

**Virginia Council on Environmental Justice (VCEJ)**  
**Outdoor Access Subcommittee**  
**December 5, 2019 – 10:00am-12pm**  
**Patrick Henry Building, Conference Room 2**  
**1111 East Main Street, Richmond, VA 23219**

**Executive Summary**

The Virginia Council on Environmental Justice (VCEJ) Outdoor Access Subcommittee held a public meeting on Wednesday, December 5, 2019 at the Patrick Henry Building in Richmond.

Chairman Nathan Burrell called the meeting to order. Members of the Outdoor Access Subcommittee reviewed the text of Executive Order 29. Mr. Burrell then facilitated a discussion of the mission and scope of the subcommittee's work. Members identified three primary topics of planning, accessibility, and education as potential policy areas to explore within the scope of the subcommittee.

Subcommittee members identified a draft mission statement to guide the subcommittee's efforts.

Ms. Karad shared brief updates from the Northam administration, noting that the Governor would be introducing his biennial budget proposal within the next two weeks.

There being no public comments or further business, the meeting concluded at 11:17am.

**Welcome & Introductions, *Nathan Burrell, Outdoor Access Subcommittee Chair***

Chairman Nathan Burrell called the Outdoor Access Subcommittee meeting to order at approximately 10:05am. Chairman Burrell welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited then opened up the floor for introduction of council members, agency staff, and guests.

Virginia Council on Environmental Justice members present included Nathan Burrell, Mike Ellerbrock (by phone), and Jevonte Blount. Also in attendance were Meryem Karad and Katie Sallee representing the Office of the Secretary of Natural Resources, Melicent Miller representing the Department of Health (VDH), Paige Pearson representing the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF), as well as Jennifer Allen and Isaac Sarver representing the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). No members of the public were present.

**Executive Order Review, Mission, and Scope Discussion**

Mr. Burrell provided some brief framing remarks noting his hope for candid discussion about outdoor access for underserved communities. Mr. Burrell referred members of the council, staff, and public to the text of Governor Northam's Executive Order 29 and Executive Order 45 for review.

Ms. Karad referred members to the text of Executive Order 29, specifically the clause referencing outdoor access:

Ms. Karad shared that Governor Northam has recently issued Executive Order 45, relating to flood risk management standards and resiliency planning in the Commonwealth's development of public facilities.

Mr. Burrell inquired about Executive Order 45's implications for inland or riverine access points on natural resource agency properties, citing Powhatan and Pocahontas state parks as an example. Ms. Karad noted that Russ Baxter and DCR are discussing these issues, and shared that Deputy Secretary Saks had initiated discussion with the Department of General Services relating to standards for construction in riverine floodplains.

Mr. Burrell shifted discussion towards the mission and scoping of the subcommittee, and asked members of the subcommittee for ideas about a possible mission statement. Mr. Blount recommended using the text as a starting point. Reverend Dr. Ellerbrock noted that there is some academic literature that exists about different cultural perspectives with regard to the outdoors.

Mr. Burrell noted that the subcommittee could facilitate an increased understanding of how the planning process for outdoor access can be more accessible to underserved communities. Some general recommendations around equitable planning processes, as they relate to outdoor access, are a firm place to start in. Mr. Burrell drilled down on the concept of access, noting that it means different things to different people. Mr. Burrell noted that the siting of parks could often create barriers to access. Mr. Burrell shared that 2045 looms large as the projected date at which the country will become majority-minority, and stressed the need to lay a groundwork for access before that date.

Mr. Blount agreed with Mr. Burrell's experience regarding siting of outdoor spaces, noting recent academic literature that he reviewed which mentioned the absence of public sidewalks. Ms. Allen noted that public transportation systems often do not serve parks that are frequently located in outlying areas, which creates a barrier to access. Ms. Miller shared that in terms of the scope of the committee's work, and expressed hope that there would be discussion about inclusion of all people regardless of their abilities.

Mr. Blount asked agency representatives to offer their perspectives on current programs. Ms. Miller shared that the VDH is looking at walkability and active transportation through an equity and social justice lens. Ms. Miller noted that having an educational component around food preparation was an additional focus. Ms. Pearson noted that DGIF had adjusted its messaging to focus on low-cost, sustainable use of fish and game for fresh food needs.

Mr. Burrell noted that all of the topical discussion seemed to fall under three main topics: planning, access, and education with many of the policy issues raised packaged underneath those core topics. Ms. Karad noted that one focus of the subcommittee's work could be to ensure that the Virginia Office on Outdoor Recreation included an equity and access or environmental justice component.

Mr. Burrell noted that the three topics seem to be the scope, and noted the need to refine the mission statement. Ms. Karad, after some discussion by the group, facilitated the following draft mission statement:

*“Acknowledging that public spaces should serve everyone and foster healthy communities across the Commonwealth, it is the mission of this subcommittee to craft recommendations to help state agencies, institutions, government entities, and governing bodies to implement policies and best practices in planning, increasing access, and education initiatives from the viewpoint of diversity, equity, and inclusion.”*

Mr. Burrell noted that the subcommittee would likely review the proposed mission statement and possibly make further edits.

#### **Draft Work Plan, Nathan Burrell, Chair**

Mr. Burrell noted the need to discuss a draft work plan, and asked the agencies present and council members to consider who might be appropriate to include. Ms. Karad asked DGIF, DCR, and VDH to present at future meetings on current environmental justice and outdoor access initiatives. Ms. Karad noted that the next meeting of the subcommittee would likely take place in late March. Ms. Karad noted that the subcommittee members could provide feedback upon hearing agency presentations, and suggested that subcommittee members may also be helpful in amplifying current initiatives by state agencies and identifying possible new practices.

#### **Administrative Updates from the Governor’s Office, Meryem Karad**

The administration is currently examining inequities in the Code of Virginia and looking for opportunities to make code changes with a working group. Additionally, Governor Northam will be presenting his budget in the coming weeks. Governor Northam toured several state parks at the end of the summer, and initiated the creation of the Office of Outdoor Recreation. Ms. Karad noted that the Virginia Council on Environmental Justice or its subcommittees would likely not be meeting during legislative session, and expressed that there would be at least two more in-person meetings before June in order to ensure timely submission of a report and recommendations by the full body.

#### **Public Comment**

Mr. Burrell opened the floor for public comment. Ms. Pearson noted her hope that some of the subcommittee’s recommendations will help guide agency work to support responsible fish and game management. Mr. Sarver noted that JLARC will be issuing a report concerning natural resource agency law enforcement, and that one of the issues within the “access” topic may be how agencies keep the public safe in outdoor spaces. Rev. Dr. Ellerbrock noted that there may be value in looking at privately owned outdoor spaces, in addition to the public focus. Mr. Burrell noted his hope that the subcommittee would push down recommendations to the local planning process related to how they should look at environmental justice considerations.

#### **Adjournment**

The time being 11:17am, Mr. Burrell thanked members for their feedback, and then adjourned the meeting.