

Public Meeting of the Vermont Environmental Justice (EJ) Advisory Council (AC)
Hybrid Meeting Minutes
August 12, 2026

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: August 12, 2026

Meeting Time: 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM EST

Attendees:

Advisory Council (AC): Britaney Watson, Jennifer Byrne, Rich Holschuh, Jeffrey Mbarushimana, Mariana Sears

State of Vermont: Karla Raimundi, Kim Barrett, Juliet Birch

10:00 AM

Welcome & Introductions

- Consent to Community Agreements
 - Not all in attendance responded.
- [September 26, 2025 Meeting Minutes](#)
 - Quorum not achieved. Not approved.
- [February 11, 2026 Meeting Minutes](#)
 - Quorum not achieved. Not approved.
- [April 8, 2026 Meeting Minutes](#)
 - Quorum not achieved. Not approved.
- [July 8, 2026 Meeting Minutes](#)
 - Quorum not achieved. Not approved.
- [August 12, 2026, Agenda](#)

10:05 AM

VT EJ Law Updates

- Juliet: Providing some quick updates:
 - The Community Engagement Plan Guidance that was developed by the VT EJ Community Engagement Subgroup is now complete and has been distributed to all of the covered agencies for their use.
 - To respond to the Advisory Council's recommendations in 2024 to develop a centralized system to intake environmental justice complaints from the public across all covered agencies, the IAC has started a Centralized Intake System Task Group. AC members are welcome to join!
 - As you know, 3 V.S.A. § 6004(h) says that "it shall be the goal of the covered agencies to direct investments proportionately." This has been an ongoing implementation effort involving the covered agencies. Work is continuing to finalize the State's approach to implementing this statutory provision. We will provide additional information when appropriate.
- Karla R.: The next phase of work for the Community Engagement Plan deliverable is technical assistance. This is where the Unit is focusing their attention now with regard to this deliverable: providing covered agencies with the tailored support they need to begin developing their Community Engagement Plans.

10:20 AM

Draft Environmental Justice Complaint Definition Icebreaker

- Kim B.: Goals for today:
 - Get to consensus on the propose EJ Complaint definition
 - Determine additional work needed to finalize the definition
 - Determine if the Council needs collaboration with the IAC
 - Determine next steps and goals
- Kim B.: Summarizes the difference between an EJ complaint and a Civil Rights complaint, the recommendations received from the AC in 2024, and the EJ complaint definition proposed by three AC members in 2026
 - Jennifer B.: What is the intent behind creating another definition at this time? This is not a specific target of the law or deadline in the law.
 - Juliet B.: Since Civil Rights complaints already have a structured framework from the federal government but EJ complaints do not, this is something that the IAC has been asking about. It is important to hear from AC members as the representatives of community –

what truly constitutes as an EJ complaint? How can an EJ complaint be distinguished from other forms of complaints? This proposed definition was drafted by Rich, Mariana, and Matt as part of the AC's 2026 response to the IAC. The definition of an EJ complaint is the foundation of standing up this intake complaint system

- Jennifer B.: In terms of the interpretation of a complaint, this definition is broad. What happens to someone who complains at a state agency and is unsure if the complaint fits as an EJ complaint?
- Juliet B.: In trying to build this complaint intake system, the goal is to ensure that the onus is not on the complainant to determine if their complaint fits the framework or not but rather that the complaint is triaged and properly referred.
- Rich H.: We were concerned that this definition be expanded beyond simply human-centered impacts, wanting to include the environment itself, not just the impact to people.
- Mariana S.: Understood that agencies were hoping to better organize around how to respond to these EJ complaints, so starting with a structure and definition around what an EJ complaint could be (how it differs from a Title VI complaint) could be helpful. Making it easier for the public to file complaints and get them addressed and resolved. Ideally, the responsibility is not on the complainant to figure out exactly what type of complaint they have, but rather that the agencies do this triaging.
- Karla R.: There is a definition of EJ in the statute, but it was important for the IAC to understand what kind of allegations could trigger an EJ complaint process. This definition is helpful to identify the elements of a complaint that the complaint intake system would need to address.
- Mariana S.: AC members have spoken about amending the EJ definition as defined in the Law. The Council is hoping to bring back to the legislature a reviewed definition of environmental justice. One of the concepts that is missing is related to how anthropocentric the EJ definition is currently, respecting the indigenous perspectives.
- Kim B.: Introducing an ice-breaker to support AC in understanding, processing, and describing the current EJ complaint definition. Summarizes why the ice-breaker is important. Ice-breaker: How would you explain the draft definition to your neighbor?
 - Mariana S.: Do you know that there is an EJ Law in Vermont? Start by asking them what they know. Learning that environmental justice is about not just the environment but the people impacted by the environment or environmental decisions. Offering the EJ complaint as an opportunity to

invite participation. Try to share that the Law is intended to change the traditional relationship between the public and the government, which has been painful in the past. An opportunity to fix what has not been right in the past.

- Rich H.: In explaining this definition and process to a neighbor, I would suggest that a "complaint" - in and of itself - need not be seen as negative or off-putting or oppositional. It is part of a conversation or exchange, and "says out loud" what might otherwise be ignored, assumed, or, even more likely, unknown. It expands our mutual awareness, and "makes it real"... and most importantly, this now-present conversation includes other-than-humans whom, after all, co-create this so-called environment that provides everything that we as humans, draw upon.

10:50 AM

Public Comment

- Adam R.: Calling in from the Conservation Law Foundation. Interested in the work the Advisory Council is doing to implement the VT EJ Law. The EJ complaint definition is interesting and a strong framework to help fulfill the 2024 recommendations.
 - Mariana S.: Where are you located?
 - Adam R.: Boston, MA
 - Alejandra C.: Burlington, VT
- Mariana S.: Where are we in terms of appointments? Do we have vacancies? Can the Advisory Council members do anything to support participation and filling vacancies?
 - Juliet B.: There are 11 seats on the Council, and there is currently 1 vacancy – the EJFP representative seat has been vacant since January. There are two appointing authorities who appoint different positions on the AC. While we can provide recommendations to these authorities on who would be viable candidates to fill these seats, they do not have to take these recommendations. They also do not communicate with us directly throughout the appointment process. The AC is welcome to support with recommendations or asking for appointments, but the appointing authorities move at a pace that is not within our control.
 - Kim B.: Reaching out to people individually can be helpful to make people who feel like they've been away for too long welcome to come back to the space

11:05 AM

Break

11:15 AM

Unfacilitated Draft EJ Complaint Definition Discussion

- Kim B.: To discuss Mariana's questions regarding participation as well as discuss the EJ Complaint definition
- Mariana S.: Maybe we can decide which members of the council each of us can reach out to re-invite them back to these meetings. Also thinking about how to propose an amendment to the environmental justice definition under the Law.
- Rich H.: The process for revising definitions under the Law – EJ Complaint definition doesn't require approval from the legislature?
 - Juliet B.: Definitions of terms that are already legally defined (environmental justice, environmental burdens, environmental benefits) require the recommendations to be adopted by the General Assembly before they can be considered legally revised. Definitions that do not have legal definitions (like EJ Complaints) do not require recommendations to be adopted by the General Assembly.
- Jennifer B.: Statutory changes – we should keep this motivation afloat with a clear idea of recommendations by January to be brought for next legislative session. Utilizing energy from law makers to help make these
- Juliet B.: Three different conversations happening: One about the EJ complaint definition, one about the environmental justice definition, and one about participation – maybe we can focus our limited time together on those things that we can work on now.
- Kim B.: Discussion questions:
 - Does the full Council agree with this definition as-is?
 - What additional work and discussion is needed to finalize this definition?
 - Does the Council require any discussion, collaboration, or insights from the IAC or covered agencies to make progress?
 - What are next steps and immediate goals?
- Jennifer B.: Really likes the current draft definition. "Any person can present a complaint" – Maybe clarifying the methods that allow for a complaint to be submitted, this could help ensure that the procedure is broad – many options to submit a complaint. An online form cannot be the only way that a complainant can submit a complaint
 - Mariana S.: Is there a form for agencies to intake Title VI complaints?

- Karla R.: Some agencies already have something stood up. Not sure about the status for every individual agency. We are focusing our attention on EJ because this is Civil Rights is already so standardized by the federal government. EJ allows more flexibility for us to stand up a central intake system.
- Mariana S.: We started this process by trying to have a unified intake system for complaints generally. How can we separate EJ from Civil Rights?
- Karla R.: Not all agencies have common civil rights requirements from the federal government. The onus is on the state to do the triaging of these complaints to determine the subject matter and how they are to be responded to.
- Juliet B.: The nuances here are more about how the agency intakes the complaint. The agency is responsible for appropriately triaging and referring the complaint. The public experience should not be impacted by this.
- Jennifer B.: A lot of the times, this complaint process is not the way it is handled. Many-faceted issues. Not typical that an agency would encourage someone to file a civil rights complaint. This is intentionally ambiguous in the Law. Will take a lot of work to develop a standard definition of this process.
- Mariana S.: What is this definition for if it is not the beginning of a process?
 - Juliet B.: The definition is the beginning of the process.
- Kim B.: Reminder of the Central Intake System workplan shared by the IAC as part of their report submission in 2026, introduction to the Central Intake System Task Group. Hoping to get AC participation on this task group. This work has never been done before and requires a lot of collaboration. There is shared understanding between the people on this call.

11:55 AM

Debrief and Next Steps

- Mariana S.: Reaching out to other Council members to support attendance and participation
 - Juliet B.: Avoiding meeting quorum over email is an important consideration
 - Jennifer B.: Wanting to clarify the details of the Open Meeting Law
 - Karla R.: Will send Open Meeting Law training video that helps to explain

12:05 PM

Close Out