Transcript

July 14, 2025, 8:43PM

Birch, Juliet started transcription

Kim Barrett 0:03
Well, sometimes too much boundaries.
You guys wanna start?

Bill Conley (public)
Yeah, sure.

Kim Barrett
OK.

Rich Holschuh
Did I hear you say earlier?
Just a minute ago, when I was in there, not to interrupt, I apologize.
When you asked about the environmental justice rules,

Bill Conley (public)
yeah.

Rich Holschuh
And these folks roles.
As administrators, somebody said you created it yourself.

Juliet Birch
No, say that no the law created.
Our role, I think, is probably what you heard, yeah.
Overheard.

Rich Holschuh
OK.

Juliet Birch
Yeah, that would be cool.

Rich Holschuh
No, I I I'm not gonna say I appreciate that.
Yeah, sorry about that.

Kim Barrett
So we're gonna record, but just the transcript.
So yes, you're here to talk about the environmental benefits spending guidance.
Long term, thank you for being here.
So the purpose of the meeting is to increase transparency of the environmental benefits spending guidance, also known as evsg, and then also the Vermont, EJ Law and transparency.
Is an important part of this process.
So I'm gonna be recognized if this is super technical. So this is just one way that the law is supporting you. You all don't want.
We're gonna gather oral comments regarding the evsg share information. If you'd like about the public comment period and then also talk about the next meeting just for your awareness.
Guidelines. So all speakers will be provided A 2 minute time limit.
You all will have way more than that.
And then you can provide your name.
Just your first name if you like or affiliation if you have one.
You'll get an opportunity to give all comments and the comments must pertain to ebsg or the Law.
And then we're gonna produce a responsiveness summary, which we'll share.
And that document will kind of go over our responses to the calls.

Juliet Birch
Yeah. So something that I mentioned to you before, Bill.
Bill. Yeah.
Is that we're like, we want to have a dialogue and a conversation also knowing that what we're going to talk about is a draft document that we're not. We don't have all

the answers on just yet, which is why we're here talking to you. And so we as.
An R staff are happy to respond to any like clarifying questions or talk through any concepts that.
You know, are things that we're 100% on.
And will, as Kim mentioned, we'll respond to anything that's like substantive that we still are learning about through the responsiveness summary.
You can also submit written comments.
I'll pass you this flyer here if you're interested in writing a comment after this meeting.
Or if you wanna share it with anybody, that QR code will lead you to our Microsoft form online where you can type something up.
If this was a.
Virtual meeting or hybrid meeting? We would have a teams chat.
This isn't really applicable here, but.
The previous team chats have been public record.

Kim Barrett
Here's a schedule doesn't apply.
Different meeting, but essentially we're gonna go through different like we're gonna provide some introductory information and then we'll have public comment.
After and then we'll keep doing that.
And then you could just have the the floor.
Let's start an overview of the Vermont EJ Law, also known as Act 154 of 2022.
It's Vermont's first law focused on fixing environmental health gaps, works to ensure every person, no matter their race, income, language.
Or background is protected from environmental harm.
All Vermonters benefit from this law, and it also recognizes that some communities face more environmental burdens and fewer environmental benefits.
So the law is about trying to right that.
Disproportionate reality.

Juliet Birch
So there's a lot of different folks who are involved in the Vermont environmental justice law.
First and foremost, we have the public.

Folks like you inform everything that we have to do as public servants, especially in the implementation of this law.
And then there's the environmental Justice Advisory Council and the Interagency Environmental Justice Committee.

Bill Conley
So you're on that?

Rich Holschuh
Two member of the Advisory Council, as a representative for the record rich Holshow.
To a member of the Justice that EJ Advisory Council and a representative for the Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs.
So that I've I've heard most of this.

Juliet Birch
So the Advisory Board of Yup. So the Advisory Council including Rich is made-up of 11 folks.
There, there's ten folks who are, you know, representatives from communities across Vermont who are disproportionately impacted by.
Environmental disparities of some kind.
And then there's also the 11th members of person from the Office of Racial Equity, which is a state office.
And then we have the interagency Environmental Justice Committee, which is kind of goes in tandem with the Advisory Council.
They are made-up of one representative from every agency that.
Is put in the law as someone who needs to implement the law, the agency of Natural Resources is one of them, but there's also folks like Agency of Education, Agency of Transportation. We have a slide that'll show the full list.
And then the Interagency Committee also actually includes the Office of Racial Equity.
So there's kind of like a dual seat there and these two folks that are two groups are the ones that are the advisory bodies for the law.
So whenever there's any sort of like decision making that needs to occur in the

implementation of the law, it's we, we first and foremost it it's it's founded in the consultation of those two groups.

Bill Conley
That's very uh.

Rich Holshuh
These folks are the ones that are carrying doing all the work. Yeah, carrying it forward.
We're just pretty faces.

Bill Conley
It's pretty well thought.

Juliet Birch
Get out here, rich.

Bill Conley
Pretty robust.
Kind.
Structural.
'Cause that's what I was gonna ask about education. 'cause. I'm a teacher. Yeah. So, yeah, great.

Juliet Birch
Yeah. So that next bullet, the covered agencies, that's what we'll refer to throughout what we're talking about this as the groups, the, the different agencies that have to implement the law.
So each covered agency as a representative in the Interagency committee and then the natural, the Agency of Natural Resources, is listed separately because.
We are employees of the Agency of Natural Resources.
And we were kind of our role was created under the law to facilitate these conversations, coordinate the implementation of the law and we also as an agency, are the leads in providing technical assistance.
In in the implementation of the law.

And then finally, there's the legislature.
They wrote the law.
They're very important, very, very important, of course.

Rich Holschuh
Go ahead, bill.

Bill Conley
Can I ask?
Like, how did how did? Did it start in the legislature and then work its way through committee and then?
You know and then get passed on.
The governor signed it.
Do you know anything about that history?

Kim Barrett
Yeah. So it's still unclear to me, but that's also because Juliet and I started a year and a half ago and there were two different EJ coordinators that were closer kind of to the beginning of the invitation.
So yeah, we don't have all the details.

Juliet Birch
Yeah, my my understanding is that there were some folks who were involved in the Vermont Law School who?
Were kind of involved in the initial drafting of the law, and then it was brought to the legislature and went forward.
From there, but the kind of legislative record is, I don't think either of us were very familiar with it.

Rich Holschuh
I have a but is it OK that we interject here?

Juliet Birch
100%

Rich Holschuh
Yeah, we're not waiting until public comment.

Juliet Birch
No, no.

Rich Holschuh
I don't think this has come up.
I'm very much a contacts person.
Yeah, I need to understand.
Who this fits in with the big picture?
Vermont's a tiny state.
And we do good things here.
But they only carry so far. Given that I don't know if somebody has to start.
Can you contextualize Vermont's environmental justice law relative to what is happening in the rest of the country?
Where is this in the larger movement? If there is one?
How far have people gotten with it? Things like that.

Kim Barrett
It's a great question.
Do you think I could?
Kind of marry on that.
Yeah, especially after he used to be the presentation. I think even when we get to the the foundational concepts that would help. Mm-hmm. And maybe it's a question we all can answer, but.
Yeah. Yeah, it's a really good question.

Rich Holschuh
That's really especially with us a feeling for like how it's work that needs to be done.
It's long overdue.
It's getting done right in our in the best way possible.

Juliet Birch
right?

Rich Holschuh
Since it's kind of new stuff.
And I would.
But how effective is it going to be in the big picture, right?
Especially because of how much crutony.

Juliet Birch
Yeah, especially as of late with the amount of scrutiny that's gone into this work.
It that's a big question, yeah.

Rich Holschuh
I mean, being watched.

Kim Barrett
Yeah, I think that we can.
We're small enough, though, as a state I feel like we could model some things.

Rich Holschuh
Small about modeling, yeah, yeah.
Thank you.

Juliet Birch
So these are all the agencies just for your reference that are involved in the law.
So Agency of Natural Resources, transportation, Ed.
But there's also a couple of other folks who are not in a full agency, but they were written under the law.
We still refer to them as covered agencies, but you know the public Utility Commission, Department of Public Service, Department of Public Safety, so these are the folks who are implementing the EJ law.

Bill Conley
Just had dinner last night with.
Oh, cool, yeah.
I'll talk to him about it too.

Juliet Birch
Yeah, yeah. Health is a big one under environmental justice.
So we're glad to have the folks from VDH.

Rich Holschuh
So each of these agencies has got like a point person stand person. Yep. Yeah. The rest of the agency might not know anything about it.

Juliet Birch
And that is very true.
That is very true of a, you know, share with your friend.

Kim Barrett
But that's important too, because also the representatives who make up the Interagency committee, you know, they're trying to facilitate and also coordinate across their agency or department.
So this is really where the Community piece comes in.
Yeah.
OK.
So how does the law work?
It intends to identify where like the locations or regions the communities with the greatest environmental needs are located.
It creates tools and guidance to help agencies act in our fairly and wonderful is the environmental benefit spending guidance which the law asks us to consult with Vijay Advisory Council.
And also asks the Interagency Committee to inform as well.
And then requires public reporting.
So the purpose of this environmental benefit spending guidance?
Is to see all of the covered agencies up to report on the investments that support their environmental benefits, like getting to the communities that they need to be.
And I think we've actually been talking a lot with.
Someone from agency of education about what that actually means, you know, and then also involves the public at key points like this.

Now we're gonna talk about some foundational concepts. You know, in the law, but also in the guidance.

Rich Holschuh
Excuse me.
I swallowed rock.

Kim Barrett
To the environment here, describing those as characteristics.
It could be physical, social or cultural of the spaces where we where it can play.
You OK, rich? OK.
Thank you. Feels the worst.
Yeah. Oh my gosh.
Yeah. So environmental justice, that concept of you know, we all have a right to live, work and play and.
Healthy environments and thrive.
And then environmental benefit, we're describing that as things that increase individual and community well-being in the spaces where we live, work and play. So because there are so many different covered agencies, the different types of benefits are vast.
So it could be safe housing, nutritious food, clean water, clean classrooms, things like that.
Investments. We're describing them as commitment of resources like money and time.
So one example which Rich actually helped us strengthen this part of the presentation, but one example we are going to think of for the environment is tightening trees or like trees in general and our agency does a lot of that.
And so the environmental benefit of trees helps us breathe.
We provide shade all of those community.
Things that create community well-being and then the investments, there's a lot of commitments and resources that go into that like buying the trees and figuring out where to put them, any staff time to plant them and all.
So that's the framework that we're using the portfolios.

Juliet Birch
So then the big question for you probably is, well, what are you talking about guidance?
You've been mentioning it.
This is where we can talk about that a little bit more in depth. The environmental benefits spending guidance, which is what this public comment period is on is a document that really will explain how agencies approach their baseline spending report as it's put in the law. So what?
The heck is that?
A baseline spending report is gonna be something that agencies are gonna make.
To explain about the investments that they make towards environmental benefits.
Where they are most needed.
So this specific report is going to be the first in a line of reports that will go out perpetually. This first one is gonna be kind of like we're looking three years back in all of the investments that agencies have made in the past three years to figure.
Out how proportionate are those investments towards?
Communities, when it comes to environmental benefits and then from there they will enter into annual reporting where they can start checking on. OK, I'm making changes to the proportionality here. How is it?
How is it turning out so that annual reporting would only be like looking a year back, kind of as a annual check in if that makes sense?
And then the third concept here is is proportionate.
What do we mean when we talk about proportionate and achieving proportionality?
There's a lot of things that kind of go into this.
The question of what proportionality is, and we're still talking about it with the Advisory Council and Interagency committee, and just within each covered agency, what does proportionality look like? But in general, we would describe it as an equitable share of environmental benefits based on need.
So after covered agencies finish, those baseline spending reports, they will work to make their investments more proportionate.
And then what we have listed here is just the.
Language in the law of like where?
Where it's asking us to kind of achieve proportionality, rich.

Rich Holschuh
Can I bring up something on the point #2 there baseline spending report agencies will submit reports.
Planning about their investments that create benefits where they are most needed.
It begs the question, how do they know where they're most needed?
That brings up another tool, the mapping tool. Yep.
They can't make it credible. Comparison of what they're spending, if they don't know what they're being measured against.
And that's a whole nother thing.
And then Bill may not know about

Bill Conley
well the obvious.
Yeah, that question was.
What's the criteria, right?
Yeah, right.
Yeah. And then how is it monitored and how is it?
Evaluated, you know?

Juliet Birch
Yeah. Yeah, that's a really good question.
It's kind of like the 30 for 30 by 30.

Rich Holschuh
Yeah, exactly 59, right?

Bill Conley
How is that going to be?
How's it going to be achieved?
How's it going to be monitored?

Rich Holschuh
Yeah. You know, I'm like, I'm really into.
Oh boy, I'm really invested things.
I'm so really. Yeah. So.

Kim Barrett
Yeah. Anyway, yeah.
Well, yeah. So many pieces and parts of that.
But the one does talk about going down to the census block level and also it mentions the municipal level.
And also we understand that in Vermont specifically like that doesn't really capture where the greatest need would be.
Then it you know the other issue is other states. Have you know no state is perfect.
But there are other states that have access to more reliable data around this.
But because we're so small, there isn't any like casual place to get all the data and then also because we are so small, there's even for me like a higher risk of privacy concerns as well when we start to identify.
You know, so these are all the hard hitting questions?
And ultimately like, especially with the mapping tool, it's gonna require a lot of community involvement to get the data. And I think one thing that I would like to make sure is on everyone's radar is that we're also gonna have to intentionally.
Legitimize, like.
More widely legitimized anecdotal data and qualitative data.
In the context of where we are nationally and the context of people you know already wanting to rely on quantitative information which which supports a lot of systems of oppression that are built on knowing that, the more we don't have access to the accurate information in number form.
Than you know.
Get further perpetuates that attack on our work so you know it's just really simple stuff. But.

Bill Conley
Not nothing too complex.

Kim Barrett
It's not really so.

Juliet Birch
Go ahead.

Kim Barrett
No, I was just gonna say so.
The lot. There is a nice framework in the law and I think that all these little, all these big idiosyncrasies, that isn't necessarily, you know, considered in terms of the timeline, but everyone's doing their best.
Yeah. Thank you.
Were you gonna say something too?

Rich Holschuh
What I think so, OK.
I'll just.
No no's to anybody here. The state of Vermont or Small State will try and do a lot with a little and in the in the couple of years prior to this on Earth to the last two, the state of Vermont passed a whole lot of very pro.
Initiatives.
In times seemed optimistic and and budgets were flush and it now we're now we're looking at implementing them under very different conditions, both fiscally and politically.
Yes, so there was.
There was serious headwinds and but the obligations are there and you know these, they're trying to do it.
I mean, we have a hard time just getting people to come to our meetings.
Everybody's like whatever.
Like other things to do.
It's. It's hard. Yeah. All right.
But it doesn't mean it's not worth doing.
Because it perpetuates itself.
It's kind of just said.
We've only got so much to work with, and that's pretty deep.
Please log on.

Juliet Birch
Yeah. And I will say like so when we created this presentation, it was under the assumption that, you know, we might have a couple more people at these meetings

and would need to be more thoughtful about how we ebb and flow time.
And so we wanted to keep the concepts really like.
Simple and focused on this particular deliverable.
But as Rich brought up.
There's a several things that the law asks us to do, not just this guidance, and they all kind of overlap with this timeline, like this timeline is really just showing us. Here's what the guidance is going to do for your understanding.
And it it is.
It's just very interesting.
So like the mapping tool for example, is going to be finished around the beginning of.
2027 but that's a tool that's going to help us figure out what does Vermont look like?
In terms of need and so just bearing in mind like that's kind of how it fits into this picture.
So there's other stuff too.

Rich Holschuh
Carts in front of the horse.
We don't.
We don't even have the data yet.
And you're asking for board on it.
You have to move on.

Kim Barrett
Yeah, the the other thing that's actually helpful about that is that means that before this other data is available, we already have people thinking about it and aren't developing the systems.
You know, figuring out the coding.
And all this other stuff so that when we get that data, there's not gonna be a change, you know.
But at least it's not.
Oh my God, there's all this data, and let's figure out how to do this.
You know what I mean? 'cause the guidance is general enough that.
Yeah, anyway.

Bill Conley
Yeah, has been spending done right? Mm-hmm. Since the implementation of the bill.

Juliet Birch
Yeah. I mean, even before the the the bill was passed, I mean, our agencies have been.
Investing in environmental benefits since the dawn of the agency, and it's just a matter of acknowledging that that's the case and figuring out.
Is that spending proportionate?
Are we being thoughtful about?
Thoughtful about who gets the most versus who's not.
Maybe not getting as much as they need.
Yeah.

Bill Conley
So does the law.
The law really facilitates that.
That happened. Yeah. Prior to the existence of the law, was less.
Less considerate about that aspect of spending from environmental benefit or sent accurate data.

Kim Barrett
I would say it's it's like the the framework, the conceptual framework.
Wasn't necessarily like widely held across all these coverage, so I feel like that's the helpful thing.
Is that all of these high level concepts that we talked about? We also have to get bring all the agencies up to speed.
To kind of get there. So yeah.
Questions. Are we good to move to the next one? OK.
OK.
So what is the EDSG?
It clarifies how agencies assess and report on environmental benefits, which means it creates this like.
Procedure or or a high level framework of how you would do it.
It recognizes the need for environmental justice.

It provides flexible guidance so that all of the covered agencies can use it, explains the law's intent.
And offers minimum standards and then also supports the other vertical mandates over time.
So what doesn't the evsg do?
It does not decide where the money goes, like which specific environmental benefits like those are things that each individual agency's gonna have to look on based on their reports, does not direct how dollars are spent, does not override agency budget processes and does not make changes to.
Right.
This is where we would break for public comment, but wondering if you have any additional thoughts so far that you want to share, or even any thoughts you might have on implementing.

Bill Conley
So it occurs to me that.
I I like to write letters to the editor even though as I do that I realize there aren't that many that read the newspaper anymore.
And I'm like, OK, am I really having any impact? But it occurs to me that you know, way more people should know about this and probably do you know.
And you know, I think to the extent.
That people are committed to any kind of justice.
If they don't have a place in.
Their, you know, their consciousness about how people suffer from environmental.
Problems usually.
The you know lower income people, people, taller

Rich Holschuh
people without a voice.

Bill Conley
People without voice.
It's suggest to me too that there are people that are really passionate about social justice.
But may not.

Put the environment in together with that.
That's just.
My hat, whereas I I I've sort of always.
I've always been interested in social justice since when I was a kid.
Did and and then environmental awareness and you know.
Importance of.
Our our connection to the Earth has always been important, so to me it's always been linked, you know.
But I'm not sure.
So I and I'm in.
I'm an educator, so that's on my mind. You know, works like, how can we educate people to make those connections?
Actions more more clearly.
So one way is that I tend to do public. I can do it in school.
But to have a bigger impact, I I like to write letters to the editor.
Do you know about this?
You should be.
You know, that kind of thing, right?
So anyway.
OK. Umm.

Rich Holschuh
Nothing new for me.
Phil brings up a good point there.
The environmental justice is kind of little known concept for a lot of folks. Some people heard very much about it.
And and it doesn't come off social justice discussions right that often.
And the the point that I continually bring up and I I am going to respond to your e-mail.
Hands off eccentricity.
This is a social justice law.
This is not about the environment.
And that's.
Glaring mission to me.
This may not be the organ to carry that forward.

But we need to be paying attention to that. This is about the effect of legal decisions on people and people living on places and not about anybody else other than.
Right, right.
Which we need to pay attention to.
It's as you treat the environment and treat people.
And vice versa.

Bill Conley
Yeah. And then my mind goes to I go.
I go locally I think about.
Where might be.
Where might people be living locally where?
A degraded environment has a direct impact on their on their health.
Mm-hmm. You know.
And I just like couple of examples pop up in my mind.

Rich Holschuh
Yeah, that's what the membership on the Advisory Council is supposed to.
Encompass to the degree it can and and like one of those very significant ones is mobile home parks.

Bill Conley
Yeah, right.

Rich Holschuh
Yeah, they are highly vulnerable.
Yeah, yeah. And nobody cares.
I mean, people care, but people, they they're in the corner of town.
They're like, oh, I forgot about that. That's right.

Kim Barrett
Yeah, we can drive past really drive past.

Rich Holschuh
Yeah, this is so bad. People fly over.
Yeah, yeah, zone.

Juliet Birch
Yeah. We also have a representative who represents, like food security communities.
And I think that that's also something that I that.
Gets widely overlooked as well.

Bill Conley
So I thought it was also very useful that that last slide you put up that it doesn't do these things, yeah.
So then, but it does raise the question of all right, so.
So each agency that has its budget.
Basically proceeds with their budget priorities.
I guess it's and then they report, right?
So basically they're just saying.
We're reporting under this the evsg.
To because now we have to, right.
Yeah. And we have.
We have a new set of.
Things for us to report on.
But essentially, we're not changing any of our core functions, right?
Is that am I accurate?

Juliet Birch
Did you bring us to the timeline slide again?
Thank you.
So that one slide that we had shown you that had the bullet about the ebsg and then the baseline report and then proportionality.
This third thing on the timeline here that says establish a goal of proportionate investment, that's kind of a it's it's not as concrete as some of these other deliverables that we see in the law.
Like, here's a physical document.
Here's a physical report, but this thing here asks each agency to make a goal.

All that is achievable and to work towards achieving that goal of proportionately investing their money towards environmental benefits and so while the the guidance document that we're talking about today.
Can't.
Tell agencies how to change their budgets.
That's something the agencies are going to have to assess for themselves based off of their reports.
The spirit of the law and this deliverable in the law is inherently saying you're going to have to change.
Change your budgeting to an extent in order to achieve that proportionality.
Does that make sense?

Bill Conley
Yeah, it does. So that, let's say.
In 26 issues, they are spending more and then is there, is that what the advisor is there like an evaluative body that says, oh, that's interesting.
Yeah, he seemed to be.
Yeah, you know, I I guess I always wonder about.
You issue your report.
I had to write a report from my district.
About what?
What we do to meet federal guidelines for our English learners.
And.
The person at AOE said.
You know, you got to make sure that that report that you just finished doesn't just sit in a file.
It's a living document that everybody has to, you know, basically you're saying this is what you do.
Are you doing it right?
So yeah, and that's what I'm worried about.
Is that?
Yeah, you know, it's just gonna sit in the file.
Mm-hmm. And the Superintendent and the assistant Superintendent won't know, right?
Even though I've written all the stuff about how it needs to be, you know.

Distributed across schools and across administration and all that. Right. Worried that because the student population of multilingual learners.
People just don't get what they need, you know.
But they don't understand.
So, like, Oh yeah, you take care of them, right?
So I think about do those reports just sort of right?
Get shelled.
Yeah, which, you know, can happen in any any bureaucracy, right?

Kim Barrett
The those are really great thoughts and.
I think what's helpful is that all of the questions you all are answering I think can actually be turned into.
Like different revisions to certain parts of the document to make things certain things more clear.
What I also realize is there's a lot of context like you said, that we're discussing in this conversation about the future.
That I think would be helpful.
So thank you for that.
Earlier you mentioned and what are the thresholds?
It's under the law that you know that we use to say this is an area with greater need.
You name the third one, which is folks who speak languages other than English.
So there's a big.
Understanding that those groups aren't really supported in the ways that they need.
And then there is a question that you have asked.
Yeah, just like what?
What mechanisms under the law ensure that?
Reports don't just sit there.
And this is where I feel like, especially the Advisory Council could play a really important role because also the anthropic centrism keeps.
I feel like it's part of that is.
Helping the legislature understand that too. You know what I mean?
And also helping the legislature understand what you just said, which is how do we make sure that things move forward and actively support at least like from the public's perspective like?

Right. You know, there isn't a public comment period for folks to look at the reports and then also what will what?
Form will the reports take you look like you know, right?
Maybe there's an internal one, but maybe the external one to the state looks has the same information, but is, you know, like there's no set requirements for that.
So I think that this is a great place for us to look at. What are the ways that we can leverage the AC but also?

Bill Conley
The boy again.
Yeah, yeah. 'cause it's it's tough in any, you know, you like. I work in a school system and it's small, but it's still a big rock. It's.
And there's one there are five different schools.
And each is a culture onto itself, right? And a silo unto itself, right. And my job is to go to those different schools.
But I see how difficult it can be, even in a small system, just to get communication going.
To serve a particular population absolutely, you know, it's not easy even in a small system, you know.
So I mean, I think this is fantastic.
Yeah, but it's wow.
I don't tell you.
I'm sure you know it's challenging.

Juliet Birch
We know.

Rich Holschuh
So the bottom line is there's no solid answer to that.
At query at once.
These reports are compiled.
Who reviews them? So are they.
Are they internally self reviewed self-assessment?

Kim Barrett
Yeah, these will be looked at and and actually like folks are already starting to build their report. It's going to have to be.
Something like so the report, you know, February 15, 2026. Some folks in our agency are already talking about, OK, like when we submit that report, what can we do now to make next year's, you know what I mean? Because this is like a pilot for.
Me.

Rich Holschuh
That's only seven months away.

Kim Barrett
But exactly.
It's true though.
But externally, though, that's the case that you're saying it's like.
How do folks also get to view those reports and keep up with it and understand that?
Figure out how to advocate for themselves.
Ask more questions.

Juliet Birch
Yeah. The other element here.
Again, we tried.
We wanted to keep this really simple, but there are other.
Deliverables that kind of come after July 2026 related to this work and one of them is that our agency is the lead agency under the law, is tasked with creating.
Like a report summary, which we have interpreted as being like we're analyzing these reports and we're we're going to highlight takeaways.
But as Kim mentioned, like that's something that although we're tasked to do that at ANR.
I don't know that it's necessarily something that we could do alone.
That's something that we would really we would need serious consultation and support from the Advisory Council and the Interagency Committee to do so.
So that is I think one way that we can look at the baseline spending reports and say, OK.

Here's probably some areas for improvement, and then once we get into starting in like 2028, the annual reporting cycle that I told you about, that will be more like, OK, we really got to stay on top of this.
We really need to continue thinking about this, yeah.

Bill Conley
So really.
In so many ways, this is still new, brand new.
Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.
So when something like this is new IT.
Takes a while.
Get the wheels turning right now.
You don't even know what the bugs are to work them out.
Yeah, right. Right.
But like you said, the each agency's like functions won't change.
But how they look at their work might change 'cause some people have to go through the, you know, the understanding that they provided but don't benefit.
You know what I mean?
Like, maybe they didn't feel good.
They were working like text.

Bill Conley
It also makes me think of like you know, so as a teacher.
Teachers have their fingers in the pulse of what their kids are experiencing.
It's saying, yeah. And you know, we have certain reporting mandates.
That are maybe not always related to.
Health that might be from environmental conditions? No, but it seems to me that that kind of information flow.
From the bottom up is.
Pretty important.
It's just one of so many, but.
Yeah. When you see kids that are not doing well for whatever reason, it could be.
Mm-hmm. That they're expensive environmental arm, you know.
Yeah. And that then it gets really complicated.
And.

Just kind of.
Oh, if you'd be interested, we could connect you with the Interagency Committee representatives for agency. Abed.
You know, yeah. Could be a good connection just to have in.
Yeah.

Juliet Birch
Yeah, he's a really thoughtful guy.
He would probably really enjoy talking to you.

Kim Barrett
Yeah, I think you guys would get a. Yeah, he's definitely a very thorough thinker as well.
Which makes sense because you're teachers.
Let's talk about the reporting process, because I think it'll let itself nicely toward the conversation is going.
OK.
So this is the framework that we're offering to agencies starting with step 0, which is building the capacity for this work and the outcome. One of the outcomes is identify a team of staff to support this reporting process.
So that involves, you know, going through all the other concepts we just talked about.
I didn't figuring out who has access to what information and all that.
Stuff one.
Assess the assessment to identify environmental benefits.
So what are the actual environmental benefits in our agency provides and then outcome there would be to identify them.
And those two steps seem really simple, but I think they're honestly like most important, aside from creating the actual report.
Because if you do these two things well, then it sets you up.
You know to be successful successful in the process now.
Yeah.
And then just one more time. Yeah, initiative assessment.
So what initiatives in my agency provide environmental benefits?
So what programs and things like that? So you identify the initiatives that directly

invest in environmental benefits and I think we mentioned tree planting. So the programs that are associated with that.
You know, we look at the other ones as well.
And then we do an investment assessment.
So does my agency actually have information, though on tree planting?
And then he assessed the availability of the data on investments toward environmental benefits and this.
Is really difficult to do and we actually, you know, like the reality is we may not have all of the information on and data.
On all of the environmental benefits that we're providing and then we may not and even if we did have all of that information, we don't necessarily have all the information.
On the investment side of things.
Or can't capture it in a way that could be utilized in this context so.
That is, that's a thing.
And then there's also recognizing the the understanding that hopefully this will improve over time.
So we also need to give agencies the space to say in two years maybe we have more data with the mapping tool and other things.
So that the reports get better over time, right?
Do you have any thoughts?

Rich Holschuh
A good example of.
Allowing time and space for this new.
Big farm is.
Earlier in this process, the agencies were required to compile a list of environmental justice complaints that we may have received from citizens.
Just a list and and the responses and and they did because they were required to do that, and The upshot was that.
For all purposes, there weren't any because there was no mechanism yet.
No. Mm-hmm. Wow. So.
It's gonna take some time, yeah.
Yeah, people didn't know that they could complain about the hat, and he's had no

way to record it other than through a a civil rights.
Yeah, yeah, but not an actual justice, right?

Juliet Birch
Yeah, that's a great example.

Rich Holschuh
Yeah, yeah, that's a really good take some time, folks.
Yeah.
Yeah.
We had the counselor to look at all these reports from all the agencies.
Fortunately, they were all very short.
Yes, we did this.
We don't have any.
We ain't got none.
Yeah, we will, OK.

Bill Conley
Our job is done.
Doesn't it?
Yeah, we're good.

Juliet Birch
Which is not to say that there are not, you know, things that we hear from the public.
All the time that could potentially be something like this.
It's just a matter of, you know.
No, there's no rubric to drop him into, right? Yeah.

Kim Barrett
And what's interesting, it's almost the inverse of this.
What's interesting is I learned that it that within our agency, lots of people call like, some of the enforcement officers in the Department of Environmental Conservation.
And a lot of their they'll want to complain or put in a complaint.
But it'll actually relate to some.
Different agency, you know what I mean?

But yeah, so it's interesting where people are coming to us to report on certain things like, oh, my garbage can is overflowing. And it's that's an environmental issue. But so yeah, it's like, how do you help people understand where to go for what?
Yeah.
Good.

Juliet Birch
So right off the bat, I'm just gonna tell you the reporting process is only 7 steps.
So you don't have to.
We're almost done.
But so Step 4 after the previous step, which was kind of assessing the amount of data that's available. Step 4 is actually identifying the investments that agencies are gonna report on so.
Thinking about like tree planning, for example, our urban community forestry program.
As Kim mentioned way earlier in the presentation, it spends money on trees, which is an investment. They also spend money on staff time to plant the trees and they also volunteer time which even though that's not necessarily spending money, it's still a commitment of resources, right.
Yeah.
Right. And so those are three different types of investments, but let's say we know how much money is spent on the trees and how much money is spent on tap staff time.
But we don't necessarily.
This is hypothetical.
We don't necessarily have the, you know, structure yet right now to calculate how much volunteer time went in. That's like a whole part of the picture that's missing that we can't report on yet. But we could maybe make a commitment to set that up in the future, right?
So in step four, you're asking the question, hey, I have all these investments.
I've looked at the data.
Which of them can I actually report on right now?
And then that's where the outcome would be.
I'm gonna create a list of the investments I am going to report on. I'm making this commitment also noting that later in the process the agencies are being asked to say

how am I going to incorporate other investments in the future as I continue to improve my data.
Intake. That's one of the kind of really great side benefits of doing this work is that not all agencies are up to par with each other or with the public's expectation of how we are collecting data.
And that's one of the things that we.
We could certainly improve through this work.
And then Step 5 is the data gathering.
So how will my agency collect, organize, and store data on investments?
And the outcome would be to create a data set with all the information needed for the report.
It sounds really cut and dry, but that's where, like most of the time is gonna come from lot of staff time.

Bill Conley
Yeah, yeah.

Kim Barrett
Yep, there is a piece about those two.
There's a need for the 8 the other agencies to talk to each other too, you know.
So that's what I'm trying to figure out now is what's the best way to do that?
Yeah.

Juliet Birch
Like what you were saying about the siloing within your small school system?
It's the same thing, except on a huge scale for us.
Yeah.

Bill Conley
And what?
Many more people involved, too. Yeah, yeah.

Kim Barrett
I forgot I'm clicking the slide.

Juliet Birch
Thank you.
So then last two steps, closing out where where we made it to the finish line.
Step 6 is describing and quantifying environmental benefits.
So the main question here is, can my agency measure the outcome of the environmental benefits it provides? So like you're putting money into a bank, right? And you want to know how much interest it's going to yield.
Agencies are asking the same questions about how much are people really getting out of the money we spend on benefits.
So are we yielding more?
Is is it worth it?
You know, or should or should we put money towards somewhere where there's greater need.
That will do the most good with the, you know, less money or something to that effect.
So the outcome would be, where practicable, agencies should develop a description of environmental benefits.
So we plant trees that creates clean air, maybe lower temperature in a city, or potentially even lower energy bills or something.
Yeah. And an assessment of the outcome of the investments.
That's where it gets complicated, because it could require.
Modeling and like a lot of time to really think through.
You know, for example, an environmental benefit is a playground.
How do you quantify the outcome or the benefit of a playground?
That's a really hard question.
So that's something that we've been.
Trying to set everybody up to eventually parse through as the the covered agencies do this work.
And that's where the where practical practicable really comes in

Bill Conley
very important phrase, right?

Juliet Birch
And then the last step would be reporting.

So how can my agency be transparent?
And clear while completing the baseline spending report.
And they would create a report of investments made so that would be the data set as well as an explanation.
So, like a qualitative report of what was and was not included and why.
And you know, if an agency, for example, says I have, here's 100% of my investments, I can only report on 50% of them.
We also are encouraging agencies to kind of.
Give provide a prioritization scheme of how they're gonna start bringing in the other 50% of their investments into later reports.
So we're really trying to encourage.
Transparency as much as we can through this, this segment of the report

Bill Conley
so is ANR.
Are you sort of?
Responsible for overseeing this aspect of it.
You're just another agency, right?

Juliet Birch
I mean, because we're the lead agency.
We're the ones who created this guidance and therefore created this reporting process.
Mm-hmm. As Kim mentioned before, it doesn't have any legal weight because it's just guidance.
It's just a suggestion.
So if other agencies like they, they could potentially, you know take it or leave it.
They probably don't wanna do that because we worked really hard on this with their input, but.
Yeah, I wouldn't necessarily.
Say that we're overseeing it, but folks do, and when we're going into the report reporting process, as people are building their reports, they will come to us to ask questions and get technical assistance to work through it.
But you know, they can take it or leave it if they really so chose.

Rich Holschuh
Yeah, yeah, they go rogue.

Juliet Birch
So that was our whole spiel.
If if you have any other thoughts or or comments, I also know this is a lot of this is a lot of information to kind of process at one time.
So as we said, there's also an opportunity to write written comments and if you have friends who are interested too. Yeah.

Bill Conley
Yeah, yeah, I would say just thank you for doing this work.
It's really.
Kind of under most people's radar, I'm sure.

Rich Holschuh
So, Bill, this is the draft.
Yeah, they're gonna Polish this up a little bit, and then they're gonna roll it out for the actual public hearing, OK.
Right.

Juliet Birch
I don't think that there is going to be another, at least not in the law, but we could talk about the potential of that.

Rich Holschuh
I'm I'm getting mixed up. No, I mean.
The other meetings, right.
So you're gonna work on take these comments, incorporate them right as best as you can, and then gonna get turned over to the agencies, right?

Kim Barrett
Yeah, OK, September 15th.
It'll it'll be released.
And between now and then, it's also on its leadership's.

Responsibility as well, not just in our agency but other agencies.
Really make sure that they're not only thinking about this, but they're organizing around this and the center that they do that.
The faster we can also update the guidance to meet their needs too.
So all of those things are happening.
One thing that I just realized too that.
Where practicable, keys measuring the outcomes? That sounds so intense. And every time I think about it.
It kind of blows my mind, but I realized that the law doesn't necessarily prescribe how granular you have to go.
And that makes me feel like.
You should just.
Kind of like the same thing as in the other steps prioritizing. I think there are some benefits that we can quantify, but I think we'd have to qualify.
You know what I mean?
The outcome a bit and then this is also where it just depends on what measuring mechanism we want to use and if it's it needs to be numerical or if it could also be.

Bill Conley
It's just one.
Playground example is a really good one.
You know, even even tree planting, which.
You know, you know, I think everybody knows how important that is.
So many benefits, you know.
Stopping erosion, just being one, you know? Yeah.
Even the we had a local project.
Along one of our.
Tributaries to the Connecticut.
Right over here. It's called the Whetstone Rd.
And during Irene the whetstone.
Jess went crazy and it did what it wanted.
Did what it wanted to do. Wanted to be a wanted to be a river, yeah.
And it flooded downtown, you know, and other places, people who were in mobile, home parks got flooded.
Out and people and other there were, there was another.

Umm, lower income housing unit.
Oh yeah. In in W Pratt W Pratt.
So yeah, So what they did was there was an old lumberyard.
Right on the banks of the river of that brook and somehow.
They lumber yard vacated that space.
And then they.
They literally added.
Ton upon ton of film to bring the land level up to prevent.
A similar you know we will have it.
That's right, we know that.
But to prevent?
The lower lying downriver, you know.

Rich Holschuh
Is it the opposite? Yeah.
Oh, OK, the the industrial.
Development that had been there over time and culminated in a lumber storage yard, right? Because it was floodplain. The owners at the time had raised it up out of floodplain for with thousands of gallons of yards of gravel to make a flat place to stack lumber or CL.
And trucks around.
So they had to.
So there was no flood resilience and when the whetstone flooded.
It it came over that area, there was no absorptive ability.
I know.
Slowly. Slow down. Yeah. And and it came through downtown. Did what it did and the project out there through Vermont River Conservancy.
They acquired it had been inactive for years and years and years. They can lot.
They came in and they trucked all of the gravel out and they dropped it back down to original level and it is now a restored floodplain and the idea being that that may acre feet of water.
And stay up there.
Here now instead of coming through downtown.
Yeah. Wow.
That was it was a very expensive project, yeah.

And now we have a new floodplain manufactured.
It's a public park with trails and plantings.
So then how do you that took a lot of that kind of money's gone now, right?

Bill Conley
How do you then measure that benefit, right?
Yeah, how can quantitatively, yeah.
Qualitatively, how do you measure it?

Kim Barrett
Well, it's like talking about the the, how granular you get. The benefit also is just that something that once was a flood like we knew what the flood thing.
Now the benefit in like 1 qualifier is that it's now.

Bill Conley
Yeah, yeah, it's that simple.
Oh, my God. Yeah. But that's so.
I just.
I'm stuck on that it it makes me wanna cry how people can just make decisions like that.
Yeah, and some things are flood clean.
And then you just decide to.
It's ridiculous, yeah.

Bill Conley
Oh, thanks for that correction.
Yeah, I have.

Kim Barrett
I'm gonna use. OK. I'll be back.

Rich Holschuh
And you're supposed to wrap up by 6.
Yeah, or I'm all set.

Kim Barrett
I actually think it's 630. Oh, I thought we started at 4:36.
On the e-mail, yeah, that's what I said. Oh, yeah, yeah.
It's today the 14th.

Bill Conley
Oh, it doesn't say that in time on the wires. I think it did. On the library side, yeah.

Kim Barrett
'Cause, the other meeting was.
Two hours.
So virtual.

Juliet Birch
I think it was just an hour and a half as well.

Kim Barrett
No, it was definitely two hours.

Rich Holschuh
I think we've covered it.

Kim Barrett
We have. I just.
We have to keep that open, though, just in case.
Like technically in case, yeah, it's a public meeting. Yeah. Yeah, but.

Rich Holschuh
Get it?
I'm looking at the the legend on this paper plate. I think it's hilarious because it's BPI compostable.
Compostable except.
California except.

Bill Conley
California, they usually have.

Rich Holschuh
That could be Canada.

Bill Conley
Oh no, but BPI it's it's the coding, right?

Rich Holschuh
Yeah. And I was, where was it that I can't do it in California?
You need to go with the problem.
Do you think it's AI?
It's a law.

Juliet Birch
Do you think it's that they can't do it, or do they just decide that they don't want to compost something that has this coding because it's they, don't it?
Yeah, that makes sense.

Rich Holschuh
Yeah, it's just kind of funny compostable except.
You.

Kim Barrett
You're right.
It's an hour and a half.
It's just that my facilitator brain is like, you're not gonna get out of bed.
You have to get back on the right.

Bill Conley
Yeah, well, this is very, very helpful, very.
I would know absolutely zero knowledge of it.
That's.

So that's great.
Quite a few things I have to absolutely say.

Juliet Birch
I know you said when you came in and we were just getting to know each other that. You're kind of you've made it a personal goal to like kind of get more involved in stuff like this.
Are public meetings that we have with the advisory rich is a very loyal attendee and then the Interagency Committee as well.
We have public meetings.
Usually once, sometimes even twice a month, depending on what's going on.
Sometimes we go a couple months without having any meetings. If we all need a break.
But our website, under the Vermont environmental justice law, we have a calendar where we regularly update if there are meetings happening.
So we'd love to see you there if you are interested.
We spend a lot of time talking about kind of the insurance and outs of the law's expectations and.
Some of it you might not find the most thrilling, but right, certainly informative.

Bill Conley
Yeah, yeah.
And then maybe my last question would be.
How does it sort of filter down to municipalities?
You know.
'Cause most of us, you know, we interact with our our town and our town government, right?
You know, and we know about ANR, but they take care of wildlife, right, you know.
Yeah, that's how I think most of us think right about different state agencies.
You know? Yeah. 'cause something like. OK, I wanna report back to my Conservation Commission.
In darpston. Mm-hmm.
For next meeting.
Umm.
And I'm sure a bunch of questions will come up.

Boom, I can.
I've got contact info for both you and and Kim right so.
Yes, I could do it

Rich Holschuh
right on this. Yeah. Yep.

Juliet Birch
I mean, there's definitely there's a lot more room to keep, talk like to keep talking.
So if you ever wanna reach out to us, we love to chat.
It's like our whole job. Yeah. The one thing that I will say.
Is that you know all the different levels of government are so deeply intertwined with each other and a lot of the time, depending on the agency, depending on what the type of money is on the state level. Usually like there, there are a lot of cases in which.
The federal government just gives us money that is already spoken for, and we just say, OK, this municipality is supposed to get this and we we're kind of just the pass through but.
There is a. There's also a lot of examples of money.
That is spent at the state where we do have discretion over how it's spent this.
The baseline spending report and proportionality of spending also has a huge could have a huge implication for municipalities.
As Kim mentioned, the different kind of criteria for an environmental justice focus population, you know, people who are in need in the state.
Is based on.
Geography. The Census block group level, and municipalities so.
There's there is a really big like kind of intertwining role there. I just gave you kind of the high level elevator pitch.
But I think that we could definitely talk about like if you if you are, if you have connections with folks who are in particular municipalities who want to learn more like we'd love to have those conversations 'cause, I think it might not even be an R that they.
Need to get connected with. It might be another agency, but there's a lot of conversations that should happen, and I agree that.

D siloing is something that really needs to happen on all levels.
Like just to it's a it's a waste of time to have silos in a lot of ways. It's really hard.

Bill Conley
No, and I would say every organization.
Maybe the exception of one.
It's it's just kind of like a.
It's like built into the DNA of a organization that there's gonna be siloing, right?
So you just have to be.
You have to be aware of it.
And try to work with work around it as much as you can, right?
Anyway, my wife's probably saying, wait, how long is this meeting going?

Juliet Birch
Well, thank you so much for coming. My pleasure.
I think we've had a great conversation and I hope you got something out of this that's definitely awesome.

Bill Conley
I definitely did and I've like got to meet you.
I you know, knowing about you and all the work you've been doing locally and cool and elsewhere.
So I'm glad you're here.

Rich Holschuh
Yeah. Thank you for.
Participating.
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
It's all about learning, learning together.
I I will share with you that I'm on this advisory task force for the climate Vermont climate plan, which is part of the implementation for Act 59 30 by 30 50 by 50.
How are we going to get there?
So they're putting a draft climate plan together, you know, priorities, methods, blah, blah, blah.
And they're going to roll that out to the public for commentary.

And there are public hearings.
That's why I was getting conflated, right.
Three of them around the state and I think if I remembered correctly, that the Southern Vermont one.
Is in Ludlow.
No chemo probably.
And I think it's next Thursday.
Wow. And again like so how do you get people to come to these meetings?
Yeah, and there's a virtual.
Component of it there might be.
Or they might have had a have had or are having a virtual meeting like these folks doing this right.
Yeah, my brain's mush right now.

Juliet Birch
Yeah. Is this Sophie's team?
Sophie Veltrop's team doing the public.

Rich Holschuh
It's through VHCB.

Juliet Birch
Oh, OK. OK, that makes sense.
Got it.

Rich Holschuh
There's a lead on that. Yeah. One the HCV, the Vermont climate plan.
Act 5930 by 30.

Juliet Birch
Yeah. Which is different than the climate action plan. I'm guessing that, right?
They're connect OK, but they're different or.

Rich Holschuh
No.

Same thing.
And I'd be dropping a letter in there.

Juliet Birch
I don't think it's you.
This is what I'm talking about with Asyluming is that we work in the same office as these people and don't always know the insurance and outs of the work that they're doing so right.

Bill Conley
Yeah, well, you know what?
We were trying to do.
Johnstone Conservation Commission.

Juliet Birch
I'm just going to stop this recording.
Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you. Mm-hmm.

Birch, Juliet stopped transcription