff to encourage friendships among committee members and a feeling of camaraderie among the members. Nametags are furnished members upon their arrival at meetings and members are encouraged to wear their tags that are written in letters large enough to be read from across the meeting room.

Members of the public are welcome at committee meetings. Persons who have an interest in serving as a member of the committee should express that interest privately to the ADD committee liaison, as there are occasional openings on the committee for new members. In a normal year, three to five members go off of the committee and three to five new members join the committee.

For additional information about the work and the workings of the Bluegrass Area Development District’s Natural Resources & Environmental Protection Advisory Committee, contact staff liaison Don Hassall at (859) 269-8021, [dhassall@bgadd.org](mailto:dhassall@bgadd.org) or the ADD’s mailing address at 699 Perimeter Drive, Lexington, Kentucky 40517.