

Virginia Council on Environmental Justice
June 17, 2025 from 10 AM to 4 PM
Location: Virtual meeting via WebEx

Virtual

- Karen Campblin
- Janet Phoenix
- Morgan Whayland
- Lisa Kardell
- Theresa Burriss
- Lydia Lawrence
- Kerry McAvoy
- Meryem Karad
- Harrison Wallace
- Kendyl Crawford
- Ron White (joined late)
- Faith Harris (joined late)

Quorum achieved

Staff

- Gwendolin McCrea
- Danielle Simms
- Melanie Davenport

Agenda/Notes

- 10:05 Welcome by VCEJ Chair Karen Campblin
- 10:08 Roll Call
- 10:10 Overview of Meeting Agenda
- 10:11 Approval of previous meeting minutes
 - November
 - A few corrections given to DEQ
 - Motion: Theresa
 - Second: Lydia
 - Aye: All
 - Nay: None
 - Motion passes
 - December
 - Motion: Harrison

- Second: Theresa
- Aye: All
- Nay: None
- Motion passes
- January
 - Motion with incorporation of change to Eddie's bio: Lydia
 - Second: Harrison
 - Aye:
 - Karen Campblin, Janet Phoenix, Lisa Kardell, Theresa Burriss, Lydia Lawrence, Kerry McAvoy, Meryem Karad, Harrison Wallace, Kendyl Crawford
 - Nay: none
 - Abstention: Morgan (was absent)
- 10: 15 **Discussion of Annual Report Outline and Chapters (60 mins.)**
- - **Chapter 1** – Need to revamp/redefine the issue of EJ in the commonwealth, an opportunity to make an assessment of what we recommended and where our recommendations are, a chance to revisit 2021 interagency EJ report
 - Theresa (lead), Courtney, Ronald – Council Recommendations
 - Karen suggests going back three years to the assessment previously done and then assessing the last two report recommendations
 - Theresa suggests including some steps that would need to be taken to make the progress into a yes, can provide context
 - Kendyl – [2021 Interagency EJ Report](#)
 - See if any of the recommendations moved forward, are they still valid, does it tie into the work of the council, particularly regarding top agencies (DEQ, health)
 - Think about our role as a body, not the tech experts or the doers; will be a new administration; are there opportunities to provide recommendations generally, encourage, and review the report, make a recommendation to ask for status update
 - Discuss intersection of the EJ Council and the working group, how work could or should impact work of council does, how do agencies view ej? Couple tight paragraphs focus on work of interagency group and the work of the council, how can we be informed as to our work as council, how could the report influence how the council works with agencies
 - **Chapter 2** – Incorporating communities where we are doing visits (Christiansburg/Montgomery, Northern Neck)
 - Areas/Issues:
 - Christiansburg/Montgomery - Hope, Kerry

- Northern Neck – Col. White
 - Data Centers – Janet, Lydia
- Following the format created for Suffolk by Janet last year, but level of detail in last year's report not expected
- Kerry requests formatting template, asks if we have site visit plans for Christiansburg and Northern Neck
- Karen trying to have a visit to the Radford Munitions Plant and can send additional information, hoping to get a local lens which would be very helpful (will also have public comment period while there)
- Theresa mentioned that she has colleagues at VA Tech that have gathered data on the plant and is willing to share
- Important to start making local connections now to position ourselves well for the report writing process
- Data centers are quite comprehensive, so guidance would be helpful on word count, focus of section
- Don't have a site visit identified for Northern Neck as of yet, Janet is talking to a waterman in the area and confirmed our meeting location in Tappahannock (Nov 5)
- Karen can provide page limits as part of the template
- Ann Bennett (who presented at this meeting) just released a report that would be helpful to the data centers section
- We should arrange for a site visit to the Northern Neck to prepare for the November meeting.
- **Chapter 3** – devoted to summary of public comments and how ties into the report
 - Karen
 - Encouraging folks to sign up for this section as it only has one name
 - Been a problem to get the written version of the public comments, need to encourage speakers to submit comments in writing
 - It would be important to gather public comments after each meeting to help flesh out this chapter.
- **Chapter 4** – education and collaboration on EJ issues, designing content which focuses on permitting requirements for air and water, educating on env issues ant the community level and facilitating meetings with communities (creating a comms strategy for that)
 - Liz able to do most the work for this section and able to talk about this session if folks want to follow up with her, also happy to have additional folks work in support of this section
 - Education on DEQ permits,
- **Chapter 5** – council guiding document
 - Guiding principles – Harrison, Kendyl, Courtney
 - Courtney giving feedback on guiding principles document

- Kendyl/Harrison will send to Karen for whole group to view and comment (3-4 weeks before next meeting)
 - Conflict of bias – Aliya (lead), Meryem and Lisa
 - Meryem requests a template for this section (length), right now at 12 pages – council guiding documents and conflict of bias form
 - Aliya and Meryem have put together a few drafts for this section, so has Kendyl and Harrison
 - Janet reminds us to circulate early August, edits should be into committee by mid-July
 - Everyone must join at least one chapter, email Gwendolin.mccrea@deq.virginia.gov
- Morgan would like to hear from DEQ about what they have been working on in the past year
 - Recommendations should be intentional in ensuring agencies have the support and resources they need
 - Lots of factors that need to be balanced in the final recommendations
- **11:33 Discussion of Meeting Schedule for Remainder of Year**
 - Radford Munitions Site Visit, Aug 21, 10-3:30PM (Radford Community Library)
 - Federal facility so would require everyone to have real ID
 - DEQ still looking into feasibility of visit
 - Will have some type of a site visit while we are in Radford
 - Tappahannock, Nov 5, 10-3:30PM (Essex Public Library)
 - Looking into site visit opportunities in the Northern Neck
- **12:00 Public Comment and Discussion (1 hour 45 mins.)**
 - No public commenters signed up ahead of time
 - Discussion on Lack of Engagement
 - Advertised on SNHR website, commonwealth calendar, and utilized the existing listserv (~400 folks)
 - We used to go places during meetings (been more in Richmond and virtual)
 - Frustrations expressed from folks who have commented about not being able to get things done (need to be able to show how we are addressing comments)
 - Meeting timing is not conducive to public comment either
 - Starting meetings later in the day to have time for public comment when people are off work
 - Federal landscape is hostile to EJ
 - We used to have more than one public comment period as well to try to accommodate folks who were not available during one time slot
 - 5 council members had difficulty accessing the Webex platform, could also be a barrier for participation

- Webex is platform used by DEQ – Danielle mentioned that there is no other option available
 - DEQ can ensure join instructions are on the agenda for future meetings
 - Ron mentioned meetings done with the governor's administration with Microsoft Teams
 - Can we look into accepting audio or video comments?
 - Danielle can talk to AG's office about what that would look like
 - Council members share with their networks
 - Do we want to do graphic invites to share on social media?
 - Danielle is unsure if we can circulate council-made infographic about meetings with infographics, needs to check in with the governor's office
 - Want to improve notifications and timing to ensure more robust participation in meetings
 - Folks may be unfamiliar with the website, and it would be helpful to make the process for public comment less intimidating, potentially adding process/guidance for comment-making
 - Potentially adding instructions to website
- **DEQ Updates on EJ**
- Education series on Chesapeake Bay work done over last 30 years, water quality/planning, how to apply for grants
 - Next series: Sep 9 (water planning)
 - Previous series are on YouTube
 - Been helping to facilitate public meetings on controversial topics
 - Melanie mentioned proposed guidance on permitting, but never heard back from the governor (mid-late July 2023), so now do permitting case-by-case
 - Youngkin set up a review procedure, but there are no timeframes, DEQ doesn't have control over it (Office of Regulatory Management)
 - Youngkin wants to achieve regulatory reductions, have to balance what we need vs. historical/not needed
 - Last night a public meeting in NOVA
 - Current Topics:
 - Coal and combustion residuals at Possum Point
 - Greenridge Landfill – Part B Application in review
 - 2 Natural gas pipelines in Pittsylvania County, Kate Miller just set up a website on the topic
- **Security Concerns for Site Visit**
- Danielle mentions that the site visits aren't new but haven't been enforced by previous staff
 - Depends on how location infrastructure is set up

- Are there any best practices on designing safe site visits?
 - Have to talk to facilities and DEQ about liability
 - Can plan for a site visit of 1 or 2 people
- Report Timing
 - Want to approve November meeting
 - Report is due the first day of legislative session Jan 14, 2026
- **1:45 PM Data Center Presentation followed by Q&A and Discussion (1 hour 45 mins.)**
 - In the last few years, we have seen the development of hyper-scale data centers
 - Have large diesel backup generators, often built beside residential communities
 - Also includes land use issues, affordable housing and transportation
 - Ann Bennett, VA Sierra Club (Chair of Data Center Campaign)
 - Loudoun County – 3 industrial areas in the county
 - Soon will have as many data centers in Prince William as in Loudoun
 - What's driving demand?
 - AI ten times more energy-intensive than a normal google search
 - AI market hit faster than expected
 - Why VA?
 - 70% of the world's data flows through VA
 - VA was the beginning of the internet
 - Proximity to DC
 - Used to have cheap power
 - Favorable state policies and subsidies
 - Connected to seabed cables leaving VA Beach
 - Big Players
 - Amazon, Google, Met, Equinix, Iron Mountain, QTS, Compass, Digital Realty
 - Landowners
 - Utilities, water, electricity, energy
 - PJM
 - RE
 - Economic development authorities
 - Sierra Club [published a report](#) yesterday
 - VA is now confronting
 - Not prepared to meet energy demand, particularly under VCEA
 - Equivalent of 58 pentagons-size wise proposed
 - Inadequate energy planning, little regulation, costs borne by ratepayers, additional infrastructure

- Dominion has applications for 40 GW of power, the JLARC study talked about 30 GW
- No longer just a NOVA situation, growth coming to Greater Rappahannock region
 - Concerns about both energy and water consumption threatening the Rappahannock River
- Much of the development south of NOVA will be Amazon campuses, already have 40% of the diesel applications approved by state
- 28 mega projects needing 37+ GW of power (1GW of power is about one coal plant, nuclear ~1.8GW)
- Impacts on Community
 - Encroaching on residential areas, noise of data center (buffers inadequate, trucking in diesel fuel, breathing in diesel emissions from generators)
 - Recreational facilities, pedestrian paths located right next to data centers
 - Almost all of the increase of power needed is for data centers
- Energy Infrastructure – Substations
 - Can be up to 20 acres
- EJ Concerns
 - Amazon Plaza 500 in Fairfax By-Right
 - Proposed substation
 - The Meadows Chantilly – EJ
 - Would be located next to mobile home community
 - Residents vulnerable in the summer, harmful diesel fumes if they do not have central air
 - Number of diesel generators – over 9200 approved, could see multiples times this number if we continue to invest
- Who is responsible?
 - Seeing more fossil fuel use, companies starting to rely on nat gas (pipeline)
 - Google is doing good work in Europe – in Finland have a data center that runs 98% on renewables
 - Data centers working with a different set of rules in Europe
- Almost half of the power generated will be going to one industry
- Driving stress on grid
- Now delaying the transition away from dirty fuels
- Energy Demand PJM grid provider
 - Many data centers are waiting to plug in, could be 7 7-year wait, trying to service all of those who will be seeking power
 - JLARC 30 GW, Dominion has projected 40GW
- Water Fights
 - Google got caught in Oregon consuming way too much water

- It's a cost in both energy and water, very costly to VA
- Impacting watersheds, rivers, drinking water
- Loudoun has reclaimed water system but top water users are still data centers
- Campuses that will need millions of gallons of water a day
- Sometimes we can anticipate, and sometimes information is redacted
 - Need additional transparency (put the data together because of the lack of transparency)
- Hope the next governor will take a serious look at data centers
 - Right now, residents pay a higher rate than industrial users
 - We continue to subsidize some of the most profitable companies in the world
- State Level Policy Conversations
 - Need more attention on the topic – allow communities to know what is happening, a lot of coordination between econ dev folks at local and state level (Amazon), but the public really is not a part of it (projects are partially developed before community even knows about it), have asked for better cooperation to expand it out of solely economic development authorities
 - Asked to protect ratepayers
 - When is enough enough?
 - Need to plan appropriately so we can meet VCEA, maintain air quality and protect local communities
 - Need far more understanding of the problem
 - JLARC report was helpful, but financial interests are very strong
- - Gray Montrose, Dep Director of Land Conservation for Capital Region Land Conservancy
 - Data center issues in Henrico
 - State statute that EJ is important and not just a box to be checked
 - DEQ says if a locality says site is suitability, then it is acceptable
 - Locality may have no interest/no capacity to stop projects or make a recommendation on suitability
 - We have no data on data centers
 - Because of how data centers have been incentivized, we have little actual data
 - What are data centers impacting infrastructure costs?
 - Compounded EJ impacts
 - But now we have situation with data centers w/ their emergency diesel generators, PJM considering brown

- outs/blackouts happening this summer, substations, gas plants (Chesterfield Gas plant), gas pipelines (Southgate, MVP,)
 - Varina is bearing burden (pollution) for affordable housing in Tuckahoe (wealthiest area of county) – localities are saying concentrate harm in cities in one spot and then distributing the money gains countywide
 - Doesn't take into account mental health, community assets
- There are only 25 air monitoring stations throughout the commonwealth doesn't make any sense to say we accurately understand what is happening in particular areas of counties
 - <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/our-programs/air/monitoring-assessments/air-quality-forecast>
 - Companies not committing to provide air monitoring as they suspect the data won't be in their favor
- Different technologies may make current technology obsolete
- What if it is a bubble? Zero plans for the industry to clean up its mess
 - What is the plan for who is going to pay for blighted properties?
- As a commonwealth, we look for short-term gains (covering shortfalls) while committing enormous resources water, land, energy, people's health to industry who won't pay it back
- Discussion and Q&A
 - Sierra Club data is based on actual data, good sense of what could happen if it does get built out
 - There will be a consolidation and winners and losers
 - Folks buying up a lot of land, getting land rites, and also starting to go through the process
 - Have to assume building them and planning accordingly
 - Fauquier and Henrico County leading the way
 - 40 counties that need to have protections on the books to make sure they build responsibly (if the state is not going to step in)
 - Massive and we are not prepared in any way, shape, or form
 - We have horrible perfect storm in terms of localities (locality finances doing poorly, unable to pay for social and physical infrastructure, residential development is more costly than localities receive for it, need data centers to cover shortfalls)
 - Individual power bills are going up, Dominion wants an all of the above energy strategy (without distributed generation as Dominion does not own/profit from DG)

- Data centers need to have their own rate category that does not disadvantage VA residents, they should pay to do the type of business they want to do
 - Residents pay twice to subsidize the company and then pay the higher rates
- If governor declares emergency, diesel generators will be on 24 hours – a 24-hour industry
- What recommendations should the council be aware of?
 - Lots of recommendations in the Sierra Club report (at the end of each section is a series
 - <https://www.sierraclub.org/virginia/data-centers-harms>
- Suggestions w/ Localities
 - Be a part of the farming conversation (need to understand food models, provide for new farmers, and protect land), say we care about health, green space
 - Should make investments in air quality monitors, think about coal dust, connect env and public health in a way that can be an example to rural localities
 - How to shape resources equitably?
 - Rural – farmers need to know don't need to sell out to data centers, utility scale solar
 - Losing ton of wetlands
 - Cities are in the financial position that counties will be in once they run out of places to develop
 - Rural – losing a ton of forested land
 - Need to attack issues statewide (cumulative impacts, deforestation, water quality, etc.)
 - Local workforce implications – may bring good jobs, but very few guarantees in terms of construction (don't really use unions), only a few jobs after construction (more than likely relocate highly-skilled people into area afterwards)
 - Bill that got vetoed that would have provided information/data
- Data centers taking over used of land (small business, small industrial, gymnasiums, etc.) – quality of life at risk
- Need to have statewide convos on benefits here and burdens there, you are setting up an EJ situation (solar siting, data centers, etc)
- Need to raise this as an issue for elected officials – they are always hearing from Dominion and Amazon, etc.

• **3:30 PM Closing Remarks by VCEJ Chair Karen Campblin (5 mins.)**

- Councilmembers please sign up for at least one chapter no later than June 24

- Councilmembers please send drafts in by July 24th time to have them go out Aug 1 to allow ample time for review
- Councilmember Announcements

- **3:35 PM Adjourn Meeting**

DRAFT