

Virginia Council on Environmental Justice (VCEJ) Notes

Potomac Community Library, 2201 Opitz Boulevard, Woodbridge, VA 22191
Tuesday, May 9th, 2023, 11:00 am – 3:35 pm

Attendance:

- **Present In-Person Council Members:**
 - Dr. Janet Phoenix, George Washington University (Vice Chair)
 - Karen Campblin, ktcPLAN (arrived late)
 - Meryem Karad, Evergreen Action (arrived late)
- **Absent Council Members:**
 - Dr. Theresa L. Burriss, Radford University (attended virtually)
 - Taysha DeVaughan, Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards
 - Kendyl Crawford, VA Interfaith Power & Light and Virginia Conservation Network
 - Aliya Farooq, VA Interfaith Power & Light
 - Harrison Wallace, Climate and Clean Energy Equity Fund
 - Rev. Dr. Faith Harris, VA Interfaith Power & Light
 - Clarence Tong, Arrival
 - Kathryn MacCormick, Dominion Energy
 - Fernando Mercado Violand
 - Ronald Howell, Jr., Virginia State University
 - Lillian “Ebonie” Alexander, Black Family Land Trust
 - John Boyd, National Black Farmers Association
 - Rev. Dr. Mike Ellerbrock, Virginia Tech and Minister, Catholic Diocese of Richmond
 - Lydia Lawrence, Fairfax NAACP
 - Andres Alvarez, Acadia Service
 - Tom Benevento
- **Staff:**
 - Danielle Simms, DEQ
 - Grace Holmes, DEQ (attended virtually)
 - Gwendolin McCrea, DEQ

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11:10 am – Welcome, Vice Chair Dr. Janet Phoenix

- Dr. Phoenix opened the meeting and invited all those joining online to introduce themselves.
- Discussion of agenda and purpose for public comment period without 3-minute time limit, with an emphasis on people representing EJ communities

11:29 am – Presentation from Department of Environmental Quality, Environmental Justice Program Manager Danielle Simms

- Topic: Overview of [Draft Guidance on Environmental Justice in the Permitting Process](#)
- Procedures to ensure fair treatment and meaningful involvement, permit evaluation process
- Informal public comment period for the draft guidance was open from mid-March until May 1
- None of the procedures in the guidance would supercede or change existing law or regulatory requirements regarding issuance or denial of permits.

11:46 pm – Short break and reconvene at noon

12:00 pm – Public Comment Period

- The Council took public comment and discussion on the following topics:
 - **Mary Hill** of Hobson Village gave comment related to concerns about underground storage tanks for which there are no records, problems with septic systems and drainage, development projects, and patterns of organizations reaching out to residents of Hobson Village for information and then not following through with assistance.
 - **Sheila Joseph** of Portsmouth gave comment related to EPA/DEQ grant application assistance, stormwater, lead pipes, and interactions with local government.
 - **Renata Harris** of Brown Grove gave comment related to historic district designations, the Brown Grove community plan, the Wegman’s distribution center, a landfill in the community, economic zones, and a request to EPA for further environmental impact review. She also gave comment regarding the VA EJ council operations and impacts.
 - **Carolyn White** of Pughsville gave comment about redistricting and the dividing of Pughsville between Chesapeake and Suffolk.
 - **Kelly Hengler** of Suffolk gave comment related to urbanization and development, flooding and septic issues, the need for technical guidance, and the challenges for communities that are historically rural but being annexed into cities and finding barriers to access into local decision-making.
 - **Katie Whitehead** of Pittsylvania County gave comment related to a study on the potential impact of gold mining in Virginia, and whether the Council would have a state agency provide a report to them about it.

- **Pamela Brandy** of Pughsville gave comment about redistricting and confusion about the assignment of districts within the different localities in Pughsville.
- The council discussed concerns raised by Renata Harris, outline above. The council discussed that they have been writing annual reports but that it is unclear what happens to those reports. They are hoping to have a discussion with someone in the administration about the contents of the reports. However, the council will continue doing their due diligence to really try to represent the concerns that we hear during these public comments, in between meetings and the annual report.

1:10 pm – Public Comment Period Ended

1:11 pm – Discussion of Council Function

- In January, a letter was written to the council to lay out some concerns about the Council's ability to function.
 - There cannot be one-on-one conversations about this. So guidance needs to be drafted to that effect.
 - There also needs to be a change in policy regarding the setting, Council has been informed that virtual meeting rules had been changed. Because a policy regarding participation has not been voted on, council members, virtually, they were concerns raised about council members must come and be physically present, to participate in meetings.
- Discussion of a meeting to do some work and help meet needs – what considerations need to be made to make it a public meeting?
 - Want to give council members a little bit more flexibility and freedom for some discussion opportunities.
 - Discussion of possibilities for meeting formats that would meet FOIA/public meeting requirements.
 - OEJ staff have to be present to staff these meetings.
 - Need direction from the administration about further staffing capabilities.
 - Would like to meet with the Secretary's office.
- Next meeting will be held in Charlottesville on Tuesday, August 8th and the Department of Forestry.
 - Kendyl is hoping to be able to disseminate a draft of the annual report.
- Moment of silence for Shawn Soares, who passed away.

2:08 pm – Meeting Adjourned