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State of Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (802) 828-1294  
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2 [ANR.CivilRights@vermont.gov](mailto:ANR.CivilRights@vermont.gov)  
Montpelier, VT 05620-3101

November 15, 2024

Dear Environmental Justice Advisory Council members,

Since beginning our work with you all a short eight months ago, we as Environmental Justice (EJ) Coordinators have been aware that there are tangible ways we could improve your experience as Advisory Council (AC) members. Our goal has been to ensure you all see that your contributions to this work are valuable and necessary. We want to offer you these thoughts to close out this year and usher us into the next. We write this letter to acknowledge the ways we have made efforts to improve your experience and ways that we as a collective can work together to continue progressing in this work.

### **Improving Your Experience.**

From our first meetings with you in April to now, we have taken note of the many ideas you all have shared to mitigate the barriers you face to participating in the implementation of the Vermont EJ Law. Here are a few pieces of feedback we've heard and ways we've tried to incorporate them in our work with you:

#### **1. Advanced notice of public meeting dates.**

One of the first pieces of feedback we heard from you all is that you would benefit from having advanced notice of public meeting dates. To address this, we reached out to you all in June to assess your availability for monthly meetings. It was through your responses to the availability surveys that we established meeting times for August through November where a majority of you stated you were available. We aspire to schedule next year's public meetings even further in advance to continue to address this need.

#### **2. Alternative methods of contact.**

We understand that staying in contact with us through your partner emails has posed a challenge for many of you. For many of you, email is not your preferred method of communication. For this reason, we have contacted you all through both your partner and personal emails regarding public meeting logistics. We have also made it part of our routine to call or text some of you to update you on the latest information from our

team. For next year, we will continue to identify the best methods of cultivating our relationships with you.

### **3. Alternative ways of contributing.**

We know that sometimes life gets in the way and attending a public meeting is not possible. We have heard from you all that, even when you are not able to attend a meeting, you would like to contribute in some way. For this reason, we have made it part of our routine to list discussion questions in meeting agendas and to offer you all the opportunity to email us your thoughts. Additionally, we have tried other asynchronous ways of collecting your responses such as Microsoft Forms, Menti-meters, or Doodle Polls. We are continuously assessing options for making contributing to this work easier for folks.

### **4. Varied public meeting locations.**

Another piece of feedback that we've received from you all is that you would benefit from more varied meeting locations. In-person attendance at public meetings is crucial for developing relationships and building trust. To address this lack of variety, we reached out to you all in August for suggestions on meeting locations that would suit your needs. We received one response which suggested Middlebury or Rutland as doable alternative locations. This year, our team was in contact with Community College of Vermont to schedule meetings at their Middlebury and/or Rutland locations, but the logistics did not pan out in time. It is our intention to get more varied meeting locations in advance for our 2025 meeting dates.

### **5. Engagement with the communities you represent.**

We've received feedback from many of you that you would like to engage more with community members to hear their needs. This is a crucial and fulfilling part of your work that we recognize has not been easy to do. To support this, our team reached out to a community partner in September to begin planning a listening session with residents of Bennington -- a community that is disproportionately exposed to environmental inequities. After making you all aware of this potential listening session, we received feedback that Bennington was a big ask for folks due to how far away it is. Between this feedback and some logistical obstacles, we had to cancel this potential listening session. We plan to schedule more events like this in the next year, and we want to support you all in cultivating your connections with your community in other ways.

From the items listed above, we hope that you can all see that, as new EJ Coordinators, we have done our best to establish new habits and norms that respond directly to your needs. We acknowledge that there is room for improvement, and we are committed to



continue to do better as we mature in these positions. Despite these efforts, the AC is struggling to meet quorum and move through crucial decision-making points.

The implementation of the Vermont EJ Law requires your attendance and participation in our public meetings to meet quorum and achieve our responsibilities under the Law. As AC members, your participation in this work is necessary to ensure that the products of the Law reflect the wants, needs, and perspectives of those most affected by environmental injustice. It is important to us that this work is not led by assumptions about community needs, but rather is informed by community itself.

We believe that the Vermont EJ Law will have a positive impact on the quality of life of Vermonters. To make that positive impact, it is necessary for us to collectively assess how we are going to work together to continue progressing in this work.

Sincerely,

Kim Barrett and Juliet Birch

Environmental Justice Coordinators

Vermont Agency of Natural Resources