

Virginia Council on Environmental Justice (VCEJ)
Clean Energy Transition Subcommittee
January 17, 2020 – 2pm-4pm
Patrick Henry Building, Conference Room 1
1111 East Main Street, Richmond, VA 23219

Executive Summary

The Virginia Council on Environmental Justice (VCEJ) Clean Energy Transition Subcommittee held a public meeting on Friday January 17th at the Patrick Henry Building in Richmond.

Chairwoman Taysha DeVaughn called the meeting to order. Members reviewed the report from the Advisory Council on Environmental Justice and Meryem Karad gave updates. Members discussed the mission of the subcommittee and drafted several recommendations for the final report. Meryem Karad shared legislative updates from the Northam Administration as well as future meeting information. There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 3:59pm.

Welcome and Introductions

Ms. DeVaughn called the meeting to order at 2:02pm and welcomed the subcommittee members to the meeting. Members present included Taysha DeVaughn and Tom Benevento. Meryem Karad and Katie Sallee from the Governor's office were also present to staff the meeting.

Ms. DeVaughn asked to confirm when the subcommittee should submit their recommendations. Ms. Karad noted that the full report is due in July 2020, and advised each subcommittee submit 3-5 recommendations; but is able to submit more if they wish.

Executive Order & 2018 Report Review

Ms. DeVaughn reviewed the report from 2018 with the subcommittee. Ms. Karad went through the recommendations from the 2018 report to discuss and note what recommendations Governor Northam has already been implemented. Ms. Karad provided details on recommendations that have been implemented in the newest iteration of the council.

The subcommittee discussed the role of standing recommendations and where the council can implement them in the final report.

Mission, Charge, and Draft Work Plan Discussion

Ms. DeVaughn read the charge from the Executive Order. Ms. DeVaughn and Mr. Benevento discussed using the charge to start writing the mission statement. They decided to determine several themes to inform the mission. Ms. DeVaughn recommended including defining the language around equity, equality, and rural. Mr. Benevento also added further defining clean energy.

Ms. DeVaughn discussed legislation specific to her geographical location on clean energy and economic development. She noted that the subcommittee could advocate for involvement in economic development and the clean energy transition that is already occurring in Virginia.

Ms. Karad recommended considering the private sector as well. She also recommended that the subcommittee consider new positions for state employees to help implement environmental justice.

Ms. DeVaughn and Mr. Benevento discussed some draft recommendations. They determined that they want to include two standing recommendations: to maintain diversity in the council, and to maintain representation geographically professionally. They also discussed keeping the recommendation to continue being responsive to issues raised by council members and the public. Ms. DeVaughn recommended that the council visit Southwest Virginia.

Mr. Benevento shared some recommendations. He recommended that Virginia increase energy efficiency in building code mandates. Ms. DeVaughn recommended increasing that to construction and renovation codes in general. Mr. Benevento suggested aligning with California's codes. His second recommendation was to increase accessibility to community-based solar in rural Virginia; as it is not currently legal in Virginia. The subcommittee discussed the Solar Freedom Bill and if that recommendation fits with the bill. They discussed how to make recommendations in light of newly passed legislation that may need to include provisions based on region.

The members present also discussed bill recovery loans, which would allow low-income communities loans to help access energy efficiency upgrades. They discussed finding more information on the program in order to write a draft recommendation, and decided that more research was necessary.

Mr. Benevento asked how to write a recommendation on job training programs. Ms. DeVaughn offered recommending job training and job access in low income and minority areas.

Mr. Benevento asked how to make a recommendation regarding grant money for energy efficiency improvements. Ms. DeVaughn offered recommending that a percentage of existing grant money go to Southwest Virginia, or prioritizing the most impacted communities.

Mr. Benevento recommended meaningful penalties for non-compliance with EO 43. Ms. Karad noted that everything so far is a working document, so penalties are not currently in state policy.

Ms. DeVaughn noted that the subcommittee does not recognize natural gas as part of a just transition to clean energy. They discussed including that in a recommendation or in the mission of the subcommittee.

Governor's Office, Legislative & Administrative Update

Ms. Karad updated the subcommittee on the Administration's legislative and budget priorities for the 2020 session. Ms. Karad noted that the Administration is pursuing a bill codifying the Council. Additionally, Ms. Karad noted that the will of the Council was to meet in Hampton Roads this March, and that Ms. Sallee will be sending out a few meeting date options to the full Council shortly. The Council will meet following the adjournment of the 2020 General Assembly Session this March.

Mr. Benevento asked about the Transportation subcommittee. It was enveloped into the climate change subcommittee at the last full body meeting. He also asked about agriculture and noted that it has been a missing piece in the Council. It was discussed and noted that this is an area the Council can be sure to address in the coming years.

Ms. Karad mentioned inviting members of state agencies present at the next subcommittee meeting to address questions that came up during this meeting.

Ms. DeVaughn discussed next steps and a timeline for finishing their recommendations.

There being no additional business, the subcommittee adjourned at 3:59pm.

Meeting Adjourned