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## **Meeting Minutes**

### **Governor's Environmental Justice Advisory Council**

**Tuesday, May 28, 2024**

**1:00-5:00pm**

**Wayne County Community College**

**Walnut Building Room 101**

**3000 Wayne Memorial Drive, Goldsboro, NC 27534**

At 2:30 PM, Co-chair Virginia Guidry 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

Justin Duncan

Justin Flores

Evin Grant

Dr. Marian Johnson-Thompson

Marilynn Marsh-Robinson

Naeema Muhammad

Daisha Wall

Sharon Martin

Sherri White-Williamson

Jennifer Mundt

Dr. Rebecca Witter

Ebony Pittman

Dr. Courtney G. Woods

Douglas Taggart

McKinley Wooten

The March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024, meeting minutes were adopted by the Council.

The Council heard a presentation on the EO292 Mapping Tools & Hub Project from Emad Khatib and David Giordano from the North Carolina Department of Information and Technology (NCDIT). They provided a project timeline and demonstration of the EJ Hub website and the environmental justice mapping tool. The EJ Hub is in draft form and will include grant information with external links. The EJ Mapping tool will be found on the website. The EJ Mapping tool will display an array of demographic data, permitted facilities locations, relevant health data, air quality, climate stressors, and sensitive receptors. NCDIT reviewed the process needed for delivering a finalized product by October 2024, gaining approval of the mapping tool prototype, and integrating feedback from both Council and community members.



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The Council provided feedback on the technical usability of some features in the prototype map, the way grants are organized and listed, and the incorporation of additional data sets. There was a question from the Council about whether nonpermitted facilities like industrial poultry operations will be included in the EJ Mapping Tool. NCDIT said they would make a note of the request and Council members are welcome to suggest potential datasets for NCDIT to incorporate.

Council members offered that the tool should showcase grant opportunities for potential recipients as well as disbursement of existing grants. Funding opportunities will be maintained on an EJ Grants webpage along with relevant technical assistance information. A motion to keep grant disbursement data on the EJ Mapping Tool was made, seconded, and approved by the Council.

- **Action Item:** The Community Engagement Subcommittee will collect a needs assessment on additional information needed for funding opportunities and disbursement.

There was a discussion of additional data sets to add to the tool and it was noted that any new data sets would need to be pre-existing in order to expedite integration. NCDIT noted how this may alter the pre-discussed scope of the project.

- **Action Item:** It was recommended that the following datasets be added to the scoping document:
  - o CDC Environmental Justice Index (available at <https://eji.cdc.gov/> )
  - o State properties like parks, prisons, and other facilities
  - o Migrant farmworker housing if available
  - o Heat Stress Incidence (available from NCDHHS heat-related illness surveillance)

There was also a discussion of how race and ethnicity variables were presented in the draft EJ Mapping Tool. This is a critical aspect of environmental justice and the current data visualization from ESRI data was unfamiliar to many on the Council.

- **Action Item:** The EJ Hub and Mapping Tool Subcommittee will provide feedback to NCDIT on preferred display of race variables.

Following the discussion around technical aspects of the tool, the Council deliberated on the best way to incorporate community feedback into the tool before its launch. There were suggestions of releasing the tool to select members of the public immediately following the meeting, but concerns were raised that the unfinished nature of the tool may impact the quality of the feedback received. A motion to release the tool to limited members of the public in its current form did not carry. The Council then moved to approve the current design of the tool to facilitate the creation of the minimum viable product for the Council.

After deliberation on the timeline to gather feedback from the public, the Council moved to allow the EJ Hub & Mapping Tool subcommittee to begin hosting informational sessions and



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circulating a feedback survey before the public is granted complete access to the tool. In the meantime, members from the Community Engagement subcommittee will determine the best way to disseminate information about the tool and have enough time to incorporate public feedback before the conclusion of the Council's project timeline.

Updates were then given by individual subcommittees, which included:

- **Community Engagement:** Chair Ebony Pittman reported that they reviewed a draft proposal for a public engagement strategy drafted by NCDOT's Public Involvement team, including a potential statewide virtual meeting, telephone town halls, in-person forums, and council meetings.
  - **Action Item:** The Community Engagement subcommittee will meet with the EJ Hub/Mapping Tool subcommittee to coordinate the development of a strategic timeline.
- **Cumulative Impacts:** Chair Sherri White-Williamson shared they will further develop research questions to identify researchers already collecting data.
- **EJ Hub and Mapping Tool:** Chair Dr. Courtney Woods has established a biweekly meeting schedule, developed a survey to solicit public feedback on existing mapping tools which was piloted at the Sampson County Science Fair on April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024, and they obtained a list of stakeholders from DHHS, DEQ, and other state agencies to solicit their feedback on the mapping tool.
- **Report Development:** Chair Jennifer Mundt shared their plans for the content of the October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024, report that will outline the activities of the Council, the subcommittees, and the state agencies present. They also presented a detailed weekly timeline of how they will draft and generate the report.
  - **Action Item:** All subcommittees should send updates for the final report by September 10, 2024, to ensure the final report can be drafted by the deadline.
- **Training:** Chair Marian Johnson Thompson discussed a comprehensive training plan for state employees and potentially state boards.
  - **Action item:** The training subcommittee will work with the UNC School of Government to develop training program content.

The Council discussed the previously approved process for updating and reviewing Environmental Justice goals.

- **Action item:** The Council review groups were asked to send a written update about ongoing EJ goal review by May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024, with final goal review to be completed by each review group on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

The Council moved into a period for public comment.

Speaker Jasmine Washington from the Southern Environmental Law Center asked that the EJ Council, especially those employed by Cabinet agencies, encourage all agencies to finalize EJ



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Goals so that the public may provide feedback. Further, the speaker suggested that EJ goals should be developed to guide actions now, not just in the distant future.

Speaker Dr. Valerie Ann Johnson from the North Carolina Environmental Justice Network urged that EJ Council meeting times should be in the evening when the public is available after work to provide public comment. The speaker also encouraged Council members to utilize the research efforts of HBCUs and emphasized the value of community-based research from community members.

A representative from the Rural Empowerment Association for Community Help raised the issue of the hog lagoons in Duplin County and the ensuing smell.

Speaker Bobby Jones from the Down East Coal Ash Environmental & Social Justice Coalition asked the EJ Council to consider partnering with his organization or other similar organizations to ensure that the work that is already being done for environmental justice reaches all communities, including the frontline communities. Mr. Jones's Anti-violence Youth Ambassador program works to identify the connection between EJ and violence. One of the youth ambassadors expressed his concern for the reuse of coal ash, emphasizing how it affects the air quality of students.

Lib Hutchby joined through Webex and asked the EJ Council to clarify what they mean when they refer to "the public" while discussing the release of the EJ Mapping Tool. She mentioned that the tool needs to have accurate and current information. She also said that Dr. Courtney Woods previously shared a tool that was very helpful.

Barbara Street from Kinston County spoke about her family's exposure to contaminated water after being displaced by flooding. Ms. Street explained the multiple approaches she took in order to fix her problem and ultimately explained that she received no help. She suggests no accountability from health services or the Environmental Protection Agency. Street's family now has slew of health issues including cancer, low white blood cell counts, etc., and she suggests that it is a cause of the contaminated water. Ms. Street emphasizes the disconnect between NC agencies, attorneys, and the public who are impacted by these EJ issues.

Leticia Zavala of El Futuro Es Nuestro: "It's Our Future", spoke about the harsh environmental conditions that farmworkers are subject to in North Carolina. She introduced her organization and explained that its goal is to improve working conditions for farmworkers. She noted that agriculture is vital to the NC economy and that we depend on farmworkers. Ms. Zavala highlighted the death of an NC farmworker while harvesting in 2023 due to heat related illness. Ms. Zavala urges the EJ Council to consider farmworkers' rights while they work towards improving North Carolina environmental justice.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00pm.