

EJ Inter-agency Webinar Notes

Monday, August 30, 2021, 2-4pm

Attendees: Agency Leaders and/or their designees

Department of Environmental Quality – David Paylor – Chair

Office of Environmental Justice – Renee Hoyos

Virginia Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion – Dr. Janice Underwood

Secretary of Natural Resources – Meryem Karad

Department of Conservation and Recreation – Clyde Chrisman

Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources - George Braxton

Virginia Marine Resources Commission – Rachel Peabody

Secretary of Administration

Virginia Department of General Services – Sandra Gill & Matthew James

Virginia Information Technology Agency – Nelson Moe

Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services – Jennifer Perkins

Virginia Department of Forestry – Rob Farrell

Secretary of Commerce and Trade

Virginia Economic Development Partnership – Stephen Moret

Department of Housing and Community Development – Kyle Flanders & Matt Weaver

Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy – Carrie Hearne & Michael Skiffington

Secretary of Education

Department of Education – Anne Petersen

Secretary of Health and Human Resources

Virginia Department of Health – Brenden Rivenbark

Secretary of Transportation

Virginia Department of Transportation - Sandra Norman, Richard Walton & Angel Deem

Virginia Department of Rail and Transportation – Jennifer Mitchell

Port of Virginia – Scott Whitehurst

Secretary of Veterans Defense and Affairs

Department of Military Affairs – Tristan Bradsher

- **Introductions and overview from David Paylor and Renee Hoyos, and introductions of agency representatives**

Dr. Janice Underwood provided opening remarks

Discussion on meaningful engagement

- VEDP acknowledged seeking feedback from EJ communicatees earlier in the project is important and would like to know which communities would be off limits to certain kinds of industries.
- Several agencies discussed the challenges of current public notice requirements and meaningful engagement. Newspaper is not the best way to get information to the public, door-to-door canvassing, create funding sources to communities to encourage participation, working with local government to reconcile zoning with EJ considerations,

creating a third party ombudsman to facilitate transparency and newsletters that consider agency actions through an EJ lens.

- Advisory committee to decide funding priorities.
- Director Paylor suggested working together to streamline public participation throughout the agencies perhaps by creating a guidance

**The Commonwealth will continue to grow economically. How can we do that equitably?
Who needs to be at the table?**

- Discussed site suitability.
 - How we can innovate as a state to be committed to environmental justice but also be open to businesses and companies?
 - We don't want to take a project for consideration that doesn't align with what a community is looking for.
 - It's not about letting business doing whatever they want, it's about giving them a predictable operating environment.

Discussion on tools would be helpful to make those changes? (eg. Maps, guidances, etc)

- All agreed to having an EJ map.
 - Use the map to guide companies in terms of the locations and types of projects that would work well and wouldn't work well?
 - we need to all be on the same page with definitions, policy guidance, speaking with the same language in order to move forward with EJ tools
 - VITA transferred the efforts of that to VDEM at the beginning of FY2022; reach out to Curtis with VDEM – they should be at the table.

EJ Report:

Agencies need to assign staff to support the writing of the final report due December 2021.

- The EJ Report should document examples of environmental injustices that have been realized in Virginia as a result of already disenfranchised communities not being afforded the information, opportunities, or resources to provide input to localities and or potential business prior to large business developments being approved and executed.
- This report should also include recommendations related to best practices on proactive stakeholder engagement and creating meaningful, accessible feedback loops between communities and the business hoping to develop industry in close proximity.
- There also exists the opportunity for policy recommendations to require such best practices to be put into laws/regulations.

Public Comment

- Stephen Fischbach, Esq: Litigation director for Virginia Poverty Law Center
 - Member of EJ Collaborative

- I want to encourage you to keep meeting. This has been the most meaningful discussion and will result hopefully in this EJ trend going forward to 2022
- Suggest to VEDP to create an advisory board populated with representatives from EJ communities and link communications with these communities
- Zoning and local government: important to recognize that EJ communities do not have the same access to their local government officials as others (opportunities to influence)
- Freeda Cathcart, Soil and Water Conservation District Director
 - Better working relationship between DEQ and conservation interests and especially when it comes to farmers and foresters
 - I was a little confused – I thought I was signing up to be part of the working group; I didn't notice that there was anybody from the department of conservation and recreation that was represented in this working group (*David then confirmed that they are part of the workgroup*)
 - Grocery store/barber shops are good locations to reach individuals in the community
 - Importance of enforcing environmental laws and how agencies to work together to create an environment to support everybody
- Grace LeRose, City of Richmond
 - We are looking to DEQ for guidance; we are about to begin another stakeholder process similar to RVA H2O process (looking for guidance and tips so that we can have a fully re-utilized stakeholder process)

Wrap up

- Plan a listening session with the public in September 2021.
- Plan additional meeting in October.
- Public can send thoughts to David, Renee and any member of the working group