

**Joint Meeting of Vermont Environmental Justice (EJ) Advisory Council (AC) &
Interagency Committee (IAC)
Draft Hybrid Meeting Agenda
September 20th, 2024**

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: September 20, 2024

Meeting Time: 12:00 PM to 3:00 PM EST

Virtual: [Join Meeting via TEAMS link](#): Click [here](#) to join meeting

Physical Location: Fletcher Free Library, Pickering Room, 3rd Floor, 235 College Street Burlington, 05401

Meeting Information: [Meeting Materials](#)

Attendees:

Interagency Committee: Amy Redman, Jenny Ronis, Claire McIlvennie, Grace Vinson, Karla Raimundi, Abbey Willard, Ed McNamara, Dave Pelletier, Xusana Davis

Advisory Council: Mariana Sears, Rich Holschuh, Jennifer Byrne, Zoraya Hightower, Britaney Watson, Xusana Davis

State of Vermont: Juliet Birch, Kim Barrett, Emma Ramirez-Richer, Bridget Phillips, Gabbie Wray

Other: Shelby Anderson, Johannes Epke, Kira Mok, Lauren Sadowski

12:00 PM

Welcome & Introductions:

- Consent to [Community Agreements](#)
 - Principles read and consent obtained. No comments
- Approve [August 19th, 2024 Meeting Minutes](#)
 - Minutes approved. No comments.

- Approve September 20th, 2024 Agenda
 - Agenda approved. No comments.

12:10 PM

Ice Breaker

- Name, title, what about Earth are you grateful for.

12:20 PM

Core Principles of Community Engagement:

- Review Recent Draft (draft 5) to the Core Principles of Community Engagement
 - Kim Barrett: outlines the timeline and process of the development of the core principles of community engagement (from May 2024-September 2024),
 - see graphic on page 7 of the PowerPoint.
 - Karla Raimundi: Thank you to Alex Lintner and Phoebes Potter for their work on these.
 - Juliet Birch: recognizes that quorum has been obtained (5 AC and 7 IAC) and asks to approve the draft (excluding copy edit errors and accessibility concerns). Juliet calls for copy edit errors after the essence of the draft has been approved.
- Vote of Approval
 - Abbey Willard: asks if the appropriate Impact Assessment linked here and if there are there two versions for different purposes?
 - Xusana Davis: responds that ICAR version is not included here, but can be provided
 - **Draft 5 put up for vote and is approved**
 - Kim Barrett: gives thanks to those from the public who joined to provide feedback.
 - Juliet Birch: announces that a responsiveness summary will be released in the coming weeks.

12:40 PM

Public Comment

- None.

12:50 PM

Break

12:55 PM

Environmental Justice Focus Populations:

- Updates
 - Kim Barrett: Recaps the conversations in the last meetings about EJ focus populations. Prefaces that the conversation this time around is less about the data and more about the on-the-ground work and community experiences. Questions provided as conversation starters (see page 12 of the PowerPoint). Invites AC members to share first.
- Discussion: Considerations & Solution-Building
 - Mariana Sears: In her experience at Hunger Free Vermont: people think of many different aspects and feelings when they hear that word. The physical feeling versus the social consequences of populations not having enough food. No one can measure hunger, that's why the definition of food security/insecurity exists: Enough/Not enough food to fulfill their needs. Hunger Free Vermont works with the systems that exist in the State to improve food security. Studies and the census allow Hunger Free

Vermont to target their efforts. 2/5 people in Vermont self-define as food insecure. Access to Data and access to information and resources from the federal government allow us bring help and awareness to Vermonters. We also bring proposed changes to the legislature. Hunger Free Vermont is trying to hire a diverse array of employees to inform these issues and solutions. Has done work with migrant workers, Abenaki Nation, language access, immigrant populations. Gathering information from different perspectives and putting it into the work, and spreading it to the direct service providers food shelves, community centers, action networks, CSAs, who are doing the work on the ground. This collaboration is essential to making a difference for hunger and appreciates the EJ collaboration in the past in this space, since it makes a difference.

- Kim Barrett: thank you, this is the type of context we need to collaborate with you.
- Karla Raimundi: comments that this makes her think of the environmental justice mapping tool that the EJ law has tasks the group with, good context for the burdens and benefits that must be eventually be mapped.
- Jennifer Byrne: Conservation Commissions are in the municipal sphere, the closest thing Vermont has to county government. There is no funding allotted, so all that funding must be raised by the commission. The tasks that a conservation commission helps with can range from helping farmers, to replacing culverts, improving roads, etc. Since they are governed by the resident in the watershed, there is a lot of speaking one on one with residents and seeing what they need. Mostly interacts with farmers. It's so random how farmers get benefits distributed to them, and this is unfair. Obtaining State, federal and other programs' funding are not consistent between farmers. Their ability to obtain assistance depends on their education, types of farms, types of record keeping, amount of time they have, comfort level with systems. Would hope that a map would show where the money gets spent and shows the injustices that the poorest farms are experiencing. Lake Champlain Basin gets the most money, CT river valley definitely gets less, for example.
 - Abbey Willard: regarding the Lake Champlain versus other watershed comment: Resources are directed towards a water shed based on data that shows that the watershed is impaired. So many policies have so many criteria that narrow down who's eligible.
 - Karla Raimundi: Strongly need to fill in the gaps in the data, so we have a better picture of what is happening on the ground, and then better policies can be made. Mapping tool has to use the smallest possible geographic unit, and maybe this would help pick up the inequities Jennifer sees.
 - Mariana Sears: data is only one part of the answer. Storytelling completes the data.
 - Kim Barrett: underscores what Mariana says. All types and sources of data must be considered to solve these problems.

- Mariana Sears asks Jennifer Byrne: Are conservation commissions all the same (5 member board and defined by a watershed)?
 - Jennifer: each of the districts are the same, starting back in 1939 (see video in chat [insert link]). It's a national structure. Residents choose boundaries, and some are based on watersheds and some on county/town lines. It's a type of local government and most aspects of it is left vague so it can be up to the people, those who are asking for more from their government.
- Xusana Davis: Housing. Housing needs to be put in environmentally healthy places in a way that considers the environment and is hopeful that the mapping tool can help inform this. On the flip, housing impacts the local ecology, so when we build more housing how does the local ecology respond?
- Rich Holschuh: Our environmental work remains anthropocentric. It focuses around benefits and impacts. This is good because it recognizes environmental justice impacts to humans, but it doesn't privilege other-than-human communities at all. It is not well addressed and continues to keep raising the concern even though he doesn't have the answer.
 - Kim Barrett asks Rich Holschuh: What changes would you like to see in this space, and what are some of the key issues you think?
 - Rich: While we can only do so much with what we have, would like to see more of a eco-justice/rights of nature approach. Rights of nature could be in a state or federal constitution. Western society has never done this, and until we do, we are going to continue to tinker around the edges.
 - Kim: This sentiment could inform the EJ FP definition.
- Abbey Willard: regarding the mapping tool/data aspect: there is resistance in our agency to be able to contribute the environmental benefits and burdens to different groups. Race/gender/ethnicity is not allowed to be attached to investments from our Agencies.
 - Kim Barrett: responds and echoes this issue. How do you work on a glaring issue if you don't have the tools to identify or talk about the issue?
 - Karla Raimundi: The Legislature has directed us to make categories to fulfill this law, but we need to make sure this is defensible to the current discrimination laws that exist. The Civil Rights indicators can be a good proxy for race. The question is whether this would apply to Vermont due to its rural nature. Also, in VT, there are not a lot of instances of point-source pollution. Legally, very complicated and this area remains an area of importance.
 - Abbey Willard: comments that if the State is going to use proxies, have to be really transparent about those.
 - Jennifer Bryne: This is why the community engagement plan is the most important part of this law, not the mapping tool. Every

community has different difficulties accessing government help. Even though this race as an indicator conversation has been an issue for decades, it hasn't been able to be resolved, so let's do better with what we have the power to do, i.e.: community engagement.

- Kim Barrett: notes that the EJ FP discussions on pages 12-13 of the PowerPoint still warrant more discussion.

1:45 PM

Public Comment

- None.

1:55 PM

Break

2:00 PM

AC & IAC Breakout Working Groups:

AC Discussion:

- Vacancy and Turnover,
 - Karla Raimundi: Shares with the group the language in the law on the turnover of each seat in the Advisory Council, and the turnover dates which were procured from the Office of the Speaker and the Committee on Committees
 - Walter Brownridge – February, 2025
 - Mariana Sears, February, 2027
 - Maryam Shabbir Abbasi – February, 2029
 - [Vacant] – February, 2027
 - Zoraya Hightower – December, 2024
 - Britaney Watson – December, 2026
 - Gayle Pezzo – December, 2028
 - Karla Raimundi: AC members will need to develop a transition plan before expiration of their terms, curious about revalidation
 - Xusana Davis: In her experience, appointing authorities may be amenable to reappointing individuals who are interested in continuing
 - Karla Raimundi: Will touch base with General Counsel
 - Zoraya Hightower: Notes she is no longer on the Burlington City Council
- Buddy System and Governance,
 - Kim Barrett: How do you envision collaboration at this point? How can we use a buddy system to advance this work?
 - Mariana Sears: Buddying will help to learn more about government function and to bridge knowledge gaps, help to illuminate meaning behind technical term
 - Zoraya Hightower: Moving from the theoretical to the practical, developing relationships, embedding AC members in IAC thought processes. Making AC work more tangible. Suggests creating a ranked form where AC

members can rank agencies by preference based on experience and interest

- Xusana Davis: Different members may need different amounts/types of information to remain caught up on the work. Different agencies can offer different levels of expertise on substance of environmental justice work.
- Climate Action Office Update: NOT COVERED
- Community Engagement
 - Kim Barrett: What's happening in your communities? Have there been any particular challenges? What does problem-solving look like for you in your role?
 - Xusana Davis: Returns to Rich's prior point about engaging other-than-human communities. How to maintain the principles of equitable community engagement in engagement with other-than-human communities?
 - Zoraya Hightower: Can we get automatic invoices for meetings?
 - Xusana Davis: Office of Racial Equity is interested in pursuing automatic invoices for council members
 - Kim Barrett: Any information about what comes up in community spaces is helpful information.
 - Jennifer Byrne: Community building needs to happen first on the council itself. No reason to bring in additional people until community is built on the council. More variation in physical location and meeting times is preferred.
 - Kim Barrett: there has been work down around varying physical locations but feedback is required to determine what locations would be most effective.
 - Zoraya Hightower: Logistics of the meetings are just difficult by nature and it isn't always realistic to expect perfect attendance. Not ready for community stuff related to the law yet. Doesn't want to go into the community and set expectations of what is possible beyond existing constraints. Community engagement would be helpful as the AC and IAC are requiring support in decision-making
 - Jennifer Byrne: In-person meetings would be helpful.
 - Mariana Sears: There are many limitations to being involved in this space: technology, language, high-level perspectives, etc. Lack of compensation. Returning to Rich's point about engaging with other-than-human communities. How can we begin to incorporate this into our environmental justice work? Are we leaving council members behind?
 - Jennifer Byrne: Direct engagement (phone calls, texts) with farmers is an important way that she gets farmers to participate in community events. Similarly, this could be applied to the Advisory Council.
 - Kim Barrett: What else would you like to see in the space to get to know each other and feel engaged in the work?
 - Mariana Sears: Allowing more time for conversations about each other's work, keeping questions more straightforward and grounded.

IAC Discussion:

- Environmental Benefits Spending Guidance,
 - Juliet Birch: Update on how the environmental benefits spending deliverables are going. Purpose of the lookback report is to track how benefits and burdens are distributed to eventually redistribute funds and achieve more proportionality in benefits and prevention of overburdening. Task group has been meeting to work on environmental benefits spending guidance.
 - Claire McIlvennie: Task group has been meeting to talk about Key Decisions 1-5 in the Guide to the Guide. Questions include: How to define the 3-year lookback period? What kind of data field should we be reporting? Should we be focused on quantitative data or can we include qualitative data as well? Task group is now moving into a drafting period
 - Juliet Birch: Drafting period will be starting soon, but we have lots of outstanding questions. Maybe those outstanding questions will remain outstanding in the guidance, and simply be posed to the agencies for consideration? Discussion questions:
 - What does establishing a goal of proportional spending look like for your agency?
 - What kind of approach in reporting and data gathering would work best for your agency? Phased or broad?
 - Abbey Willard: Phased approach feels most familiar based on past work the agency has done. Feels doable
 - Dave Pelletier: Broad approach feels like I would be overwhelming while a phased approach may be more manageable.
 - Amy Redman: Who do we tap to help do this work?
 - Abbey Willard: Agency of ag has an environmental justice committee that has representatives from each division to share responsibility in implementation and completion of deliverables. Lack of capacity and resources for the deliverables
 - Juliet Birch: ANR has an environmental justice network to support implementation of the Environmental Justice Law. Notes that the ANR staff in the environmental justice network have reflected that a phased approach is preferred.
 - Karla Raimundi: Scope of the lookback and annual reporting. Baseline established and then expanding benefits to compare to baseline until, after several iterations, all benefits and services would be captured.
 - Abbey Willard: Is a phased approach even allowed?
 - Karla Raimundi: That is a question for the Advisory Council.
 - Ed McNamara: Question related to reporting: Can we actually say that if a benefit is in the census block it is actually going to an EJFP? Do we have the granularity for that assertion?
 - Juliet Birch: Hoping to discuss more about the options for the EJFP definition during the October meeting.
 - Dave Pelletier: Data may not be there for us to start at a granular-enough level.

- Claire McIlvennie: We may be best off using the guidance as a framework to start from, even if we don't have all the questions answered. Task group needs to get started on writing the guidance.
- Elevating Community Engagement
 - Juliet Birch: Can we all go around and answer the question: From your personal perspective and from your agency's perspective, culturally, how does community engagement feel to your agency? Where do we want to get?
 - Amy Redman: VDH has a community engagement guide that they are starting to implement. People understand why community engagement is important but hierarchy can pose an obstacle.
 - Dave Pelletier: Wide range of awareness, acknowledgment, and practice of community engagement in AOT. AOT has a foundation of community engagement in most project development. Some staff still have room for improvement.
 - Ed McNamara: PUC is unique because they have to be insular by nature in many cases. Constraints around what outcome is required makes public engagement difficult. Community engagement at the end of a technical process is not always helpful. Community engagement should occur earlier to make perspectives implementable
 - Claire McIlvennie: Elevated interest in PSD. Balancing time to do intentional relationship building with resource constraints and needs to respond to the immediate needs.
 - Abbey Willard: Resource constraints have limited past attempts to analyze results of community engagements. Interpretation of feedback is important but hard to do without support.

2:50 PM

Brief Share Out

- Kim Barrett: Talked about buddy system and how to self-select who they'd like to pair with
- Jennifer Byrne: Can we get a report on past and present meetings, attendance, and when quorum has been achieved?
- Juliet Birch: The EJ Coordinators can make a spreadsheet with this information
- Abbey Willard: IAC talked about environmental benefits spending guidance, consensus was reached around preferring a phased approach in reporting.]
- Juliet Birch: IAC also talked about where the agencies are with community engagement and thinking to the future about community engagement plans
- Karla Raimundi: IAC wants to address the question to the AC on whether a phased approach can be used or if there is a preferred prioritization scheme from the AC on this reporting

2:55 PM

Next Steps

- Juliet Birch: Next steps will be sent via email out of respect for time.

3:00 PM
Close Out

Minutes Submitted By: Emma Ramirez-Richer, Agency of Natural Resources

Minutes Approved: