Summary of Environmental Council meeting 5/4/09

Present: Julie Dudrick, Trish St. Leger, Paul Fick, Gavin Leighton, Jessica Graybill, Abby Rowe, John Pumilio, Christov Churchward, Bob Turner, Ian Helfant, Barbara Brooks, Beth Parks

Ian updated us on the willow biomass planting; Paul will check with Mike Jasper about local companies for spraying.

Ian asked John to talk about renaming the Environmental Council as the Sustainability Council and updating us on his first month. John wants us to be conscious about our use of the term “environmental sustainability.” This is not interchangeable with “sustainability.” John prefers that we not talk about environmental sustainability. Sustainability includes environment, economy, and equity; so environmental sustainability is too narrow and, for some people, synonymous with radical environmentalism. Renaming the council isn’t that important but the words we use are. ACUPCC also requires us to name a sustainability committee. That could be us, or the Campus Ecology Group. Trish mentioned that we thought the Environmental Council would serve that role. Others agreed. John pointed out that ACUPCC requires us to have a high-level appointed committee that will get us to a carbon-free campus “as soon as possible.” Ian returned to whether renaming us as Sustainability Council might make sense both for these reasons and for our ability to reach multiple constituencies. If we’re going to do it, it makes sense to do it as quickly as possible. Paul suggested it was time to revisit our charge anyway to make sure that it was consistent with our current vision and plans, as well as the evolution of our membership to include more people. Ian asked John what he thought about the current charge. John argued that it is overly focused on environmental stewardship and could benefit from a broader emphasis on sustainability. Beth pointed out that if we rewrite our charter we need to make sure that we don’t lose the environmental stewardship part. We especially don’t want to get too tied to the ACUPCC. John agreed that too much focus on climate change and greenhouse gas emissions could lead to our ignoring other issues. Ian asked Bob what he thought. Bob answered that he has a slight worry about the term sustainability as being too broad but feels that defining sustainability in the context of John’s three E’s is fine. Jessica agreed and very much liked the 3 E’s definition. Barbara pointed out that communications will be a crucial aspect of this so both our title and our revised charge should convey our main foci and goals to the campus and public at large. Ian suggested that he, John, Trish, and Paul should work on a revision of the charge to bring to the Council in the fall, making sure it has a broad sustainability focus but still retains a focus on environmental sustainability, and also revising it to name the Environmental Council as the group to oversee ACUPCC.

John has been meeting a lot of people in his first few weeks in order to learn who is doing what and how things work. The more he learns the less he knows, he joked, so it will take longer than one might expect. He and Rachel Surprenant have been redoing the sustainability website with a focus on sustainability, not environmental sustainability. It will have an “About” tab with a quick definition of what we mean with a graphic
illustrating the various parts of Colgate that need to be connected. There will be more focus on themes rather than committees and groups. People will be energized by specific topics and can then learn who at Colgate is working on them. Paul wants to make sure that in broadening our vision we don’t lose people who are mostly focused on the environment. Jessica likes the focus on topics since people will get excited. Ian pointed out that environmentalism is changing to have more focus on collaboration. Christov suggested that more specifics about goals will help with student participation. Gavin agreed. John pointed out that environmentalism became eco-elitism but sustainability is a way to avoid this and make true progress.

Ian asked whether John has what he needs to have a successful summer. Should the Environmental Council pay for a second intern? Does he need other things? John thought that a lot of campus education still needs to take place about the purpose of John’s position and our sustainability efforts in general. Meeting with people and groups is crucial and has been very helpful. He needs to continue to meet people. Barbara suggested the Professional Development meeting in the fall as a great way to meet staff. We need to connect our sustainability efforts to the Economic Environment Group and the Presidential search. Jessica suggested making the willow plot central to our communication efforts; she pointed out that the sign at the plot says “keep out!” not “this is what we’re trying to do here.” Beth and Jessica pointed out that the educational component could be a great class project. Julie pointed out that a similar Upstate Institute project had been successful. The Council agreed that there should be a sign advertising the site as the Colgate University Willow Biomass Project. Jessica will write a paragraph for the sign. Paul will check on costing the sign. Barbara pointed out that Communications will be making a video of the willow planting. Ian noted that the Southern Madison Heritage Trust’s signage at the Leland Reserve on Preston Hill Road, which was built by the current SMHT President, is a good model for our own planned sign.

The Council discussed a graduating senior who is interested in working over the summer. There’s a potential project with Physical Plant, in collaboration with John. Paul will work with others to see if it’s possible to define a project that could work. John related his idea for a project about “social marketing” as a way to get people to change their behavior. The educational side of the project would be to look at a text called *Fostering Sustainable Behavior* and try to apply it to Colgate. This could be a good project for this graduating senior. Barbara pointed out that the most successful person to do this kind of project is someone who is outgoing.

Beth suggested that John meet faculty and staff over lunch during the summer. There are also a few events for summer research students that John might be involved in. Jessica suggested a big event in the fall to let John get to know students and *vice versa.*