

**Vermont's Environmental Justice (EJ) Advisory Council
Draft Meeting Minutes
November 8, 2023**

Note to reader: These draft minutes were compiled by staff from the Agency of Natural Resources. If you would like to see any changes to these draft minutes, please reach out to phoebes.potter@vermont.gov

Meeting Information:

Date: November 8, 2023

Meeting Time: 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Location: Virtual via Microsoft Teams

Meeting Details and Materials: <https://anr.vermont.gov/about-us/civil-rights-and-environmental-justice/vermont-ej-law/calendar>

Attendance:

- **EJ Advisory Council Members Present:** Zoraya Hightower, Mariana Sears, Walter Brownridge
 - **Vermont State Agency Staff Present:** Bridget Phillips, Karla Raimundi, Sophi Veltrop, Phoebes Potter
 - **Members of the Public Present:** Kati Gallagher
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Agenda:

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| 10:00 AM | Welcome and introductions
Consenting to Community Agreements
Review and Approve November 6, 2023 Agenda (this document) |
| 10:10 AM | Community engagement / meaningful participation of directly impacted communities / people from EJFPs during implementation |
| 11:00 AM | Public comment |
| 11:10 AM | Break |
| 11:15 AM | Creating a sustainable and rewarding structure for Advisory Council members to be in relationship with the agencies, so that we can ensure ongoing dialogue, advising, communication and action. |
| 11:45 AM | Wrap-up / next steps |
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Meeting Recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySSKH4YtToU>

Meeting Notes:

At Monday's meeting Phoebus offered to share both the meeting recording and notes as well a summary of the big picture in terms of the conversations had at the two meetings as well as connecting themes between the two meetings and potential next steps for engagement and follow up.

Around the room introductions- name, pronouns, who you represent, what in the environment you are feeling grateful for today.

What are your goals for this meeting within the broad topics on this agenda today?

Zoraya: Is less interested in perfectly articulated intention, is interested in how we are working with the agencies and what we are doing next.

Mariana: How do we want to engage with the public in these meetings, how do we want to communicate to the public when the agencies are discussing important issues related to the law? Would like to make sure we have a group of people, or a committee, tapped into drafting different language related to community engagement for these meetings and for agency discussions. Would like to see a list of spaces, networks, groups that we work with, outside of the council, within the council, so we know and can visualize the scope of our outreach.

Use the resources we have to hire a third party contractor who has resources with community engagement that can help us direct our work. The state websites seem set up to almost discourage getting feedback from members of the public. As a mom with kids and limited time she isn't going to be able to quickly find what she needs to effectively share an opinion.

Walter: Vermont Interfaith action is able to reach out because it is an organization represented by faith based organizations that are adept at community outreach. It is really important to get people pulled in to give meaningful participation directly. Concerned about the piece around funding. The success around this will depend upon the funding of the initiative.

Phoebus: Around funding: See page 4: [Potential Action Steps - EJ Advisory Council - August 2023.pdf \(vermont.gov\)](#). \$350,000 is considered a small amount of money for a mapping tool. \$150,000 for community engagement.

\$40,000 for Accessible Public Meetings

\$110,000 community engagement led by Advisory Council Members

We are not positioned to nimbly do certain things like stipends and childcare provisions. Request for Proposal for community based organizations to take on this piece is a useful discussion point

Mariana: Would like to minimize number of people involved in conversations about conversations. We are taking the time to set the ground, but we need to bring people on board about things that will impact about their lives. Are we talking about the park, the lake, the transportation ?

Zoraya: Where are we on working with the agencies, what is their timeline for giving us something substantive to review?

Phoebes: this document provides information on original due dates, and when the AC is specifically called on to advise / consult covered state agencies: [Advisory Council - Scope of Work - 2023.pdf \(vermont.gov\)](#)

We are talking about a two year push out legislatively with the understanding that we can set interim goals and send materials. We are going to need the extra time (already behind, started out 6 months behind).

Zoraya: We don't want to create another process document on top of what we have already created.

Public Comment

Kati: Would like to flag that there have been some conversations around policy development in the environmental sphere around the agencies have a certain amount of this work done within the existing timeframe. They are trying to figure out the timing of the work and whether it makes sense for them to push back their reliance on the idea that the agencies have done the work. The amount of community engagement and arameters/requirements we would expect to see attached to the legislature. We don't want to add parameters into a policy reflected by ANR's work if it's going to take longer than anticipated/indicated by

Phoebes: We will schedule a time to talk further so we can get your perspective on this and considerations of organizations into these due dates.

Zoraya: Where are the agencies in terms of timeline? What are they working on? When do they think they will have their plans, regardless of the deadlines?

Phoebes: We have a task group working on EJFPs, Environmental Benefits Spending Guidance

In terms of spending the funds it sounds like there is a desire to take action and begin moving forward. Some of this can be directly and some we can do with a third-party community based organization or multiple ones, to help support community engagement

Phoebes: What do we want our public meetings to look like? To what extent will members of the public be showing up and engaging in substantive policy conversations versus to what extent will the meetings be internal development meetings?

Karla: Wants to go back to Zoraya's question about Interagency Members and their community engagement plans in the context of deadline recalibration.

2025 would be the deadline for the community engagement plan, she would like to provide some context for the things that would need to be in place based on the principles that we have drafted to guide the creation of those plans. A foundational step for a community engagement plan is Language

Access, although this isn't contemplated in the law itself it is most definitely a task that agencies have to take on in creation of the community engagement plans.

We have had several months delay and still have foundational steps needed- Language Access Plan, creation of procedures to implement LAP, business office procedures to disburse funds for LAP implementation

Extension of deadlines will allow deliverable creation to be done effectively

Phoebes: At what stage of the development and drafting process do you want a seat at the table? What are the next steps people want to get into?

Mariana: Would like to go back to Zoraya's idea of working in small groups/ peer-buddy team to map out the year

Walter: We will need to be involved at every stage

Phoebes: We could have once a quarter an engagement focused meeting. Michael Fernandez, with Bennington Regional Conversation District, offered to host first one in Bennington in 2024.

We could match up covered agency representatives and agency council members, or find other ways to pair up folks to gain perspective from different angles

Community Engagement Task Group

Karla: As we think about the buddy system structure we should think about the communication structure that makes sense

Mariana: Hunger Free Vermont has ten regional Hunger Councils that could be a good space to meet folks where they are. These councils meet every other month or so and are connected with many community organizations doing groundwork.

Hybrid Regional Meeting?

Mariana: Whatever the form or shape these meetings will take, we should be communicating now, because we are doing things now. For everything we send out that has to do with our meetings we can put at the bottom, invite public to comment on a question, invite them in

Phoebes: Community Engagement Task Group shouldn't just fall on AC shoulders, we will bring other groups in. We already have a task group focused on environmental benefits guidance and reporting