

**Public Meeting of the Vermont Environmental Justice (EJ) Advisory Council (AC)**  
**Draft Virtual Meeting Agenda**  
**November 18, 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](mailto:anr.ejcoordinator@vermont.gov)

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**Meeting Information:**

**Date:** November 18, 2024

**Meeting Time:** 12:00 PM to 1:30 PM EST

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

**Meeting Information:** [Meeting Materials](#)

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**Attendees:**

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

**Interagency Committee:** Karla Raimundi

**State of Vermont:** Juliet Birch, Kim Barrett, Bridget Phillips, Emily Rogers

**Other:** Johanna Epke, Lauren Sadowski

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12:00 PM

**Welcome & Introductions:**

- Consent to [Community Agreements](#)
  - Principles read and consent obtained. No comments
- Approve [April 29, 2024 Minutes](#)
  - Kim Barrett: Quorum not present at beginning of the meeting. As this meeting is not for decision-making, quorum does not need to be met in order to continue the meeting, but decisions will not be made. April 29, 2024 minutes to be approved at next meeting of Advisory Council. No comments.
- Approve [November 18, 2024 Agenda](#)
  - Juliet Birch: Agenda for November 18 is a reflection of the feedback and suggestions that were provided by the Advisory Council via email.
  - Agenda approved. No comments.

12:05

**Attendance and Participation**

- Juliet Birch: EJ Coordinators drafted and sent a letter to the Advisory Council to share some thoughts to close out 2024 and to begin the next year of work under

the law. This includes ways that the EJ Coordinators have tried to respond to feedback received from the Advisory Council regarding how they would like to be engaged and what can help improve their experience as council members. Asks for reactions to this letter.

- Jennifer Byrne: Scheduling the meetings so far in advance can be difficult for planning. 2-4 weeks in advance is preferred. Has had a difficult time engaging with these meetings because they are often with the Interagency Committee and the agenda is very pre-set. Would be interested in having more cohesion, relationship-building, and autonomy in agenda-setting
- Juliet Birch: Acknowledges that life can change a lot in a few months and so advanced scheduling of meetings can be difficult to accommodate. However, scheduling meetings 3-4 weeks in advance at the beginning of 2024 was not preferred by some other members of the Advisory Council. August-November meetings were scheduled through Doodle Polls based on the self-reported availability of Advisory Council members. How can we schedule meetings differently that feels good?
- Zoraya Hightower: Notes that there has been lag time between the poll going out to Advisory Council members and having the meeting invite go on their calendar. There may not be a perfect scheduling process. 2 weeks is too short notice. 4-6 weeks would be preferred.
- Zoraya Hightower: Regarding facilitation, Zoraya appreciates the facilitated the agenda because open-ended agendas can make the group feel like they are floundering. Having a mixed agenda of open space and pre-set agenda topics would be helpful.
- Mariana Sears: Knowing that life changes as time passes, 2-4 weeks for scheduling would be okay with her. The current facilitation style feels good, and feels that agenda-setting would put a lot of pressure on the council.
- Rich Holschuh: Appreciates the letter that the EJ Coordinators sent this letter out. When meeting dates are sent out well in advance, it allows Rich to block out those sections of the calendar. Comfortable with the current method of scheduling, although does not necessarily prefer Doodle Polls as a way of getting availability.
- Rich Holschuh: Has difficulty with using the State of Vermont partner email and uses work email to access content mostly. In-person meetings are preferred as they help with connection, but notes that because of where Rich is located, in-person meetings are hard to attend. Feels lost with regard to the legislative and implementation process.
- Kim Barrett: Grateful that folks are sharing what their work flow looks like. Is there a way to try multiple approaches to honor the different approaches that have been requested by Advisory Council members?
- Kim Barrett: Part of the reason why there is a lag between the sending of the availability survey and the sending of the meeting invitation is because there are not many responses and it takes multiple tries to get responses. Would be helpful if Advisory Council members let EJ Coordinators know if they will only be able to attend a portion of the meeting, to help structure the agenda.

- Juliet Birch: Notes that email is not easy to use and is not always the preferred method of communication. Offers that if Advisory Council members have other preferred methods of communication (text, call, etc.) to let the EJ Coordinators know.
- Juliet Birch: EJ Coordinators would like feedback on what locations are most feasible for each Advisory Council members to help create variety in meeting locations. Also notes that meeting locations should be in alignment with where communities that want to be in touch with EJ Work are located.
- Karla Raimundi: Notes that there are recommendations from the Advisory Council that are in tension with each other. For example, some council members are saying they want more opportunities for self-governance while some are saying that they appreciate more guided facilitation of discussions.
- Karla Raimundi: In order to encourage more independence, the Civil Rights and Environmental Justice Unit has tried to make progress on the Buddy System idea that has been brought up by Zoraya, but they haven't received much engagement with this idea by council members.
- Karla Raimundi: There is a lot of work that needs to be done in the VT EJ Law and the Law is centered around the perspectives of the communities represented in the Council. The Advisory Council has not been generally responsive. How can we provide an opportunity for more self-determination for the Advisory Council?
- Jennifer Byrne: About facilitation, reflecting on previous meetings Jennifer does not recall the Advisory Council having many opportunities to have open discourse with each other. The pre-set agendas often require a lot of homework in order to engage.
- Kim Barrett: Maybe it would be helpful to get really clear on what works for each member of the council. The EJ team can provide space for the council to be in relationship with each other but cannot prescribe how those relationships are developed. How can we engage folks who don't necessarily feel comfortable to engage?
- Zoraya Hightower: Having 30 minutes before or after a meeting to have open space for the Advisory Council to engage could help in relationship-building. Comfortable to having personal email copied in communications.
- Zoraya Hightower: The VT EJ Law is sometimes confusing by nature and so it is natural for the work under this law to start from a confusing place. This is not the fault of any individuals involved in the implementation process.
- Zoraya Hightower: Currently, the work the Council is doing and the conversations they are having are so broad that the Council is not yet in the place to have community connections like listening sessions. Important to have a good sense of what we're going to communities for before going to them.
- Zoraya Hightower: Having automatic invoices or payment systems would be helpful in making sure Advisory Council members are compensated for their time.
- Mariana Sears: Agrees with Zoraya regarding making the payment system easier. In-person time is important and having time before or after each meeting for the Advisory Council to connect in a more relaxed way would be helpful.

- Juliet Birch: Would be interested in meeting with individuals to talk more about making the payment system easier. It is important for the EJ Coordinators to get feedback from Advisory Council on potential meeting locations that feel feasible. If Advisory Council members wanted to collaborate with the EJ Coordinators on agenda-setting, that is welcome.
- Walter Brownridge: Added some comments to the chat regarding what he thinks would be helpful.
- Kim Barrett: How can we make the hybrid and virtual meetings better and more fulfilling? Knowing that not all meetings can be in person, it is important to think about ways to make these other meeting formats feel better. Feedback on this would be helpful for EJ Coordinators.
- Karla Raimundi: When the recalibration to the deadlines in the law was passed, there was concern expressed by the Advisory Council about the timely implementation of the law. ANR remains committed to adhering to the timely implementation of deliverables according to the new timeline. The participation of the Advisory Council is central to this work.
- Kim Barrett: Preparing to pause for public comment.
- Mariana Sears: Asked for time to meet as just the Advisory Council at the end of the meeting.
- Kim Barrett: Confirms that the agenda will be changed to allow the Advisory Council to meet on their own.

1:05 PM

#### **Public Comment**

- None

#### **Break**

1:15 PM

#### **Open Space for Advisory Council Discussion**

- Jennifer Byrne: Would anyone like to share how they're feeling?
- Rich Holschuh: Feeling lost
- Mariana Sears: What would help? What would make you feel more part of this process?
- Rich Holschuh: Having more opportunities to get to know each other. Concerned that there is still fundamental work to be done around definitions but implementation is already taking place according to the deadlines in the law. Of the six seats the VCNA is required to fill according to various statutes, the VT EJ Law feels like a "big black hole of not knowing."

- Mariana Sears: Also feeling a bit lost. Not familiar with the government structure. Feeling unprepared. But there may be a chance for the Council to edit the definitions under the law.
- Xusana Davis: This Council has done a lot of work trying to create an environment of consensus and trust. This is good work, but it also means that it takes longer to get to the “finish line.” There is likely more agreement between state and non-state folks than what comes across in public meetings.

1:30 PM

### **Wrap Up & Close Out**

Minutes Submitted By: Juliet Birch, Agency of Natural Resources

Minutes Approved: