

## **Virginia Council on Environmental Justice**

Thursday, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022 10:00am – 4:10pm EST

Location: 1111 E Main St, 3<sup>RD</sup> floor, Richmond, VA 23219

Present: Karen T. Campblin, Kendyl Crawford, Aliya Farooq, Reverend Dr. Faith B. Harris, Meryem Karad, Dr. Janet Phoenix, Harrison Wallace

### **Agenda**

10:00am Welcome, Co-chairs Dr. Faith Harris and Dr. Janet Phoenix (10 mins)

10:10am Housekeeping (20 mins)

- 1) Approve Jan. 10 agenda and minutes
  - a) No quorum present to vote
- 2) Any items Council member would like added to today's agenda? Approve?
  - a) Term limits
    - i. Read aloud members whose term will expire June 30, 2022
  - b) Bylaws
    - i. Unfortunately there is not a template for the advisory board to us; it is up to the advisory board to create their own.
- 3) Calendar of upcoming meeting dates for 2022
  - a) Thursday, May 12, 2022 would be next meeting. (Richmond)
  - b) Wednesday, July 20, 2022 (Tidewater)
  - c) Tuesday, September 13, 2022
  - d) Tuesday, November 15, 2022

10:30am Public comment period and discussion (1 hr)

- 1) Public comment period (30 mins)
  - a. Gustavo Angeles – Environmental Justice Coordinator for VA Chapter of Sierra Club
    - i. Thank you to the body for conducting a visit in late 2021 to part of Virginia (Bristol) that is not always thought about. Want to encourage council to continue visiting other areas.
    - ii. Videos from previous meetings would be helpful to be placed on the website for clarity and transparency.
    - iii. Very important that you have a way for public to participate – not everyone has the time to come give comments in person. A video or phone conference line would be helpful because there are people who will not be able to comments due to the limitation.

- iv. It should be a requirement that people have a way to communicate and if it is not available, then the meeting should be postponed.
- v. People in Bristol have the right to know what is happening in Panel meetings scheduled for March 21 and 22 and the council is encouraged to ask DEQ to make the meeting available to the public.
  - 1. Also requested to ask DEQ to include a health expert on the panel from the Health Department.

2) Discussion (30 mins)

- a. Council members agree on the importance of public access to meetings, especially to avoid situations like today when technical issues weren't discovered until the afternoon before the meeting
- b. Expert Panel Convened by DEQ – Bristol Landfill Odors - March 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> in Bristol, VA
  - i. Communication from DEQ does not indicate the time of the meeting or whether it is open to the public.

11:30am Subcommittees (30 mins)

- 1) Decide topics and timing of meetings
  - a. There are 3 subcommittees and 21 council members.
  - b. Give subcommittees a few weeks to produce their meeting schedule and then add them to the overall Council Calendar so that the calendar can be finalized by the end of April 2022.

12:00 pm Lunch break (1 hr)

1:00 pm Subcommittees continued (30 mins)

- 1) Decide topics and timing of meetings
  - a. Public Health Subcommittee
  - b. Energy Subcommittee
    - i. Request from VA Energy to assign a council member as point person as a co-representative in the report process, scheduled to be given January 1, 2023.
    - ii. The email from VA Energy can be forwarded to the chair of the Energy subcommittee (Clarence).
  - c. Emerging Issues Subcommittee
    - i. Evaluate issues surrounding public comments.

1:30 pm Legislative Summary and Discussion (50 mins)

- 1) Summary (30 mins)
  - a. Senator Hashmi, Interim Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources Travis Voyles, and DEQ Director Rolband provided updates regarding

DEQ boards, RGGI, EJ Act, BIPOC Historic Preservation Fund, electric vehicles, tree canopy, DEQ 4 main initiatives, EJ Interagency Workgroup, Bristol expert panel

2) Questions & Answers and Discussion (20 mins)

3:05pm Public Comment Period and Discussion (1 hr)

1) Public comment period (30 mins)

- a. Hope for Bristol - I had hoped to call in to provide public comment during your Council meeting today, but I understand there have been technical difficulties. I would be grateful to have my comments below read into the public comment session.

DEQ recently organized a panel of engineering experts to provide recommendations for the Bristol VA Landfill, the emissions from which have plagued nearby residents with noxious odors and acute health symptoms. I feel this panel is a very positive step in the right direction. They are scheduled to meet on March 21 - 22, 2022 with City of Bristol VA officials and landfill consultants. However, this process appears to be happening behind closed doors, as do the decisions that will follow - - such as engineering steps to be outlined in Consent Orders.

On behalf of residents near the landfill and a local organization called HOPE for Bristol, I submitted a formal request on Tuesday March 15, 2022, to Director Rolband. This request was for meaningful involvement opportunities for community members adversely affected by the Bristol VA Landfill. We have requested public observation of the panel process, a public comment session to the panelists, and additional opportunities for meaningful involvement in future decisions about the landfill. That letter is attached to this email.

At this time, residents do not have direct representation on the DEQ Expert Panel for the Bristol Landfill. I want to emphasize that point because I feel there may be some confusion in how the panel has been described to VCEJ and others who have inquired. While two of the experts on this panel were previously recommended by myself and by HOPE for Bristol as experts worthy of DEQ's attention, they were simply recommended because of their track records of solving problems in similarly difficult landfills. No expert on the panel directly represents HOPE for Bristol or the residents affected by the landfill.

The suggested experts are simply good at their job and were recommended to DEQ prior to the panel formation for this reason alone. A need still exists for meaningful involvement of affected residents in future decisions about the Bristol VA Landfill.

On a final note -- as I write this, students at Highland View Elementary School in Bristol, VA, are reportedly suffering nausea, headaches, and burning eyes today as the landfill emissions have filled their

classrooms and schoolyard. This elementary school is one of the most disadvantaged in the Commonwealth, and these students come from families whose homes are frequently inundated with gases and odorous pollution from the landfill. These families deserve a voice in the decisions ahead.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration

2) Discussion (30 mins)

- a. Can understand that there is no need for public comment in this process re: Bristol.

4:05pm Close, Co-chairs Dr. Faith Harris and Dr. Janet Phoenix (5 mins)

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