

**Joint Meeting of Vermont's Environmental Justice (EJ) Advisory
Council and Interagency EJ Committee
Draft Meeting Minutes
December 18, 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 anr.ejcoordinator@vermont.gov

Meeting Information:

Date: December 18, 2023

Meeting Time: 9:30AM to 12:00PM

Location: Hybrid (Dill Building (AOT), Berlin VT, and Virtual via Microsoft Teams)

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

Attendees:

Advisory Council: Mariana Sears, Gayle Pezzo, Rich Holscuh, Trey Martin, Jennifer Byrne, Zoraya Hightower, Maryam Abassi

Interagency Committee: Amy Redman, Karla Raimundi, Abbey Willard, Claire McIlvennie, Elizabeth Schilling, Grace Vinson, Gretel St. Lawrence, Dave Pelletier, Jenny Ronis

SOV: Sophi Veltrop, Bridget Philips, Megan Cousino, Emma Ramirez-Richer, Stephanie Brackin, Katelyn Ellermann, Rebecca Williams, Phoebes Potter

Public: Kashka Orlow, Hayley Jones, Indra J. Acharya, Suhasini Ghosh

Notes:

Meeting was delayed due to commuting complications for facilitator (Phoebes Potter, EJ Coordinator, ANR) resulting from flooding event. As such, the agenda was modified from it's original plan, and the meeting started about 20 minutes behind schedule.

Group Reading of Community Agreements

Consenting to Prior Meeting Minutes:

[https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/anr/EnvironmentalJustice/SharedDocuments/PublicMeetings/10.23.23 - Joint Meeting/Draft Minutes Joint EJ AC and IAC Meeting Oct 23 2023.pdf](https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/anr/EnvironmentalJustice/SharedDocuments/PublicMeetings/10.23.23-JointMeeting/DraftMinutesJointEJACandIACMeetingOct232023.pdf)

- 1 abstention / standaside - Trey Martin, not present at last meeting

Public Comments: No Comments

Break-Out Discussions: Prompts:

Step 1: Each person take **3 minutes** to jot down initial reactions to three prompts:

1. what do you think was our most important accomplishment this year?
2. what is the most significant challenge we face(d) to implementing the EJ Law successfully?
3. Envision one thing we could do to strengthen our efforts next year

Step 2: Take **12 minutes** to compare notes in your small group and discuss.

Choose one accomplishment, one challenge, and one vision for 2024 to share back to the group

Step 3: Group report-backs (**5 minutes total; 1 minute per group**)

Abbey W

- important accomplishments community engagement principles, beginning of relationship building between IAC/AC, setting expectations, recognition of EJ in agencies
- challenges timelines and capacity, yearning for systems to create long term success, insufficient time to foster true relationships between two bodies
- capacity expansion, buddy system for IAC/AC members, roadshow about why EJ work matters, shared responsibility to share work with legislature, policy maker support for work especially with community engagement work and needs

Dave P

- accomplishment - comm engagement principles, guides to deliverables, physical binder, mapping on EJFPs
- challenges - capacity, continuity so that work can move forward in stable steady way

Zoraya H

- hope for what could be but also frustration around retention of EJ coordinators need to create an environment that enables people to stay on in the unit

- Thoughts for next year - a lot of good will to do reflective work in VT and across country however funding is becoming less likely, how do we maintain momentum to move work forward?

Maryam A

- How we can carry on discussion about moving away from fossil fuels and toward more renewables
- Involve policy makers into discussions

Rich H

- Build on Zoraya and Maryam - our group has strong perception that it has been a very bumpy start but want to affirm will to start
- Clear that this has been long delayed and slow institutional inertia is not helping
- Political wins will make this harder, if VT cannot do it then no one else can
- Want to continue this work with this group

Gretel S

- bumpy start but opportunity to get started, building the relationships needed to do the work
- feedback from the public has been very meaningful and want to continue encouraging continued engagement
- Challenge - scheduling and making time for this work, systems that fail to allow for participation
- Space to continue building trust and relationships
- Central place to keep track of everything that is accessible to everyone

Jennifer B

- Comment in chat from Maryam - want to discuss accommodations for unit positions because continuity is important
- From ANR's perspective - think from a different perspective

Zoraya H

- fact that coordinators can't be retained is a bad indicator of getting the work done
- frustrated with system and ANR, not about any one person

Elizabeth S

- Phoebs, do you have thoughts and feedback on how we can support coordinators moving forward?

Phoebs P

- Need for better structural set up for work life balance

- Position has particular stressors that need to be recognized so that work can actually be distributed better so that it's not stacked on just coordinators
- Karla has been very accommodating - roadblock hit when realization that the work is truly full time for two people
- maybe consider 4 part time positions with people also working part time in the community
- Accommodations were made and Phoebes really appreciate those

Karla R

- important to her that EJ coordinators connect with the work personally
- thought/still thinking a lot about how to create sustainable workflow - overwhelming nature of deadlines imposed in law made volume of work unmanageable
- three hats - covered agency; support IAC and AC; ensuring ANR staff are being represented/brought to conversation
- Who is suited to do the work? Empathy and vulnerability are key skills for the job, with that comes a lot of difficult emotions that take a lot to carry
- still humans with personal lives
- imbedded in a system that is fundamentally inequitable - have to work within that structure

Next Topic: Interim due dates (poll taken to determine which agenda item to focus on next)

Context from Phoebes: request for technical correction to statutorily change due dates to 2 years out – agreement from this group to do that only if interim due dates are adopted. Goal is creating more flexibility but also need to interim due dates that hold SOV accountable to the work and keep it moving forward.

[Proposal was sent around for review](#) – seeking feedback on any changes needed to adopt proposed interim due dates

Karla R

- adjustment is a big part of sustainability of the work for myself and the EJ coordinators in order to do the work well and meaningfully
- some agencies do not have structural systems in place to do a lot of the work which takes a lot of time
- not just implementing deliverables in a void but creating the systems necessary for the deliverables to happen

Claire M

- EJFP mapping tool seems like a tool needed as a foundational piece for the rest of the work

- Won't prevent me from consenting to the interim proposal, but real-time decisions are already being made with tools that don't fully serve the needs of Vermont's EJFPs

Phoebes P

- Current EJFP definition is in use
- still want to have a tool in place by Dec.

Jennifer B

- still concerned about putting it out by two years
- wondering what's the thinking for the principles and community engagement plans being the same day - is there iteration that's not indicated?

Phoebes P

- maintain gaps that already existed between different steps
- provide substantive time to have agencies meaningfully engage and start doing the work

Karla R

- There are agencies that don't have language access plans
- Interim steps like public participation plans also don't exist yet so that takes time to set up
- Looking at agencies and what is needed to do the work in a meaningful way and not just delivering deliverables in a vacuum

11:40 -- PAUSE for public comment - no comments

Continue interim due date conversation, with focus on upcoming due date for Civil Rights Complaint reporting.

Karla R

- Hopefully two new coordinators starting in January

Phoebes

- Pre-drafted guidance for CR report which is proposed to only be pushed out by two months

Karla R

- deadline coming for AC on reviewing CR complaints report
- Does this timeline work for AC, what are the steps needed to provide support to AC

Jennifer B

- interim report would be helpful
- Simple four question survey including "do you have a complaint process?"

Zoraya H

- thumbs up - appreciate having it all mapped out

Maryam

- making comments on reports - suggest Karla and team call a meeting to do the comment process, because time is short and this would make it easier for AC members to make meaningful comments on reports
- Gayle P agrees

Phoebes

- interim due dates - can they be adopted?

Maryam

- want to talk about in 2024 - climate action equity review. How is state responding, transition from fossil fuels.
 - Phoebes: great points, why we need to connect this group to climate action work - through Sophi Veltrop.
 - Sophi: how you would like convos to happen - would love to hear feedback on that, email me sophi.veltrop@vermont.gov; 802-522-9555
 - Next step: Sophi will include AC on climate action related engagement opportunities and updates

Phoebes: Consent to [interim due dates as proposed?](#)

- unanimous consent given

Next Steps:

Phoebes: Karla will need a couple months to onboard new EJ Coordinators; expect next public meeting in March or April. In the meantime, task groups will continue advancing the work: community engagement (Mariana Sears coordinating) and Benefit Spending.

Advice on next steps for Civil Rights Reporting will be considered in how ANR moves that next upcoming deliverable forward.