

**Joint Public Meeting of the Vermont Environmental Justice (EJ) Advisory Council
(AC) and the Interagency EJ Committee (IAC)
Hybrid Meeting Minutes
September 9, 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: September 9, 2026

Meeting Time: 10:00 AM – 1:00 PM EST

Advisory Council (AC): Trey Martin, Mariana Sears, Victor Davila, Jennifer Byrne, Britaney Watson, Jeffrey Mbarushimana

Interagency Committee (IAC): Stephanie Smith, Dave Pelletier, Janet Hurley, Grace Vinson, Jeffrey Mbarushimana, Joshua Allen, Anne Maroglis, Amy Redman, Elizabeth Schilling, Abbey Willard, Karla Raimundi

State of Vermont: Juliet Birch, Sarah McIlvennie, Jenny Ronis

10:00 AM

Welcome & Introductions

Updates:

- Juliet: Provides the update that Matt Lawless has submitted resignation as he will be moving; this means that there are now two open Advisory Council (AC) seats: 1) municipal government, and 2) Environmental Justice Focus Population (EJFP)
- Consent to Community Agreements
 - Unanimous consent.
- [June 10, 2026 Meeting Minutes](#)
 - Quorum not achieved; Not approved.
- [September 9, 2026, Agenda](#)
 - Approved.

10:10 AM

Environmental Justice Complaint Definition

- Juliet: Goals for today include: 1) Clarifying EJ complain definition,
 - Background: **AC Members Matt, Rich, Mariana** got together in spring 2026 to draft a definition that was submitted to IAC in May.
 - Wanted to make room for bi-body discussion about this topic now that there has been ample time for discussion amongst IAC members at prior meetings.
 - Every year each covered agency is required to submit a Civil Rights and Environmental Justice complain report; Civil Rights are clearly outlined through clear federal framework; this provides clarity around elements of compliance.
 - Comparatively there is no federal framework around Environmental Justice complains; up to this body to development framework for triaging, managing and compliance related to environmental justice complaints
 - In 2024 AC submitted recommendations for IAC to create centralized environmental complaint intake system, including
 - Accessible referral and tracking process
 - Centralized intake form and structure for recordkeeping, reporting
 - Goal: to make process for public more seamless and less confusing
 - In response IAC decided to develop a task group to take on the development of this centralized system but the question of “what is an Environmental Justice Complaint”?
 - Draft definition for discussion:
 - “An environmental justice complaint is a recognition of actions, conditions, or decisions involving a disregard or neglect to any of the principles of environmental justice, including any lack of care against the sacredness of Mother Earth, the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction. Any person or community that has experienced obstruction to fair access to environmental benefits and/or disproportionate exposure to environmental burdens, as well as lack of meaningful participation, information, services, or protection as it relates to environmental justice law and/or as a result of agency action, inaction, practice, or decision-making can present a complaint. This draft definition should remain flexible and continue to respond to EJ Law implementation needs and community input.”
- Group-Driven Discussion:

- Victor: Implementation of complaints, is there an idea of which agency would handle that or would it be specific to each agency OR is that going to the AG and then the AG would connect with agencies
- Elizabeth: Currently agency by agency
- Victor: Preliminary understanding and investigation would be agency specific, but after at the 'end' of a complaint if it is found legitimate, what does that end step look like?
- Elizabeth: No clear process currently set out in the EJ law so part of this process / the task of the task group is figure out what process each agency should take
- Juliet: IAC is seeking a task group to start putting together an intake system; goal of discussion is to coalesce around "What is an EJ complaint" and "how do we address them?"
- Mariana: Was one of the three members who drafted the (current) definition; the rationale behind that drafting and personal recommendation is that this process becomes something that is friendly to people. Personally, has no idea how to submit a complaint to a government agency? Assuming that other people that have a background that is not related to government or doesn't have the knowledge/expertise of how to navigate government systems you don't know how to submit a complaint; you may not even know that you have that right or can access that service. "I didn't know that I could submit a complaint about the dump in the corner of my town, or the fact that I the only grocery store in my town is a dollar store, or that my house doesn't have adequate heating for my family". People need to know that they can make those complaints, what will happen when they do, and how to do it. It is also important to provide processes to protect the environment as well, so that complaints can be placed on behalf of the environment if not also direct impact on humans.
- Janet: Our Community Engagement Plans should outline how reaching out in ways to inform people how to access this complaint system.
- Amy: "A system that is friendly to people" feels very important to hold close in this process and work. AC's recommendation to create friendly, one-door place to go to feels very top of mind for this task; related to definition: 1) express gratitude for the AC members who drafted this and gave the group something to respond to, 2) the pieces that are in the definitions are very resonant for Amy, which feels more important than perhaps specific wordsmithing.
- Karla: Starting with something that relates to Victor's question: There are several conversations happening simultaneously; this work brings the opportunity to explore several factors that are related and could potentially

come together in an effective and state-wide EJ complaint intake system. This work includes: 1) definition offered by the 3 AC members, 2) Central intake system and triaging of complaints – the values in that system and how complaints are managed is important and what happens when complaints are received?, 3) There will (At least) be triaging centrally and the question is – there is a referral process based on the agency/agencies named; as part of this full system each agency would internally decide how to manage and respond to EJ complaints. We can imagine what this array of responses might look like based on current array of Civil Rights complaint reporting and follow up processes. Looking at what CR complaints look like currently, we can expect that EJ complaint follow up would also look like this unless this group decides to do something different.

- Janet: I can see that complaints could come in without identifying responsibility of a particular or even a few covered agencies and that the ensuing investigation would identify the relevant agencies to respond.
- Trey: One of the sections in current work sets up “submissions, investigation, follow up and resolution”. Resolution – how do you do that effectively and that holds at center that this work is justice work; bringing things to resolution and conclusion is not necessarily within the scope of EJ. What if disputes or disagreement about resolution then cause a stop of work that could be harmful to an agency and the public (example: suspension of services). Wondering how the AC can support these delineations and support remedies and make sure staff feel supported; that can be really hard as a public servant to move through.
- Victor:
 - Wondering if it would be important to say “Sacredness of State of Vermont and Mother Earth” to provide some focus of scope. Providing more parameters to avoid inactionable broadness. Flexibility is included here and can be a double-edged sword; can we review to see what is needed for the skeleton to stay true and then what can be flexible to allow for modularity.
 - When it comes to single, friendly entrance, like that. We talked about power mapping a while ago and (the CEP subgroup) talked about how power mapping communities is a terrible idea because that data could be misused. Power-mapping agencies feels like a much better idea and could support members of the public understanding who they are working with. Ex: PFAS – have encountered community members who are unsure which agencies are responsible for implementing which and guarding which pieces.

Community members reached out to AG and they had to be redirected multiple times. This redirection is a waste of time for staff members and allows more consistent implementation of rules

- Power Mapping: Where someone is authority-wise? Relevance to a particular point of issue; being able to map them along chains of command. Not the case for this, but can also include levels of favorability (ex: is someone a neutral, antagonistic or favorable person). IN this situation it would be ease of access (ex: easier to access a selectboard vs. Accessing the AG which requires petition).
- The lack of this and confusion can strain relationships as it is a form of passive communication.
- Jennifer: The law asks the agencies to submit these reports on Civil Rights and EJ complaints; we as an AC (joint) are agreeing to a new process because one doesn't exist. What we can't do is create a new compliance structure – we don't want to cross over into that territory. What I'm seeing described is some type of "one" system. Nothing is siloed. The great thing is that we (IAC/AC) is all here to support assessment. Could there be some kind of internal power structure to assess how complaints that cross boundaries are assessed and assigned. Let's make sure that we have clarity around what can happen when you file a complaint and that the follow up will not (always, necessarily) lead to legal action.
 - Power mapping: this work goes into the CEP planning work as well – important to connect this to how/where we make sure information and resources are available to community members as well.
- Mariana: Wanted to highlight what Trey, Victor, Jennifer shared and circle back to the linkage between this system and the community engagement process. If we think about relationships, you tell someone in your relationships that something is not working when there is built trust. There should be a strong relationship between this process and the community engagement plans. That would make things easier for folks and empower them to understand what's available to them and to speak up when they feel they are experiencing hard and should make a complaint.
- Trey: Appreciated questions and thoughts around what are the multiple ways that responses can happen in agencies to get to the actions that community members and complainants are seeking. There are some established processes already that allow people to submit complaints about processes. Example: speaking with

community member in Bennington when there was an agency permit that had EJ complaints; there wasn't a way to change the outcome of the permit but it would have been tremendously helpful information if the community had understood how they could engage with the permitting and feedback process on the front end.

- Juliet: Can we get a sense from the AC members if they have any interest in making refinements to the current definition? What do you see as the next steps to getting the definition to a place where it is final and approved?
 - Victor: Don't think it would take more than one session; think the definition is strong but would want to make tweaks to make sure that the form follows the spirit
 - Jennifer: Wondering if the definition could link more directly back to the definition of EJ in the law, even if it's adding an extra sentence. Definition is one thing but the process that is being built out, could that be built out a little more – what do you do with the definition once you've finalized it?
 - Elizabeth: There hasn't been a ton of back and forth yet between IAC and AC – does AC want more iterative engagement or feeling good about getting a more finalized version to sign off on? Quick reactions
 - Second paragraph quickly ties back to statute definition of EJ – a good grounding for implementation
 - First paragraph – thinking about state agency staff needing to implement that; while this group might understand what the principles of EJ are, all staff would need to have access to and be supported in building knowledge for state staff who would need to implement this
 - Also the concept of what distinguishes an EJ complaint from just any complaint about an environmental issue?

11:108 AM

Public Comment

- Jean Hamilton: Interested in generally trying to follow what is happening for the community engagement planning for all your agencies; a potentially transformative body of work; as a co-director of the LAOB and a citizen what

resources would support all your agencies to make these agencies as operational and actionable as possible. Acknowledging how much has been done with tight resources and naming that that is not a good recipe for the body of work that is happening right now. What kind of movement support would be helpful, and underscoring and appreciating conversation before about complaint system and using best practices of community engagement in whatever that system is. Occurred to Jean that there are a lot of individualized bodies already such as Human Rights Commissions, Housing violation complaint system, and just seeing what an incredible barrier. Thinking about what is the point of standing up a complaint system in a moment when there are so many dysfunctional complaint systems currently.

11:12 AM

Break

11:18 AM

Central Intake System Work Plan and Task Group

- Juliet: Quorum achieved with the AC so lets revisit approving minutes. All approved:
 - [June 10, 2026 Meeting Minutes](#)
 - [September 26, 2025 Meeting Minutes](#)
 - [February 11, 2026 Meeting Minutes](#)
 - [April 8, 2026 Meeting Minutes](#)
 - [July 8, 2026 Meeting Minutes](#)
 - [August 12, 2026 Meeting Minutes](#)
- Juliet: Purpose of the task group is to lead the creation of a transparent, equitable and accessible Central Intake System
 - In response to AC 2024 recommendations, based on AC definition of Env. Justice complaint, and following the IAC's central intake system workplan but with updates as not following timeline currently
 - Seven phase workplan which starts with core team development which is the current topic of the meeting
 - Imagining this as one big team with two "sub teams" with different capacity requirements
 - Core team: 2 IAC members, 2 AC members, 1 CREJU unit and program staff from covered agencies

- Experience or Interest: Systems and data management, Accessibility and equity, language access, civil rights and other related bodies of work
- Group Driven Discussion:
 - Abbey: What are the responsibilities or expectations?
 - Juliet: Hasn't been fully established yet, but the core team will develop this as they get going and then can define more pieces like hourly or weekly commitment.
 - Jennifer: This feels like this is really related to a piece of the CEP engagement plan and more specifically the assessment. Complaints are referenced in the assessment and then again not super deeply delved into the guidance. We're in a moment where it feels like it still needs to remain under the umbrella of the assessment that is at the foot of all the covered agencies currently. As an AC member, understanding what is coming down the pike would be really helpful. Important that we go into the complaint process in a specific way – wondering if this task group could be much less of a lift if there are 4-5 minds getting together for a couple of meetings with specific questions.
 - Mariana: Along the lines of what Jennifer is saying, I am wondering about recruiting / appointment of new AC members to help with this work.
 - Karla: What's really interesting in this particular time in the EJ law implementation is that most of the large deliverables with the exception of the CEP deliverable, are complete or partially complete; now that we have that foundation in place, we are better suited to connect the deliverables and their overlapping work more intentionally.
 - Mariana: Wanted to check if, related to the question about recruitment, have we been able to ensure that AC members who cannot attend these meetings are meaningfully participating in ways that are good for them? Wondering about those members and if we have some flexibility to move some of these meetings to times that are good for other members.
 - Juliet: The CREJU is doing what they can to support AC members and support them in participating even if they cannot attend a meeting or meetings. There will need to be bigger scheduling conversations looking ahead to 2027 and honoring that there are AC members in the chat offering that they are willing to be flexible around meeting hours to meet needs of representatives.
 - Abbey: Know that the IAC has chatted about this a bit but want to bring to the joint group. Thinking that voices that could be really helpful to bring to this conversation would be the Chief Performance Office, Justin Kenney and his team, and folks from Agency of Digital Services.

- Chief Performance Office is always looking at cross-agency collaboration and system and operational function and efficiency.
- Adding that the Agency of Digital Services is a separate recommendation to the Chief Performance Office as that is how all of the State of Vermont Information and Technology (IT) work is managed and this system would need to fit into those structures and processes.
- Sarah: The only thing I would add to that is that the Chief Performance Office also does a lot of work in building cross-agency functional systems, including intaking information, sorting it and being able to share it across agencies.
- Jennifer: I wonder if Land Access Opportunity Board (LAOB) could be considered as participants if willing. Seconded by Abbey.
- Janet: I think the Land Use Review Board (LURB) can be a revolving participant.
- Amy: Suggestion that we could have a separate informational meeting for individuals who might be interested in/considering participation in this task group. Not a commitment, but just curious about learning more about what this would look like. This includes anyone interested and is not limited to AC and IAC representatives.
- Juliet: Yes! Considering a date in late September but Juliet will send out a doodle poll; if not interested just ignore the poll.
- Mariana: Is there a sense from AC members around interest and capacity to support this work?
- Juliet: Not yet!
- Karla: Second part of the question – is it ideal to have AC members from the beginning of the process? Would offer perspective that the answer is yes. It is important that this system is informed by AC members experiences of engaging with agencies and with the communities that they represent. This has many benefits but the minimum is to make sure that we're not recreating previously created and ineffectual systems.
- Juliet: This intake system is more so for the public so it needs to be informed by perspectives from AC populations.

12:04 PM

Public Comment

- No Public Comment

12:05 PM

Break

12:10 PM

Community Engagement Plan Technical Assistance

- Juliet: Community Engagement Plan (CEP) Guidance was released in early August. CREJU held office hours in lieu of an IAC meeting in August. Juliet has also heard from individual agencies and been able to attend meetings and support internal teams. Reminder to keep reaching out as that is helpful!
 - Going to share a draft timeline for reflection and discussion around what make sense for this group of agencies.
 - Proposing:
 - Three phases of Technical Assistance (TA)
 - Phase 1 = August – October
 - Internal capacity formulation and foundation setting
 - Includes assessment
 - Phase 2 = November – January
 - Diving into specific topics for your agency to explore
 - Phase 3 = July 2027 onward
 - Interspersal with AC consultation time
 - February – June 2027 = AC consultation time
 - Think of this as an extension of phase 2 technical assistance
 - This could look like many things – as long as we're not reaching quorum outside of meetings
 - Coordinated public comment period would overlap with this timing
 - Proposing coordinated public comment period (April – May 2027)
- Group Discussion:
 - Janet: Seeing that the AC consultation period overlaps on both sides with coordinated public engagement, do we want to get AC input earlier in the process?
 - Juliet: We wanted to allow for consultation time with the AC that includes incorporation of feedback from public comment periods as well.
 - Elizabeth: Feeling the tightness of the timeline and wanting to be mindful of expectations around capacity to have a completed draft by the time that

we are submitting something to the AC. Stephanie and Janet are seconding this.

- Janet: Will be working with an external support consultant through May 2027 so thinking that LURB plan wouldn't be drafted until the spring and public comment into May. Board needs to adopt the plan; likely would happen June 28th.
- Juliet: Curious about the timeline for integration of feedback from the public comment period and how long that will take?
- Abbey: Feeling like the timeline feels both fast and tight. AAFM has just drafted an outline for our workplan. Outreach in April does align with what we're anticipating. That being said, in January or February is where we might also do public engagement that would be organized by themes.
 - One of the conversation topics that had come up from the IAC is that there are shared themes across state units – rulemaking, granting, permitting, education and outreach. Some of the activities in those categories may be more similar across agencies even more so than how we do different programs within the agency. Abbey was imagining that coordinated public comment period could be organized around types of work. If that is the case, April is feeling a little late to have those conversations with the public. Unless we're doing internal work as part of AC consultation starting in February, and then we're having the public weigh on drafted materials in April.
- Janet: LURB would have public input through our weekly open board meetings as we develop and discuss the plan as a board. This could be Nov – April.
- Juliet: There is no “ideal” situation for timing on this; there is a bit of an order of operations that need to be done.
- Jennifer: Phase 1 is the internal assessment which is going to take the first chunk of time before the drafting of the plan. Just looking at the law itself, we don't want to rush to community engagement without a reason to engage the community. Can we think about how we interpret the statute – could the joint bodies make the decision that by July 1st there is a plan accepted/approved to go out to community engagement and get feedback. Noting that this is not a formal rulemaking process and so we don't really need to run it as such.
 - Noting that we haven't had the opportunity to create clear foundational understanding of where folks need to be at in their processes before we go to the public and then before the July 1st deadline.

- Karla: The joint public process is synchronized around the issues, not around the agencies' individual drafting schedules. Agencies must be sufficiently prepared to engage collectively on the common issues identified for public comment, while maintaining their respective agency-specific drafting and adoption timelines.
- Janet: Everything that the LURB does as a quorum has to be done through the space of open meeting. Confirming that this process is iterative and the public will be engaging throughout the process. Had been interpreting the need to have a finalized plan by the comment period time. Additionally, each of the LURB's working sessions will need to be in public meeting.
- Juliet: Coordinated Public Comment Period: A public comment period for all covered agencies to receive feedback from the public as a collective and to hear public expectations. This idea was proposed by IAC and supported by AC and builds capacity for meaningful participation in the CEP development process. Amy Redman and Mariana Sears will be supporting with the organization.
- Abbey: Joint point of reference that April/May can be a very busy legislative session time of year. Plus not the ideal time of year to capture those farmers working the land - so we will try to also connect with this segment of our constituents in the December-January timeframe
- Adam: This has been a helpful discussion, on behalf of CLF the inclusion of a coordinated public comment period would be important to make this work more accessible.
- Jennifer: Hearing that folks are considering coming back with their own timelines. Asking this body to sit with question: How do we continue to work together and implement this work after July 1, 2027. Feels like a rushed process for drafting and for meetings. Wondering if there is some AC role to maintain public involvement in the process as comments start coming in and need to be heard and sorted. We can take the time and space to engage with assessments. Writing and drafting of plans themselves doesn't feel like it will take that long but the question is – is it actionable is the content there?
 - Do we have to engage in public comment before 7/1 or can we hold on that and take time to understand responsibilities and longterm processes and roles for IAC and AC bodies.
- Juliet: Hearing the ask to confirm what 7/1/2027 means for this group, and CREJU can work with their legal council on this question. Additionally, if folks want to share their workplans/timelines with the CREJU unit directly Juliet can send those out together to ensure avoidance of quorum.

- Karla: There will always be questions of timeline to make sure that we're balancing doing well by process and also acknowledging the internal dynamics of all engaged entities. The offer is that there is a period of time available where, if we can as a collective identify topics of interest where it would be good to get clarity – if we can get to a point where there are common questions that agencies have. That will allow us to have opportunity to hear from Vermonters.
- Abbey: Is “public comment period” the best fit for meaningful participation in complex feedback over a short period of time? Also wanted to share out so that the AC folks can hear the idea that was floated to have an annual summit that is focused on the cultural change and establishment shifts that will be a long-term part of this work.
- Juliet: Confirming that we are saying ‘public comment period’ broadly in this space and will be deferring to Amy and Mariana on this structure.
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12:45 PM

Next Steps

- Juliet:
 - AC members revise the Environmental Justice complaint definition (if needed) and vote to adopt at next public meeting
 - AC and IAC members finalize membership for Central Intake System Task Group
 - Central Intake System Task Group informational session: tentatively 09/30 from 1 pm – 1:45 pm, but to be confirmed by Doodle Poll
 - Covered agencies prepare to develop Community Engagement Plans (See CEP Guidance Part 2)
- Abbey: Covered agencies share their CEP timelines for consideration?
 - Juliet: Yes, please!

12:55 PM

Close Out