



Triangle J Council of  
Governments

# Smart Growth Collaborative & Water Resources Collaborative Joint Meeting: Continuing Essential Functions During COVID-19

Thursday, June 11, 2020

2:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Remote meeting – [Webex recording](#)

## Meeting Minutes

### 1. Welcome & Introductions

*TJ Cawley, Morrisville and Lori Bush, Cary - Water Resources Collaborative Co-Chairs*  
*Steve Rao, Morrisville - Smart Growth Collaborative Co-Chair*

TJ Cawley and Steve Rao of Morrisville opened the meeting at 2:05pm.

#### Attendees

Ashely Owenby, City of Mebane  
Hannah Barg, AmeriCorps TJCOG  
Justin Harcum, City of Raleigh Stormwater Division  
Jim Azarelo, City of Durham Stormwater Quality  
Jen Schmitz, TJCOG  
Kaley Huston, TJCOG  
Lindsay Whitson, TJCOG  
Lucas Magrini, V and D Solutions  
Mike Ortosky, Orange County Food and Agriculture / Economic Development  
Ruth Rouse, Orange County Water and Sewer Authority  
Steve Rao, Town of Morrisville  
Zoe Dehmer, Acme Food and Beverage Company  
Martha Paige, Town of Morrisville  
Kathleen Mason, American Rivers  
Lori Bush, Town of Cary  
Nancy Daly, Wake County

### 2. Presentation on Facilitating Food Security

*Zoe Dehmer, Director of Operations & Planning of the Acme Food & Beverage Company*

Zoe shared how she helped start the Carrboro United Food Hub, working with local farms and food organizations to support local restaurants, feed the community and create jobs for restaurant workers.

Acme, a local Carrboro institution since 1998, had to lay off 40 people in March 2020. Staff immediately got to work to launch the Carrboro United Food Hub, to buoy the economic situation of the greater restaurant industry in Carrboro during COVID-19.

The Carrboro United Food Hub provides fresh vegetables, meats from local farmers, and family-sized prepared meals, as well as pantry staples from participating area restaurants.

#### How the Food Hub works:

The Food Hub operates via a contact list where people can preorder food from multiple restaurants on “Hub Days”—Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. They set up a pre-ordered traffic pattern for folks to pick up their orders while minimizing contact.

This business has been able to help employ furloughed hospitality workers and pays a living wage for working the three Hub days per week.

Their website (<https://carrborounited.com/>) was built by the Splinter Group in Carrboro; Zoe developed the logo.

Replicating their model: See <https://carrborounited.com/how-to-create-a-local-food-hub/>

- Groups in Cary and Hillsborough have mimicked the Food Hub
- UNC is currently applying for a grant to do the same for Siler City
- The Food Hub has also received requests for tips from counties around the country
  - US News and World Report, SF Chronicle have also picked up the story
    - Why this is happening: A Food Hub provides a sense of hope and collaboration for a community.

Maya asks: What is the ratio of prepared food vs. grocery items?

- Zoe: About 2/3 is prepared food.

Maya asks: How many employees does the business have?

- Zoe: Not counting the employees who work for the various businesses, they currently employ ~10 people on the Hub days. Zoe and Acme’s business manager are both volunteering their time.
  - One full-time employee who manages Hub days
  - One person does check-in
  - 5-6 people who assist in moving food from refrigerated trucks to peoples’ cars
  - One employee studies IT and coded a program to organize daily order data, so that they can tally their live inventory.

Hannah asks: What is your long-term vision for the project? Are you just intending it as a response to COVID-19, or will this continue after the pandemic ends?

- Zoe: Customers have requested it continue longer-term; she plans to continue it at least through the end of the summer 2020. A lot of people want to continue supporting the business and have the money to do so—there just needs to be a driver.
  - Some other things that would be necessary for a longer-term Food Hub:
    - A space with dedicated parking which allows for the right traffic pattern (not readily available in Carrboro; currently they are using a local high school’s parking lot until it reopens)
    - Dedicated refrigeration trucks--US Foods has been a great partner in providing refrigeration trucks, but their business may change as things reopen

### 3. Preparing for Hurricane Season During COVID-19

*Kaley Huston, Land Use and Transportation Planner II at TJCOG*

FEMA has recently released planning and operational guidance for the 2020 hurricane season during COVID-19 pandemic response. Guidance can also be applied to any disaster operation in the COVID-19 environment, including no-notice incidents, spring flooding, and wildfire seasons.

- An unusually busy hurricane season is forecasted for this year
  - Colorado State University has predicted a high likelihood of at least one Category 3 or higher storm making landfall
- We need to start planning now for the hurricane season
  - COVID-19 has only increased the need to prepare but has slowed our ability to respond
  - COVID-19 hospitalizations are occurring in North Carolina
  - “Disaster fatigue” has taken an emotional toll on Americans
- FEMA’s role:
  - Continue to disburse emergency food and shelter program funding, as well as continuing ongoing programs
  - FEMA’s new [COVID-19 Pandemic Operational Guidance](#) includes provisions for both response and recovery, as well as personal preparedness measures (link includes FEMA webinars on the guidance document)
  - FEMA is adding new virtual programs and remote support as well as adjusting their models:
    - Exploring how hotels could be used as a safer alternative to congregant sheltering (which is where schools/churches are used as shelters for hurricanes)
    - Considering how to safely staff disaster recovery centers as well as survivor assistance centers which help people apply for disaster recovery funding
- Tips for local governments:
  - FEMA likes state/local government to handle disaster response first, and then have FEMA come in and reimburse/respond
    - Consider your staff and technology needs for your local government’s response
      - Consider evacuation planning during stay-at-home orders:
        - There may be fewer volunteers staffing shelters due to COVID
        - People being evacuated may avoid shelters due to COVID
          - Those who do go to shelters may contract COVID there

- Consider how to maximize community input and buy-in for recovery efforts, including the most vulnerable populations
  - Refer to presentation for other questions to consider
- FEMA guidance document includes checklists and resources for local governments and individuals
  - Disaster communication language that can be copied and pasted for your use
  - “Exercise starter kit” –virtual planning workshop to help you prepare for if a major hurricane hit tomorrow, how to return to normal operations
  - Fact sheets regarding a range of COVID-19 topics intersection with hurricanes
  - Conclusion: FEMA is committed to being there for state and local governments with the same level of service as usual.

Steve Rao asks: How could we use data to make better decisions? If the data exists about past hurricane impacts including road closures, other damages; could we use it to predict potential impacts?

- Kaley: Data resources exist but they do not typically exist at the level of behavioral decision-making.

TJ Cawley says: This presentation is very timely. Wake County is the manager for Morrisville’s emergency management. Is anyone from Wake County on the call?

- Nancy Daly: This all happens through the EAC. I can share some of this feedback with the emergency managers there.

Maya asks: This showcases the need for smart stormwater/stream sensors, doesn’t it?

- TJ: We have one sensor at Cedar Fork Park.
- Lori Bush: We could talk about a regional partnership to potentially get additional sensors for Morrisville
  - Nancy: Wake County is participating in this project as well.

TJ asks: Are there any plans to do a scenario exercise at the regional level?

- Kaley will find out

Ashley Ownbey asks: Connecting this presentation with the first, Kaley, have you seen anything related to personal preparedness and food security given experiences during the pandemic?

- Kaley: Not specifically; but County Emergency Operations Center are already staffed up and Wake County Emergency Operations Center has shared resources related to COVID and food security.

#### **4. Questions & Open Discussion**

*Have you experienced, or do you think there is opportunity for, intergovernmental or regional collaboration to help streamline any process(es) (if so, which processes)? Are there ways that TJCOG could help to increase your resilience and ability to provide essential services?*

Lori says: Budgets have created a significant loss of budget for all local governments; not sure of the solution

Steve says: TJCOG is doing great work already; now more than ever, regional collaboration is important

Steve says: The significant disruption in NCDOT means we must work together to figure out how to maintain the transportation system we need across the state

- TJ Cawley suggests that Triangle Clean Cities could use its regional leverage to implement more car charging stations at scale or offsite solar farm collective.
- TJ asks: Do sustainability coordinators coordinate across communities? Morrisville is about to hire one.

Lori says: Cary is voting tonight on including \$765,000 in a watershed protection fund, stemming from the One Water work. We had planned a 2% rate increase but are pushing it off for a future year because we did rate smoothing. We are waiting for the lead for the JLOW group on this.

*Were there rate or fee increases proposed for new initiatives that have now been tabled? If so, are you coming up with creative, alternative ways to accomplish your work?*

Ruth says: OWASA was planning on a 5% rate increase this year and scrambled to get it down to zero. That will involve delaying some of our capital improvement projects.

- TJ says: Morrisville is also putting a hold on CIP for a year.

*How is your organization approaching maintaining/increasing access to essential services as COVID-19 impacts continue to highlight pre-existing inequalities?*

TJ says: The Western Region Food Security Network has been providing summer meals for years and has scaled their program so that anyone can get lunch and some dinners on any day of the week. The county made this possible with nonprofit and church partners.

Lori says: Cary is not cutting off anyone's water or utilities

- Maya: How long is this projected to go on?
- Lori: It is unclear how long this will be able to go on; Cary has projected lower utility revenues, so are taking it month by month.
- Ruth says: OWASA has also not determined how long they will continue this or whether it would continue beyond the Governor's order. Water sales are down as UNC is a big customer and revenue is down due to both this and nonpayment.

TJ says: A lot of people say it is a social justice issue and should always be the case, which puts you guys in a really difficult spot.

Ruth says: We cannot waive someone's bills, the way the statute is written; however we partner with the interfaith council in Carrboro to get funds to people who need it through our "Care to Share" program.

- TJ says: In Cary, Apex and Morrisville, we have Dorcas Ministries that serves a similar function.
- Another thing about delayed water fees: We expect to recoup them later; even though they are short now.
- Maya: Can you share more about the Care to Share program?

- Ruth: Customers can round up their bills, do one-time donations, or monthly donations to help cover the bills of those who cannot pay. We did a big push before last Thanksgiving to promote this program as well as a week during COVID to increase their monthly donations through that campaign.
- Maya: How common is this kind of program?
- Ruth: I think it is becoming more common but am not sure who else is doing it locally. If you want more specifics and numbers, Mary Tiger is the go-to person to ask.

Lindsay asks: What are local governments doing regarding broadband?

- Lori: In Cary we have 99% coverage (Google Fiber) so this has not been an issue
- TJ: Morrisville is also fortunate to have excellent coverage; currently trying to provide WIFI in parks
  - NC League of Municipalities is doing a lot of work on the topic

Lori says: Cary is continuing working with Biobot to test for COVID-19 in wastewater; previously had been using this company to test for opioids. Through COVID testing in wastewater, we have been able to observe spikes before they happened. We will be continuing this if it stays in the budget for next year.

- TJ: At what level are they able to track this? This is new to Morrisville.
- Lori: Our partnership with Wake County public health at sewer intakes can detect COVID levels in a swimming-pool sized area. This data can help with contact tracing and testing.
- TJ: Do you use this data at the municipal or does just Wake County use it?
- Lori: It's more of a public health response in partnership with Wake County: <https://www.northcarolinahealthnews.org/2020/06/09/if-the-coronavirus-rebounds-cary-could-be-the-first-to-know/>
  - TJ asks: Whatever we can do for Morrisville be at this table, to use this data for our citizens, since you're controlling our sewers, would be good.
- TJ says: This might be an opportunity for TJCOG to help member governments learn more about contact tracing, to be a repository to share expertise since that is the next step if we want to stay ahead of the curve. Since NC is on the wrong side of metrics right now, anything we can do to make sure more people are aware of how we can actively support contact tracing will be important.
- TJ recently completed a comprehensive course on Contact Tracing which included specific information about COVID-19, communication strategies and several other topics. It does take a few hours but he found it very helpful as contact tracing will be an important part of upcoming phases of our reconnect Morrisville efforts in collaborative partnership with Wake County. Course description: "Learn the basics of contact tracing, with curriculum by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Health. This course is free courtesy of Bloomberg Philanthropies." <https://www.coursera.org/promo/covid-19-contact-tracing>
- TJ asks whether Wake County is implementing mask requirements, as Durham and Orange county have been doing?
  - Nancy has no updates

*What policies and/or practices have you had to create or implement because of COVID-19 that you imagine will be here to stay?*

TJ says: Many more virtual meetings; sometimes this is positive because it enables wider engagement from people who live further away

- A future CWEP meeting could involve a hybrid in-person and virtual meeting

Steve says: How can we improve virtual community engagement and connection?

- Maya: Various initiatives are exploring this; online as well as individual, app-based outdoor efforts, or in-person, outdoor, socially distant engagement

Steve: how will this affect globalization vs localization of economic development? We do not have an answer, but we're seeing a trend towards localization due to remote work.

## 5. Closing

Lori asks: What is the status of JLOW?

- Jen: The workgroups have been working towards goal of having draft recommendations by end of summer or fall, with final recommendations to be provided to by the end of the year.

Potential topics for the next meeting are to be determined: TJCOG will email the group.

- Hannah Barg volunteered to present about her work with youth on climate and hurricane resilience: <https://ie.unc.edu/yes-resilience/>

The Co-Chairs adjourned the meeting at 4pm.

### 2020 Meeting Schedule

All meetings will be held 2-4pm via TJCOG Webex or at TJCOG.

- **Thursday, September 10th** - Joint Smart Growth & Water Resources Collaborative meeting (Topic TBD)
- **Thursday, December 10th** - Joint Smart Growth & Water Resources Collaborative meeting (Topic TBD)