

Public Meeting of the Vermont Environmental Justice (EJ) Advisory Council (AC)
Virtual Meeting Minutes
April 18, 2025

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: April 18, 2025

Meeting Time: 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM EST

Attendees:

Advisory Council: Jennifer Byrne, Britaney Watson, Rich Holschuh, Victor Davila, Xusana Davis, Maryam Abbasi

State of Vermont: Juliet Birch, Kim Barrett, Angela Lasso-Jimenez

11:00 AM Welcome & Introductions (10 min)

- Consent to Community Agreements
- [March 28, 2025 Meeting Minutes](#) – Quorum was not achieved. These meeting minutes will be brought back up for approval in the upcoming April 23, 2025 public meeting.
- Approve April 18, 2025 Agenda

11:10 AM Environmental Justice Mapping Tool (60 min)

- Kim B.: This meeting was scheduled to continue the March 28, 2025 conversation about the Mapping Tool. Provide an opportunity for more dialogue about this and forging a path forward.
- Jennifer B.: Update that she, Walter, and Mariana were able to have a meeting with Secretary Moore of the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR). This meeting confirmed the current Request for Proposal (RFP) process as being the one that ANR will move forward with. Disappointed that the RFP was only shared to the State of Vermont Retainer's List.
- Karla R.: Desire to exhaust this topic to the relative satisfaction of the Advisory Council members. Interested in talking about how to communicate dissent and disagreements in ways that are respectful and wholesome. Also hoping to create an opportunity for transparency and clarity for council members to get questions they may have answered.

- Jennifer B., via chat: Submitted the follow-up that Secretary Moore provided to herself, Walter, and Mariana:
 - o “Good morning, Walter, Mariana and Jennifer.
I appreciated our conversation yesterday afternoon. Understanding we have different viewpoints about the best approach for advancing the important work to implement Act 154, I left our meeting with a better sense for where you see that the challenges and opportunities lie. As I shared, the policies and procedures that state government operates under, including how we select contractors, are not perfectly aligned with an approach that would be directed solely by the principles of environmental justice.
As I noted, I will be asking the team to move forward with contractor selection related to the mapping tool, will ensure that a copy of the RFP is shared with you all, and will work with them to foster opportunities for the Advisory Council to support meaningful community engagement around the development and application of the mapping tool.”
- Jennifer B.: Would like to share recommendations that were made by REJOICE around community engagement prior to the enactment of Act 154. Concerned that ANR is disregarding the Core Principles of Community Engagement that were passed by the Advisory Council. Dissatisfied with the decision to release the RFP to the Retainer’s List.
- Karla R.: Does not agree with the statement that ANR has disregarded the Core Principles of Community Engagement. First instance of consultation on the mapping tool took place during the May 2024 public meeting – it was shared during that meeting that there were concerns around timely use of the appropriated funds for the mapping tool and ensuring that the RFP was released to secure those funds.
- Kim B.: Could you speak more about the budgeting concerns/priorities, the carry-forward process, and ANR’s role compared to the legislature?
- Xusana D.: Office of Racial Equity would generally agree with the concerns around inclusivity and pacing of this contracting process. Acknowledging that the work related to this Law has been put into a difficult position fiscally. Scarcity mindset to preserve funding to avoid having that funding be lost. Bureaucracy isn’t allowing for many good options in this situation.
- Karla R.: Carry-forward memos are the way that state agencies make sure that money that wasn’t used during the period of time that it originally was assigned to be used can be used at a later date. In this case, it would be “carrying forward” the funds to the next year. ANR received information from the general assembly that it would be unlikely that the money could be carried forward, so the options would be to use the funds by publishing an RFP or to run the risk of losing the

funds. Federal priority changes also complicate this conversation. Doing this work at the state level is more important than ever. This has been offered to AC members before, but would anyone in the AC be interested in joining a Mapping Tool Task Group to engage directly with the RFP process and support this work?

- Victor D.: Were any of these process details shared with the Advisory Council prior to the decision making?
- Kim B.: Information about the concern for losing the funds, information about the carry-forward memo, and information about splitting the Mapping Tool RFP into a technical GIS project and Community Engagement project has been shared before. The intention behind the Community Engagement RFP was not to replace the Advisory Council's necessary community engagement efforts that need to take place to support their role as representative entities. It is important that someone has dedicated capacity to do robust community engagement to fill gaps in data for the mapping tool and translate their findings into usable data. Note that CREJU could improve in communicating procedural concepts in plain language.
- Jennifer B.: Shared a budget request from 2022 where REJOICE advocated for funding for the EJ Law. Has raised concerns regarding the pacing of this mapping tool project before. Concerned that this mapping tool will be duplicating other work, questioning if the mapping tool will be worthwhile. Will the mapping tool actually help people?
- Karla R.: The budget request from 2022 predated the enactment of the bill and was not supported, so it is not represented in Act 154. The mapping tool deliverable cannot be disregarded from the responsibilities of ANR.
- Jennifer B.: The Advisory Council could make recommendations on this, though.
- Karla R.: Correct. Also, environmental justice mapping tools are important for regulatory agencies to embed EJ principles in their daily operations. Need a tool like this to assess needs for decision-making. With the federal tools no longer available, this work needs to happen on the state level. Alternatives that have been presented are dependent on legislative action. Seeking problem-solving mindset and strengthened ally-ship.

12:10 PM Public Comment (10 min)

- No comments.

Environmental Justice Mapping Tool, cont.

- Victor D.: Can folks meet outside of this space to continue discussing next steps?
- Xusana D.: Meeting would be great, but we should avoid duplicating work and violating Open Meeting Law.

- Juliet B.: Only limitations to meeting outside of the public forum is that a meeting cannot meet or exceed quorum, or else it is subject to Open Meeting Law.
- Victor D.: Interested in having one-on-one meetings with AC members. If there are folks who want to get together below the quorum to continue discussing next steps, this is welcome.
- Juliet B.: Executive session could also be a viable option for certain conversations.
- Xusana D.: Noting that executive sessions are specifically defined in State of Vermont. You can discuss things like hiring, contracts, discussions that could disadvantage the group or the state in executive session. You shouldn't engage in decision-making in executive session.
- Juliet B.: Deciding if executive session is something for the Advisory Council to pursue could happen in future meetings.

12:20 PM Next Steps (10 min)

- Karla R.: Reiterate the ask of a Mapping Tool Task Group. Reiterate offer to participate on the contractor selection committee, which will engage in an impartial review of bids for the GIS portion of work for the mapping tool.
- Xusana D.: Introducing Angela Lasso-Jimenez as the back-up/proxy for the Office of Racial Equity.
- Maryam A.: Moving forward, would like to have more discussions on how to engage communities and how to get the AC involved in these efforts.
- Karla R.: Reiterate the ask of a Community Engagement Task Group. This could be an opportunity to influence many processes in Act 154 including AC community engagement, covered agency Community Engagement Plans, etc.

12:30 PM Close Out