

Public Meeting of the Vermont Environmental Justice (EJ) Advisory Council (AC)
Hybrid Meeting Minutes
October 14, 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: October 14, 2026

Meeting Time: 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM EST

Attendees:

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

State of Vermont: Karla Raimundi, Juliet Birch

10:00 AM

Welcome & Introductions

- Introductions -- All Advisory Council members share name and affiliation
 - Joined by Annie Decker, who works with VHCB and will be supporting Trey in his role on the Council
- Consent to Community Agreements
- [October 14, 2026 Agenda](#)

10:20 AM

Membership and Turnover Overview

- Juliet: AC members have in past public meetings expressed interest in learning about current vacancies and how we can support bringing new folks into the council. Current membership is as follows:
 - Office of Racial Equity – Jeffrey Mbarushimana
 - Social Justice Org. – Britaney Watson
 - Food Security – Mariana Sears
 - Statewide Environmental Org. – Victor Davila

- Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs – Rich Holschuh
- Vermont Housing and Conservation Board – Trey Martin
- Natural Resources Conservation Council – Jennifer Byrne
- Municipal Government – *Vacant*
- Mobile Home Park – *Vacant*
- Environmental Justice Focus Populations – *Vacant*
- Immigrant Communities – *Vacant*
- Rich: What does Environmental Justice Focus Population represent?
 - Juliet: Include people of color and indigenous people, people who speak languages other than English, and low income Vermonters.
- Juliet: One third of seats appointed by the Committee on Committees expire every two years in December with the upcoming term expiration being for the Social Justice Organization seat in December of 2026. Roughly third of seats appointed by the Speaker of the House expire every two years in February with the upcoming term expiration being for the Food Security and Statewide Environmental Organization seats in February of 2027. Victor has expressed interest in seeking reappointment
- Jeffrey: What is the barrier for the immigrant community role?
 - Juliet: The resignation for the immigrant community role was very recent so there just hasn't yet been a lot of time to find a successor so far. If you have recommendations for this role – or any others – please share with us! One general barrier to participation is that the appointing authority doesn't always share with prospective advisory council members the expectations of the role and the level of commitment, so it is important that we give people a realistic understanding of what this role entails.
 - Jeffrey: Would be willing to provide a list of folks who would be a good fit for this role
 - Karla: It would be great for you to preliminarily assess their capacity and interest before providing us the recommendations, just as a first pass assessment of their ability to take on this role.
- Juliet: Noting that the appointing authority is not obliged to follow the recommendations we provide and may appoint other representatives outside of who we recommend as a collective
- Trey: Land Access Opportunity Board may be a good fit for any of these vacancies

10:40 AM

Public Comment

- No comment.

10:40 AM

Break

10:50 AM

Environmental Justice (EJ) Complaint Definition

- Juliet: Providing context – Currently working on creating a definition of an environmental justice (EJ) complaint. This will support covered agencies in developing a central complaint intake system as part of the Advisory Council’s recommendations in 2024. The EJ complaint definition is the foundation of this work. May 2026 draft definition provided, as well as recently revised draft definition from October 2026. Definitions are subject to discussion and revision during this collaborative working time
 - Jennifer: This is a voluntary activity and the definition is not legally binding. Interested in exploring other topics in this meeting as well
 - Trey: Curious if this looks close to final in the eyes of other AC members? Some of the things that went into these revisions was wanting to create a transparent process for supporting someone as they make a complaint. Begin clear that the definition is tied to the three areas of the law: 1) environmental benefits, 2) environmental burdens, and 3) meaningful participation. Making sure that complaints are effectively directed to a pathway for remedy. Recognizing that there needs to be a clear path for staff to redress complaints as well.
 - Karla: Important to allow for some space within the definition so that agencies can work both with complaints and concerns, acknowledging the distinction. Should we spell out the sources of law? Sometimes redress can look different depending on the source of law
 - Trey: The word “direct” could be problematic
 - Karla: Perhaps taking the third paragraph out of the definition and then including them instead in a procedure to direct both staff and complainants to the appropriate source of law depending on the assessment of the subject of the complaint
 - Juliet: What do others think of what Karla is proposing?
 - Rich: Appreciates the first paragraph as an aspirational mission statement, sees the second paragraph as structure and strategy, third paragraph removal would be fine

- Jennifer: Will agencies know and understand the interpretation of the law in this definition? Do they have to follow this definition? This isn't truly legally binding. Should it be more clear that this isn't a rule?
- Karla: Agencies are clear this is not a rule in the formal sense. This exercise is intended to center AC recommendations and perspectives.
- Mariana: This work is really based in trust and the hope that we can change culture and create a system that supports members of the public
- Juliet: Let's hear from each AC member if they are comfortable bringing this revised definition to the IAC:

"An environmental justice complaint is a recognition of actions, conditions, or decisions involving an intentional or unintentional disregard to any of the principles of environmental justice. These principles are in place to help protect the stability and health of Vermont's native and endemic eco systems and support the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction for the sake of a sacred mother earth.

Any person or community that has experienced or is concerned about:

- Obstruction to fair access to environmental benefits,
- Disproportionate exposure to environmental burdens,
- Lack of meaningful participation, information, services or protection as a result of agency action, inaction, practice or decision-making

may contact a covered agency and request assistance to present a complaint or to present a complaint without assistance.

This definition will be reviewed by the Interagency Committee and the Advisory Council every five year as needed to ensure it remains responsive to the needs of the Vermont Environmental Justice Law and Vermont communities."

- Juliet: Six out of seven AC members responded affirmatively. One abstained.
- Trey: So just to summarize the workplan for the EJ complaint work: There are six phases of work and we are putting our input into phase 1. Next will be some comparative analysis and eventual AC engagement. This is not the last time we will be talking about this?
 - Juliet: Correct. Highlighting the Central Intake System Task Group. Looking for at least one more Advisory Council member to participate.

11:30 AM

Environmental Justice Updates

- Jennifer: Update on Community Engagement Plan Guidance and technical assistance?
 - Juliet: Yes, the guidance has been really well received. The guidance provides a lot of really good contents that can be incorporated into each agency's individual Community Engagement Plans. Some agencies are feeling raring and ready to go, already working on their assessments and envisioning their Plans. Some agencies require tailored support to know more about the extent to which this deliverable applies to them
 - Karla: Noting also that we have met with agency leadership to support building organizational capacity for the Community Engagement Plans
 - Victor: Thinking of what we're doing at the AC as supporting covered agencies by creating a path of least resistance
 - Juliet: Coordinated public comment period or engagement process for all covered agency Community Engagement Plans. Working with Mariana Sears and Amy Redman on the preliminary planning for this work
 - Mariana: Trying to put in practice the type of engagement we want to see all agencies use. Thinking of this as a huge overlap with the development of the Central Intake System
- Juliet: Next update on 3 VSA 6004(h) – the part of the law that asks agencies to create a goal on the way they distribute environmental benefits
 - Karla: Agencies signed on to a statement of commitment aligning with this statutory commitment that asks for a goal of equitable distribution. Next step is to analyze the data from the Baseline Spending Report
- Juliet: Any EJ work folks want to share about in their communities?
 - Mariana: Would like to see these updates come earlier in the meetings. Would anyone want to meet in person for the November 18 public meeting? Upcoming Farm to Plate Conference will include a presentation about the EJ Law – prompted by Abbey and Sarah from the Agency of Agriculture. Recently attended the Vermont Community Leaders Summit last week as well. Looking to see if the council would be willing to participate in these kinds of events in the future!
 - Annie: November 18 is also the Statewide Housing Conference in South Burlington
 - Jennifer: Dirt and Democracy Land Use Panel on October 17 – opening remarks will talk about the EJ Law and community engagement
- Mariana: Mapping tool updates?

- Karla: Contract negotiation process is now complete. It was complex to navigate negotiating two separate contracts with two separate contractors who are intended to work hand in hand throughout the process. Now this negotiation process is complete. Hopefully we can share about a kick off date in the coming weeks

11:55 AM

Close Out