

**Vermont's Environmental Justice (EJ) Advisory Council  
and Interagency Committee Joint Meeting**

**Draft Meeting Minutes  
May 29, 2024**

**Note to reader:** These draft minutes were compiled by staff from the Agency of Natural Resources and facilitation contractors from the Consensus Building Institute (CBI). If you would like to see any changes to these draft minutes, please reach out to ANR.EJCoordinator@vermont.gov.

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**Meeting Information:**

**Date:** May 29, 2024

**Meeting Time:** 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM

**Location:** Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, 1 National Life Dr, Montpelier, VT 05620, Hybrid via Zoom.gov

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

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**Attendance:**

- **EJ Advisory Council Members Present:** Rich Holschuh, Reverend Walter Brownbridge, Zoraya Hightower, Britaney Watson, Jennifer Byrne
  - **EJ Interagency Advisory Committee Members Present:** Karla Raimundi, Tiffany North-Reid, Amy Redman, Bob Donohue, Jill BriggsCampbell, Stephanie Smith, Abbey Willard, Claire McIlvennie, Elizabeth Schilling, Dave Pelletier
  - **Vermont State Agency Staff Present:** Kim Barrett, Juliet Birch, Megan Cousino, Emma Ramirez-Richer, Bridgett Phillips, Emily Rogers, Ed McNamara
  - **Members of the Public Present:**
  - **Additional Support Staff:** Ashira Pelt (CBI Facilitator), James Freeman (CBI notetaker), Lauren Sadowski (EPA), Kira Mok (EPA), Julia Keane (ERG)
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**Agenda:**

10:00 AM                      **Welcome & Introductions**

Consent to [Community Agreements](#);

Approve [Dec 18th, 2023 Minutes](#)

Approve May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024 Agenda

10:10 AM

**Short Updates:**

Core Principles of Community Engagement [Public Comment Period](#)

AC Civil Rights and Environmental Justice Complaint Report Response

10:25 AM

**Realigning:**

Why Are We Working Towards Environmental Justice? (Discussion)

11:05 AM

**Public Comment**

11:15 AM

**Break**

11:20 AM

**Regrounding:**

Deliverables and Important Dates (Presentation)

Modes of Influence (Presentation and Discussion)

- Environmental Benefits Spending Guidance
- Request For Proposal of a Mapping Tool

12:20 PM

**Public Comment**

12:30 PM

**Retooling & Reigniting:**

What Tools Do We Need to Be Most Effective? (Discussion)

Roles and Responsibilities of AC & IAC (Discussion)

12:50 PM

**Closing:**

Next Steps

Appreciations

&

Closing

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**Meeting Recording:** [\[insert Youtube link of recording\]](#)

**Meeting Notes:**

## **Welcome and Introductions**

Ashira introduced herself and welcomed participants. The Advisory Council and Interagency Committee reviewed Relational Community Agreements. A member read each agreement out loud. Members all consented and agreed to these agreements. Members approved the minutes from the 12/18 meeting. Ashira reviewed the agenda for the day.

## **Short Updates**

Juliet Birch led an update on the Core Principles of Community Engagement. The Public Comment Period is May 4 through June 14. Juliet posed the questions “How would you get your community linked to this comment period?” and “Would you like to be involved in the response process?” to the participants.

Kim Barrett led an update on the Civil Rights and EJ Complaint Summaries Report. She noted that the AC response was submitted on May 15, the Covered Agency response is due August 14, and ANR will offer office hours to covered agencies.

## **Questions:**

*Is the expectation that each agency would respond?*

Yes

*In reviewing some of the comments, they're not aimed at one agency – is there guidance?*

Karla: The approach to provide a response will be discussed during office hours. There are areas in the response responded by the AC that an answer that applies to all agencies may be the best approach, but other aspects that require agency-specific input...may be that the best path is certain areas will have a collective answer and others will be specific to agencies...expect to schedule regular office hours in June and July

*Can we make one of those mandatory for agency members? Would be super helpful.*

Yes

*If an individual agency is comfortable with recommendations...there would not be a response needed by Aug 14?*

Karla: Would provide a response that includes a phased approach...some of the recommendations will take more than three months to implement...there are a lot of options for response

*Will the comments be summarized?*

Our team will compile all of the comments

Karla: We've held two public comment meetings already...not a lot of numbers, but great quality feedback

### **Public Comment**

Ashira opened the floor for public comment. There were no public comments.

### **Break**

#### **Realigning: Why are we here? (Discussion)**

Ashira emphasized the AC's desire to connect with each other and the importance of connecting your passion to your work. She posed the question "What is my personal motivation for being here?" to the group.

*Tiffany North-Reid, Office of Racial Equity* - Have a longstanding interest, here on behalf of Xusana.

*Emily Rogers, Dept of Environmental Conservation* - Background in public advocacy around toxic chemicals

*Amy Redman, Dept of Health* - Here to be a co-conspirator and build cross racial and ecological solidarity.

*Bob Donohue, Agency of Education* - Named in Act 154, want to provide equitable access to high quality education.

*Jill Briggs Campbell, Agency of Education* - Have children in the VT school system, work on PCB programs and issues of environmental hazards, concerned about the condition of our schools, addressing systemic racism.

*Zoraya Hightower* - Life has straddled environmental and social justice work, best way to bring about change is to get your hands dirty and be a part of doing it.

*Britaney Watson* - Want to be a part of improving wellbeing for Vermonters, worked as an EJ manager, want to increase access.

*Jennifer Byrne, NRCC* - Work mostly with farmers, in and around USDA, can really see how policies written without involvement of people they impact aren't good policies, drives me to include people meaningfully in the decisions that impact them.

*Ashira Pelt, CBI* - Grew up in an EJ community in Tampa, FL, have seen struggles and denial of access to certain areas, want to bring particular skills, facilitation, to this problem, help others bring change.

*Juliet Birch, Civil Rights and EJ Unit* - Grew up in SE PA surrounded by EJ communities and work closely, there was a lot of asking for permission and waiting for changes, here there is opportunity to make real changes in the lives of Vermonters.

*Stephanie Smith, VT Emergency Management* - Want to lower future flood risk, since July, clear that complexity of programs is failing Vermonters, want to make changes on the ground.

*Dave Pelletier, Agency of Transportation* - Transportation, seems to be a throughline of transportation and mobility, increasing people's access to the things they need.

*Karla Raimundi, Interagency Committee, ANR* - This work is a passion of mine, born and raised in Puerto Rico, lack of access, met with incredible resiliency, when I moved to U.S., learned about EJ, became clear that experience in PR was filled with environmental injustice, knew wanted to dedicate life to this, have seen impact of lack of meaningful engagement.

*Megan Cousino, Department of Environmental Conservation* - Aligns with values and passion, helping people every day all day, ensuring access to resources and equity in decisions, have seen how lack of appropriate, accessible engagement can lead to compliance issues.

*Abbey Willard, VT Agency of Agriculture* - EJ terminology is relatively new, equitable distribution of benefit and burden, come from a place of a sense of belonging, people have a right to be a part of something meaningful and like their voice and experience matters.

*Claire McIlvennie, Dept of Public Service* - Thinking about and have seen what happens when you leave people out, challenged to ask harder questions, think about position of privilege.

*Elizabeth Schilling, VT Public Utility Commission* - Care deeply about environmental issues, haven't worked on EJ before but think it's critical work.

*Rich Holschuh, Chair of VT Commission of Environmental Affairs* - See myself as being myself because of the "we," here to represent my communities seen and unseen, and especially those other than human, comes from Indigenous cultural understandings, when we talk about EJ, behind that is the recognition that we treat everyone, human and nonhuman, the same.

*Kim Barrett, Agency of Natural Resources* - It starts with family, with tradition and culture, with being connected to the land, for me, EJ has been reflected in myself, the fact that I'm here and living, after coming to the U.S. and personally being impacted, here to support those who came before me and because I fell in love with VT.

Ashira thanked those who shared and remarked on the interwovenness and the network of this community.

Other participants did quick introductions, including PUC Chair Ed McNamara.

Questions:

*How did EPA get involved in this process?*

*Lauren Sadowski:* EPA is funding Ashira to be here, New England Region 1, EJ team is new, we're specific to VT, want to make this localized, want to figure out how our grants can align with what VT is looking at; EPA EJ Region 1 used to be one person, now have hired more people, here to learn and hear from everyone

*Walter Brownridge* joined virtually and answered the prompt on motivation – As a lawyer and Episcopal priest, EJ wasn't day to day work until I moved to VT, care of creation became part of my portfolio, starting a new position, personal desire to see a more just a caring world, one that is more sustainable

Juliet touched on the mandate that brought these two groups together, Vemront Environmental Justice Law (Act 154 of 2022).

Ashira invited the participants to complete a mentimeter poll on the question “What societal pressures brought us here?” The participants answered the following:

- o NIMBY - “Not in my backyard”
- o Structural racism
- o White supremacy culture
- o Capitalism
- o Colonialism
- o Inequitable distribution of benefits and costs
- o Racial inequities
- o The erosion of the planet
- o Decisions being made by an elite few on behalf of many
- o Exclusion of certain perspectives
- o Succeed without checking in on others
- o Discrimination
- o All of Our Relations request inclusion
- o Program development without engagement
- o Greed
- o Addressing structural racism, white supremacy, power inequities, giving voice to underrepresented and overburdened people
- o Federal requirements [...]
- o Urgency / perceived time

Ashira asked the group to reflect on the pressures. Members noted that the scale of the problem is so large, systemic, overwhelming. It felt like a moment of reckoning and there was a need to hold each other accountable.

Ashira led the group in a discussion about human-centered versus nature-centered justice and asked if the current discourse on environmental justice was anthropocentric.

Karla: One of the mandates is to provide recommendations on definitions contained in the law itself... this conversation could provide context

Rich: Deconstructing the word justice...seems that justice has to do with equitable administration of law...law is built on rights and property, idea that something can be owned, if you don't believe in property, all falls apart...if we

see things not as property but in common and as kin, rights turn into responsibilities.

[participant]: There's property, and there's also the rights of an individual, what can be done to an individual by another... in addition to thinking about property, can think about the intrinsic rights of an individual, don't want to disregard that aspect.

Ashira summarized the points, spoke about how complex this idea is, and encouraged participants to keep an open mind. She pushed participants to make tangible and implementable recommendations while also expanding our thinking past that to the future they want to see.

Abbey: Thinking about stewardship, wise use of resources, maybe not property, don't want to become so separate that we don't recognize as humans our responsibility to resources that aren't infinite.

Walter: On one level, EJ is going to be anthropocentric, reality of humans causing damage, also reality that we're all inextricably linked...EJ focuses on communities that have been marginalized and disregarded, thought of as canary in the coalmine, important to remember.

### **Public Comment**

Ashira opened the floor for public comment. There were no public comments.

### **Break**

#### **Regrounding**

Ashira invited the participants to reflect on what ways do they have right now at hand that they can influence the way they think about their responsibility and the way they act upon that responsibility here in VT?

Kim Barrett gave a presentation introducing Modes of Influence for the AC and IAC. They included Community Engagement, Distribution of Environmental Benefits, Mitigation of Environmental Burdens, Annual Agency Reporting, and Legislative Adaptation. She noted they would be using metrics of success to get a baseline and that this is the time and space to change definitions and bring in other aspects.



## Questions and Comments

Karla: Framing as mode of influence instead of deliverables is fantastic

Tiffany: This is great. Is there more information? Think benefits are under-discussed. Would love to understand and read more about that aspect.

Kim: Important that the most pressing issues are identified.

Juliet shared important dates, if want more information about environmental benefits reach out to their team. Juliet noted that the deadline for the RFP for EJ Mapping Tool was moved up to July 1, and would be an important focus.

### ***Environmental Benefits Spending Guidance***

Kim introduced the Environmental Benefits Spending Guidance Mode of Influence to the participants. This guidance is to outline what constitutes an environmental benefit and capture the lived experiences of communities. It will help agencies figure out how to direct their investments and resources to equitably distribute benefits. It will identify what needs to be included in their Environmental Benefits Spending Reports

Ashira posed two questions to the group. To the AC members, “What are specific examples of an inequitable distribution of benefits from your community?”. To the IAC members, “What challenges would addressing these issues pose?”

Jennifer: Thinking about agricultural community, incredibly inequitable, particularly based on geography – southern VT doesn’t get same funding as middle of VT...who gets help with TA for filling out forms , can be hard for young farmers to navigate programs.

Karla: Want to underscore importance of ensuring that the benefits are actually experienced in the communities...when we’re looking at funding sources we ensure that those benefits are accounted...what are the things that are most valued in communities that are not as available as they should be.

Ed: What are environmental benefits that are not going to EJ communities?  
What benefits are primarily going to wealthy people?

Karla: What are the things desired more of by the communities represented?

Claire: Karla's story makes me think about reference points...what people see as the potential for benefits...speaking to unknown benefits, don't know what you don't know...envisioning a world full of things you value.

Megan: What is a benefit? Benefits and burdens can be two sides of the same coin...is having a solid waste facility in your community a benefit or a burden? Can be both. Figuring out what's a benefit and what's a burden a big part of this conversation. If funding is going to a specific resource but those resources are only in certain places...like where septic systems are located...state agencies are often pass-through funders, don't always have a lot of control over who can receive it...federal partners in the room might be helpful, they design the guidelines that state agencies need to follow

Ashira: Question in the chat about if this counts as a meeting  
Have six members present (five plus Tiffany)  
These recommendations will direct real funding  
Task group: Elizabeth, Claire, Megan, Jennifer, Bob  
Stephanie volunteered

Abbey: Easy for a state agency to say things are outside of their control, but if we don't identify some of the systemic underpinning that we as state agencies are operating under, worry that change will be more challenging...if geography contributes to inequitable distribution...traditionally TA offered based on population – solvable, but an experienced reality...in awarding funds, there's a stigma that we evaluate applications without considering outside factors...as implementers of taxpayer dollars, expectation of accountability, that we have to prove need – so many emergency response programs have been focused on getting communities to prove need, lack of trust

Kim gave an overview of the task group on environmental benefit spending guidance duties and deadlines.

Kim: if this method of input doesn't work for you, what ways do? Let us know, want to make sure your input is taken into account

Ashira: Can email, can join task group, can find other ways.

Abbey: I'm interested, but don't want to add on as another IAC member if not needed.

### ***Request for Proposal: Environmental Justice Mapping Tool***

Kim explained what the mapping tool was and that they want to know what the community wants this tool to be so agencies can use it towards their benefit.

Jennifer: Why is this being moved up to July?

Karla: Anticipating a hard legislative session next year, want to make sure the funds allocated stay here to get the work done.

Jennifer: The order of things in the law was set up intentionally...the benefits guidance happens early, mapping tool comes last...needed discussion around benefits and giving AC time to weigh in on definitions an important step...lots of steps put intentionally ahead of mapping tool...don't want to put the cart before the horse...can AC weigh in on this decision to move the date?

Karla: Law states as a deadline the completion of the tool...internally we had agreed, as an interim deadline, to provide an RFP by the end of this year...RFP got moved ahead to July 1 to align with the fiscal year...not talking about the selection of a contractor, just the RFP process...order of operations is not getting altered...want to make sure money is encumbered and don't lose appropriation, in an abundance of caution.

Ashira: Jennifer, I am hearing that you want to make sure to have adequate time for input on mapping tool.

Jennifer: Seems like there have been some decisions made without input from the larger group – a process question?

Ashira: I want to be able to have this conversation about the mapping tool, I also want to have a conversation about how AC can be more empowered in this process. The Mentimeter Survey for input on mapping tool, will be open for next 14 days. Maybe we can move forward in the agenda to the planned conversation about process. Any other questions about the mapping tool before we move forward?

Elizabeth: Is the focus of the RFP hiring someone with the technical abilities to create the mapping tool?

Karla: Yes

Ashira: Any other clarifying questions about the purpose of the RFP? Looking for a contractor to create a mapping tool. Are you looking for someone with a specific connection to a specific community? Something else?

### **Public Comment**

Ashira opened the floor for public comment. There were no public comments.

### **Retooling & Reigniting**

Ashira opened the discussion by asking “What tools do you need as an Advisory Council to be most effective?”

Jennifer: More space and time... having an AC meeting when everyone's there...haven't had the full council in a while...have never had it in a different location, would be helpful to branch out

Ashira: What locations might elicit having better participation? Why do you think people are not coming?

[participant]: The people who aren't here can best answer the question about why they're not able to make it.

Tiffany: Could Teams Chat be helpful? Might be easier to keep track of than email.

Rich: Feel like we're not together yet, don't know who most AC members are yet, if we don't know each other, hard to work together...process seen as inscrutable for those of us who are not part of government...perception that things are moving along and we're being left behind...for many marginalized communities, mapping tools are mapping tools and the map is not the territory.

Ashira: Feeling that things are being prescribed, moving on without you, not a sense of who you are as a group, feeling that government process is inscrutable, how can you feel heard and part of the process.

Walter: Is there budget for a retreat? We could get to know each other better and all be together...some members of AC have more experience working with government than the rest of us...being together could help bring us together...could be a day retreat or overnight depending on if there's a budget.

Ashira: Would you like to see this be an AC initiative or something ANR is leading and taking you through? Where would you like lead to come from?

Walter: Maybe jointly

Ashira: AC, how do you envision working together with IAC? What role do you want them to play? What role do you want to play for them?

Jennifer: This council has been meeting, maybe for a year, but feels like the same meeting over and over again recently, feels like we've restarted...would like to get to a point where we're talking at a deeper level about what we're seeing in our communities...want to be prepared as a group to answer the questions like the ones that were posed today...need more time together to get deep, deeply discuss these issues that we're being tasked with addressing.

Rich: Want to affirm what Jennifer said, need more time to go deep into conversation.

Ashira: Retreat idea – maybe people would be more invested if they knew we'd go deeper.

Abbey: Has been a sense of urgency because of deadlines...if those deadlines are flexible, could create more relationship building capacity that we've asked for and felt pressure with the 8 meeting limit.

Karla: An open question, need to see what the legislature does.

## **Closing**

Ashira recommended filling out the poll and sticky notes to provide feedback on the meeting.

Meeting adjourned at around 1:02

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