

**Joint Meeting of Vermont Environmental Justice (EJ) Advisory Council (AC) &
Interagency Committee (IAC)
Draft Virtual Meeting Agenda
October 25, 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: October 25, 2024

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

Virtual: Click [here](#) to join meeting

Meeting Information: [Meeting Materials](#)

Attendees:

Interagency Committee: Amy Redman, Claire McIlvennie, Gabbie Wray, Karla Raimundi, Abbey Willard, Michele Boomhower, Xusana Davis, Stephanie Smith, Bob Donohue

Advisory Council: Walter Brownridge, Rich Holschuh, Zoraya Hightower, Xusana Davis

State of Vermont: Juliet Birch, Kim Barrett, Rebecca Williams, Jane Lazorchak, Sophi Veltrop, Miles Chavelli, John Adams

Other: Shelby Anderson, Johanna Epke, Kira Mok, Lauren Sadowski, Kati Gallagher

12:00 PM

Welcome & Introductions:

- Consent to [Community Agreements](#)
 - Principles read and consent obtained. No comments
- Approve **September 20, 2024 Minutes**
 - Minutes approved. No comments.
- Approve October 25, 2024 Agenda
 - Agenda approved. No comments.

12:10 PM

Ice Breaker

- Name, title, what animal relative means a lot to you

12:20 PM

AC and IAC Breakout Working Groups

AC Discussion: Climate Action Office Update

- Juliet Birch: Introduces Jane Lazorchak, Director of the Climate Action Office
- Jane Lazorchak: Introduces the Climate Superfund Act – How would the AC like to proceed with consultation on this Law? The Climate Superfund Act is an attempt to hold oil companies accountable for the impacts of climate change. Vermont is the first state to attempt to move a law like this forward.
- Jane Lazorchak: Main components of the law are how to calculate damages from climate change and how to hold companies liable.
- Jane Lazorchak: Advisory Council's input is most important because climate change disproportionately affects marginalized communities. What is the preferred approach to collaboration? How would the AC like to be consulted and at what points during the development of the Resilience Implementation Strategy.
- Juliet Birch: Briefly summarizes Jane's presentation. We're here to talk about how the AC wants to be consulted moving forward and what that work will look like at a high level.
- Rich Holschuh: Lots of information to process
- Jane Lazorchak: The opportunity for consultation ranges from little to lots based on what the AC wants
- Jane Lazorchak: Resilience Implementation Strategy key components: Community-Centric Approach, Nature-Based Solutions, Infrastructure Design and Reinforcement, Early Warning Systems and Emergency Response, Economic and Environmental Sustainability. Outlines near term, medium term, and long term strategy for approaching this.
- Walter Brownridge: There are a lot of health issues that are environmentally related, but they aren't often connected to the environment in policy solutions. Having marginalized communities with health issues involved is important. Does the state already have a way of collecting and analyzing the data for this project? Is there funding for this? Data is an important part of this project.
- Jane Lazorchak: Public health is a number one priority for the update to the Climate Action Plan. Developing a tool to help measure and assess progress around this project to communicate with the public.
- Walter Brownridge: Prefers to receive communication via email and phone call.

IAC Discussion: VT EJ Law Strategy Implementation & Solution-Building

- Kim Barrett: Introduces Discussion Questions:
 - How is your agency preparing to implement the upcoming EJ Law deliverables?
 - What have you learned from this year's public meetings?
 - How have these meetings informed your work at your agency?
 - What obstacles have you faced in implementing the EJ Law at your agency, and how are you working to overcome them?
- Gabbie Wray: Still new to representing ACCD in the EJ Law implementation. Excited to listen to these conversations to start learning.
- Bob Donohue: Organizational changes are occurring at the Agency of Education which is causing staff to need to distribute workloads, unable to maintain focus on the EJ Law for this reason. Creating and working with working groups to get information, but staying flexible, adaptable, and dedicated.
- Claire McIlvennie: Also having challenges with capacity at Department of Public Service. Originally had quarterly meetings about the EJ Law. Those meetings have not been as consistent as the work has stopped and started. Trying to get more consistency, focusing on the most relevant deliverables such as the Community Engagement Plan. De-siloing community engagement work. Also participating in the Environmental Benefits Spending Task Group, so starting to have those conversations internally as well.
- Abbey Willard: Agency of Agriculture has created an internal EJ Agriculture Committee. Currently working on communications to keep people in the agency up to date on expectations and to develop a consistent meeting schedule with agency leadership and the internal committee. Capacity concerns.
- Karla Raimundi: Wanting to know more about the Agency of Agriculture internal committee
- Abbey Willard: The internal committee is still working on becoming familiar with the requirements under the EJ Law.
- Karla Raimundi: What would be helpful or supportive in the next step?
- Abbey Willard: Submitted a request to the administration for another position on this type of work to expand capacity. Not a lot of urgency happening in the agency. Could be helpful to take on deliverable and talk through what would be required to achieve it.
- Karla Raimundi: Breaking up the committee into groups to tackle different aspects of the work could be helpful.
- Stephanie Smith: Using the meetings as a way of figuring out strategizing and how to take on the work. The deadlines need to be a focal point.

Vermont Emergency Management is now required to create a working group on language access services for emergency communications. This work is slowly moving forward

- Amy Redman: Working on community engagement, Vermont Department of Health has created a Community Engagement Guide and are thinking of creating a small EJ group for their internal work. Interested in working more closely with the AC members on this. Timelines are a source of motivation.
- Claire McIlvennie: Having space in public meetings to talk in depth about how agencies are planning to meet deliverables would be valuable.
- Karla Raimundi: Agency of Natural Resources has an environmental justice and civil rights network that has a working group and set of liaisons for each side of the work.

12:50 PM

Environmental Benefits Spending Guidance Task Group-Led Activity

- Kim Barrett: Sometimes these conversations about benefit spending can be very narrowly focused. Important to center this conversation around what environmental justice asks us to do. Expanding what environmental benefits by discussing things that keep communities healthy.
- Michele Boomhower: Clean water and public safety
- Abbey Willard: Opportunities for connection
- Karla Raimundi: Effective communications
- Kim Barrett: The environment is where we live, work, play, worship, find community. Different environments have different benefits and burdens depending on the context.
- Kim Barrett: Discussion questions:
 - Where do you live, work, and play?
 - What are similarities and differences between these spaces?
 - Can you identify environmental benefits in each space?
- Rich Holschuh: The places where we live, work, and play are all the same and interconnected. Separating them is an artificial separation.
- Kim Barrett: How do these spaces or this one space, what aspects are supportive?
- Rich Holschuh: We need to focus on looking for those connections and finding ways to stop putting things into separate categories. We need to be participants. This framing is anthropocentric.
- Walter Brownridge: Lives and plays near a flood plane. There are environmental benefits and challenges. Recognizes that our focus can be anthropocentric but

there are hierarchies in the human community and so some humans suffer more when they have less resources to be resilient.

AC EBSG Breakout discussion

- Kim Barrett: Introducing discussion. Observes that some people partition how they think about the environment and what makes the environment healthy. If we're trying to work on better balancing these benefits, then by partitioning we are missing a lot. Are there suggestions on how to have this conversation in a way that is less anthropocentric? Discussion questions:
 - What are examples of places folks in these communities live, work, and play?
 - Can you identify environmental benefits in each space through your work in these communities?
- Xusana Davis: Thinking about contrasting current and former life in New York, differences in ecology. Connectedness contributes to social and emotional health but crowding can have health compromises. Rural areas may have less crowding but there can be lack of connectedness and a difficulty in feeling safe.
- Kim Barrett: Hoping that the answers to these questions will help in identifying feedback to give the task group that is drafting the Environmental Benefits Spending Guidance. We need the AC's expertise for this deliverable.
- Xusana Davis: It might be helpful to be intentional about looking for feedback from communities of color that live in rural parts of the state because those perspectives aren't always represented.
- Kim Barrett: Observes that there is an assumption in Vermont that most or a lot of the people of color are in Chittenden County. Can make it hard to address the needs for people of color in rural areas.
- Kim Barrett: To Walter, wondering if there are any benefits or burdens that folks at the church are dealing with.
- Walter Brownridge: Enjoying outdoors, taking walks, being out on playgrounds, any kind of exercise has health benefits. Clean environments are helpful for that. An environment that is not clean is a burden. Environmental burdens could be the way that cities and communities are designed like streets with heavy traffic. The environment goes beyond the natural environment but also the built environment.
- Kim Barrett: Thinking about how concepts can be applied beyond human communities. Example of the effects of environmental benefits and burdens on fish populations.
- Rich Holschuh: Mitigating fragmentation promotes connectivity. Separating ourselves from the other than humans.

IAC EBSG Breakout discussion

- Juliet Birch: Introducing activity
- Michele Boomhower: Will there be an opportunity to do a deeper dive on this type of activity as we get closer to the deliverable?
- Juliet Birch: The Environmental Benefits Spending Guidance deliverable is under way and this activity will help inform the task group's work. Currently, the brainstorming you will provide in this activity will be helpful, but it would be a great idea to do this activity more deliberately within your agency when this deliverable is imminent.
- Claire McIlvennie: The task group has begun taking the discussions had throughout the last six months and turning those discussions into an initial guidance draft. This activity will help the task group understand how we define environmental benefits and how we as agencies invest in them. This activity can help inform the structure of the guidance and the content of the guidance regarding how to approach what agencies need to report on.
- Juliet Birch: Each agency representative will look at their respective table and insert different examples of services they provide that fall under each type of environmental benefits listed in the statutory definition.
- Karla Raimundi: Exercise underscored the need to rely on program staff to understand all of the benefits that Agency of Natural Resources covers.
- Gabbie Wray: ACCD has many departments and it is important to rely on other staff to be able to come up with examples that cover the scope of the agency at large, rather than just one area of specialty
- Amy Redman: Wondering if there was a way to do this that highlights the social-ecological connections of our work.
- Claire McIlvennie: The buckets of environmental benefits outlined in the law can be limiting and are not always aligned with the ways that we think of environmental benefits practically.
- Abbey Willard: Anticipating that it will be a challenge to quantify these benefits based on the ability to measure. Where are the boundaries between what we do and what we can report on?
- Juliet Birch: Touching on the previous breakout conversation about developing structures to collaborate internally at our agencies to pre-empt these deliverables.
- Michele Boomhower: Agency of Transportation is conducting an exploratory GIS assessment of agency investments.

1:35 PM

Public Comment

- None

1:45 PM

Break

1:50 PM

Reframing Environmental Justice Focus Population Definition Discussion Featuring John Adams, Director Vermont Center for Geographic Information, Agency of Digital Services

- Juliet Birch: Introduces John Adams, who is joining to continue discussions surrounding data concerns around the EJFP definition
- Kim Barrett: For AC members, this discussion is important because it helps us to understand how to improve the EJFP definition
- John Adams: Outlines discussion:
 - Overview of EJFP Definition and Census Geography
 - Challenges with the Existing Definition
 - Accuracy vs. Precision and Margin of Error
 - Race and the 2020 Census
 - Alternative Options
 - Changing Geography to Improve Reliability
 - Modifying Thresholds
 - Alternative Variables
 - Specifying data source and update process/period
- John Adams: Outlines differences between counties, tracts, block groups, and blocks. Identifies differences between land area and population (in more densely populated tracts, the land area is smaller, and vice versa). Block groups typically have between 500 and 1500 people, while tracts typically have between 1500 and 5000 people.
- John Adams: Differences between the Decennial Census, which is a census taken every four years and collects data on race and ethnicity, and the American Community Survey, which is a survey taken of a sample every year and includes data on race, income, and language.
- John Adams: Takeaways:
 - Margin of error for block group is higher than for a census tract as it pertains to median household income.
 - 1% threshold for languages other than English is too low to achieve accuracy.

- The 6% threshold for people of color means that 90% of the population lives in an EJFP region, so this threshold could be raised to 10% as an alternative
- The federal data may not be a good fit, but local services may have data that can give us a better understanding of where populations live. Decisions should be data-informed as opposed to data-driven.
- Abbey Willard: Don't want to disregard or be insensitive to the originators of the definition and the variables that they chose.
- Claire McIlvennie: Wondering about the extent to which we have good, local data sets on the areas where we know there is vulnerability in Vermont.
- Juliet Birch: It may be beneficial to use more than one definition to achieve different goals – one that is geographically tied and one that is more for identifying individual members who are apart of the intended beneficiaries
- Michele Boomhower: Many different types of benefits with different implications. Do we know if the parties who proposed these parameters to the legislature have contemplated the disparities that John is describing? Is there a mandate to go back to the legislature to report the ramifications of the current definition?
- Karla Raimundi: Wondering if we can use alternative sources of data to fill the gaps or not. VT EJ Law mandates that recommendations to modify the definition should be submitted to the general assembly, no language requiring us to consult the legislature or engage in discussions with them. The AC in consultation with the IAC was delegated this task.
- Juliet Birch: Acknowledging that there is one AC member on the call and we need to ensure that this conversation continues with the AC centered and the information must be broadly dispersed.

2:35 PM

VT EJ Law Updates

- Kim Barrett: Mapping tool updates will be shared over email. Core Principles of Community Engagement and responsive summary to the public comment period are ready to be shared publicly.

2:45 PM

Next Steps & Close Out

Minutes Submitted By: Juliet Birch, Agency of Natural Resources

Minutes Approved:

