

Meeting Minutes

Governor's Environmental Justice Advisory Council

Tuesday, July 23, 2024

1:00-6:00pm

Halifax County Community College

Room 401

100 College Dr, Weldon, NC 27890

At 2:45 PM, Co-chair Dr. Jim Johnson called the meeting to order and read the ethics and conflict of interest statement. No one had a conflict of interest, so the meeting proceeded to the planned agenda. Roll call was taken.

Council Members Present

Co-Chair Dr. Virginia Guidry

Co-Chair Dr. Jim Johnson

Dr. Tamara Holmes Brothers

Cara Bridges

Dr. Marian Johnson-Thompson

Marilynn Marsh-Robinson

Naeema Muhammad

Demico Guy

Jennifer Mundt

Daisha Wall

Sherri White-Williamson

Jennifer Mundt

Dr. Rebecca Witter

Ebony Pittman

Dr. Courtney G. Woods

Douglas Taggart

McKinley Wooten

The May 28th, 2024, meeting minutes were adopted by the Council.

The Council began the meeting with brief remarks from Co-chair Dr. Johnson regarding cabinet agencies' environmental justice (EJ) goals. Agencies are currently reviewing feedback from council members and are asked to submit revisions by September 1.

An update on cumulative impacts was given by Subcommittee Chair Sherri White-Williamson. The subcommittee is working with the Office of Strategic Partnerships to reach out to academic institutions to see if anyone is completing relevant research. Will Hendrick, Director of Environmental Justice at the NC Conservation Network, compiled a list of EJ practices and priorities from other states for the subcommittee. The subcommittee will use these when determining the best course of action and recommendations to the Governor. The cumulative impacts subcommittee plans to continue meeting with other subcommittees on a bi-monthly basis with the goal of a draft report to be reviewed by the Council in September. A key question is

whether the Mapping Tool will support the measurement of cumulative impacts, or what may be additionally needed in order to achieve that goal. These meetings are open to community members.

Matthew McLamb of from the NC Department of Information Technology (DIT) presented the updated EJ Mapping Tool Minimal Viable Product (MVP). First, Mr. McLamb gave an overview of the project status. DIT is on track with the planned schedule with the EJ Hub planning to go live in October. Mr. McLamb expanded on the timeline:

- DIT received approval of the design prototype in early June.
- Currently, DIT is working on having all layers complete by the end of July to focus on aesthetics and accessibility.
- DIT plans for the application to be complete by September.

Mr. McLamb then provided an overview of the EJ Mapping tool with the additional recommendations of the council.

- 22 items of 23 have been accepted to date in the form of enhancements.
- The one recommendation that was not accepted was a feature to allow multiple layers to be turned on and off with one click.
- DIT was also unable to clip National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration data to specify just North Carolina.
- The application now has bright background instead of dark background per requests. The topographic background in use now will be more accessible and easier to navigate.
- Additional layers that were requested have been added: Prisons, State Owned Lands (in the future the color will change based on type of state-owned land), State Tribal Boundaries, CDC EJ Index, EPA Environmental Quality Index.

Mr. McLamb then gave a demonstration of the application

- Users have to accept a splash screen that this is a prototype version.
 - DIT requests feedback from Council on the text to include on the splash screen when the tool goes live.
- Different buttons and view abilities have changed to allow visibility of maps including the ability to print map data as a PDF.
- Ability to add data to the map temporarily has been added (if you refresh the data will go away/will not impact other users).
- Current categories of layers: Climate Stressors, Demographics, Geographic, Health, Supporting Data, Transportation – layers to be finalized by the end of July to focus on aesthetics
 - Environmental, Demographics, and Climate Stressors have added new data – indices layers have to be at the bottom, or they will obstruct point data layers.
 - 50 data layers have been added to Health.
 - Community Broadband has been added as a layer.

- State owned lands will have different colored markings to designate the type of land and avoid confusion.
 - Transportation Disadvantage Index Tool data has been added .
- All of the data is represented in the “about” section of the tool. The site holds descriptions about the data points to help users dive into how data was created and derived.
- Homepage and disclaimer presented
 - Open to feedback on EJ grant opportunities and disbursements.
- Contact page has been made available, contact currently goes to Mr. McLamb.
 - DIT requests feedback from the council on what contact should be on the contact page.

Mr. McLamb then outlined the next steps for the EJ tool and the Council.

- Project team requests approval from the Council to move forward with finalizing the MVP development process.
- DIT will complete outstanding items of the Council feedback list.
- Subcommittee or the Council to provide feedback on the intake form.

Through discussion, it was determined that a key will be available for every acronym that appears on the site. The purpose of the tool is to help communities understand how environmental issues affect their area, particularly around the Heat Index statistic. This can be used to spread information to other community members and organizations. Another goal of the tool is to see what communities are disproportionately impacted by EJ concerns. It brings together a lot of information that has been held in separate places and allows for data to be seen comprehensively and visualized. The content of the tool should enable viewers to quantify cumulative impacts and represent these impacts when fighting for investments in these communities.

A motion was made by Jennifer Mundt to give permission to DIT to move forward in completing the MVP as detailed in the presentation. The motion was seconded, and the motion passed with Council vote. Dr. Rebecca Witter abstained.

Subcommittee Chair Dr. Courtney Woods of the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool Subcommittee provided an update. The subcommittee has met twice since the May 28 meeting, which included a virtual workshop where the team partnered with the EJ Community Connector Initiative led by the NC Conservation Network. In the workshop, members of the subcommittee presented certain features of the mapping tool and gave attendees the opportunity to navigate the tool on their own. In the current meeting, the subcommittee discussed the idea of holding three virtual workshops in collaboration with the Public Engagement Subcommittee. These virtual sessions will be similar to the one held with the North Carolina Conservation Network. The subcommittee will recruit for these sessions by contacting several listservs to get direct feedback on the tool. Feedback on the tool they have already received includes the fact that several communities face specific EJ challenges that are not available on the map. One community member requested an address box so that a user can type an address into the tool and see how layers relate to a

particular area. Users also suggested a query or information box to search for topics they are specifically interested as well as a section for community health assessments.

Subcommittee Chair Ebony Pittman of the Community Engagement Subcommittee provided an update, assisted by Jamille Robbins. The community engagement subcommittee has shared resources and tools with EJ communities in order to gain public opinion and further understand what community engagement looks like for this Council. There will be a state-wide virtual meeting on August 1st to get more public opinion. The community engagement proposal also included in-person forums every other Thursday throughout the state. Department of Transportation staffer Simone Robinson gave a brief presentation on the public input site for the Executive Order 292 initiative, which hopes to educate NC citizens on EJ initiatives and to collect feedback. Robinson provided an explanatory video of the mapping tool and showed the contact hotline, designed for community members with limited broadband access to call from a landline.

In response to a question about the overlaps of the EJ Hub and the public input site, Robinson clarified that the site would allow citizens to share general EJ concerns as opposed to feedback on the tool. Co-chair Virginia Guidry suggested offering stations at public meetings to gather public feedback on multiple projects in one place so as not to overwhelm the public with overlapping events. After discussion it was determined that the meeting would be recorded, statewide community leaders would be notified, and subcommittee leaders were to meet at 11am on Wednesday, July 24th to clarify priorities and project expectations.

Subcommittee Chair Marian Johnson-Thompson of the Training Subcommittee provided an update. The training subcommittee hopes to have community input on the EJ trainings as they are being developed. The training subcommittee recommends that all state employees participate in an environmental justice training, but the length and depth should depend on the agency's involvement with EJ issues. The subcommittee believes that there should be a statement that explains how EJ relates to every agency and state government work to avoid any confusion by state employees about the purpose of the training. The training subcommittee recommend that outside organizations participate in EJ training, including county commissions and city councils. Included in the content of the training should be climate justice. The training subcommittee recommends that an inventory of existing EJ Trainings be reviewed and determined whether they are effective and conduct a search to see if other organizations provide relevant EJ Training.

Chair Jennifer Mundt of the Report Development subcommittee provided an update.

- The chair reviews the content required in the October 15, 2024, Report:
 - Identify and make recommendations for advancing EJ
 - Asks subcommittees to send recommendations to report and think about top one or two recommendations to put them in front of the council.
 - Describe activities of council
 - Utilize meeting minutes and overviews from subcommittee chairs.
 - Identify EJ policies and programs in state agencies

- Each agency should do this work with substantial support from Maddie Squibb, summer intern with the Department of Health and Human Services.
- Describe Public Participation Plan agency implementation
 - Use feedback from public and describe how these are being factored into the plans.

Jennifer Mundt calls for a reminder that this is a process that will mature as knowledge increases and ability to communicate matures, anticipate a place for ideas for the future as part of the reports

- Proposed timeline for completion of report
 - 9/10 - Submit content to subcommittee
 - 9/17 - Draft report compiled
 - 9/24 - Council meeting with agenda item to discuss draft report
 - 10/1 - Revised draft report shared w/ Council and Gov Office
 - 10/8 - Virtual meeting to discuss draft report
 - 10/15 - Deliver annual report to Governor Cooper

The council adjourned for a break at 4:50pm.

The Council moved into a period for public comment at 5pm.

Jasmine Washington from the Southern Environmental Law Center emphasized that Title VI prohibits people who receive federal funding to act in a way that exhibits discrimination. There are multiple state agencies in North Carolina that are receiving Title VI complaints. Washington asks that council members whose agencies have Title VI complaints focus on avoiding discriminatory action. Washington recommends that the next public meeting taking place in Stanly County should take into consideration the concerns and history of the residents of West Badin. Council members should provide space for community members to share their experiences and thoughts given the historical context of the area.

Belinda Joyner, a Halifax County community member expressed disappointment in the Council. She was not aware that the council would be in Halifax County until this morning. She attempted to rally community members, but they could not come on such short notice. Joyner suggests that the time would be better spent in the community observing EJ discrepancies like the Atlantic Coast Pipeline issue. Joyner urges the council to take a stand in protecting communities that are impacted by making direct changes. Some of the Council members have visited the Halifax community before on a tour, and she urges them to remember the things they saw on their tour. She suggested representatives should have more direct contact with constituents. Joyner explains that many community members are discouraged because of the lack of directive and action that the government has taken for her community.

The meeting adjourned at 5:15pm.