

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ADVISORY BOARD
CONFERENCE CALL
July 10, 2018

Voting Members Present Via Phone

Adam Cutler
Clea Hollis
Jerome Shabazz
Tom Torres
John Waffenschmidt

Non-Members Present

Allison Acevedo
Nora Alwine
John Brakeall
Abbey Cadden
Glenda Davidson
Patrick McDonnell

Call to Order

Chairman Adam Cutler called the meeting to order at 9:05 A.M. without a quorum.

Introduction of New Director

Secretary McDonnell announced his satisfaction with the hiring process and selection of Allison Acevedo as DEP's new Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ) Director. With Allison's help, the Secretary looks forward to continue integrating environmental justice into DEP's programming and agency culture. DEP intends to hire an additional staff person within the OEJ and Allison will spearhead that effort. The Secretary thanked the Environmental Justice Advisory Board (EJAB) members who participated in the interview process for the Director position and thanked John Brakeall and Nora Alwine for taking on additional work throughout the Director's vacancy.

Allison Acevedo

The new Director provided a brief summary about herself with information about her previous employment and involvement with community outreach. Allison lives in Philadelphia, but was born and raised in Pittsburgh. She is an attorney who previously worked in advocacy and policy for state legislators and for the United Way and a Philadelphia-based policy group called PCCY. Her background focuses mainly on policy, community advocacy, and non-profit work. Allison is a co-founder of Philadelphia Black Giving Circle. Allison stated that she is honored to be able to support environmental justice communities through the work of DEP and the EJAB. She provided her thoughts on potential next steps for strengthening EJ community education and improving access to information.

Approval of Minutes

Without a quorum, the Minutes of the May 29, 2018 meeting were unable to be approved. The minutes will either be approved at the next meeting at which there is a quorum or by signing off via email if the Bylaws allow. Chairman Cutler will review the Bylaws.

EJ Program Update

Regional Coordinators Nora Alwine and John Brakeall provided the following brief overview of recent trigger permit applications, actions, and or updates:

Port Mine in Clarion – Ben Hal Mining Company submitted a permit application for a surface mine in Clarion County, which qualifies as a trigger permit. Nora Alwine and Knox District Mining Office staff are carrying out the EJ Public Participation Policy for this permit application.

Hegins Coal Breaker – Hegins Mining Company operates an anthracite coal breaking facility in Schuylkill County, whose permit is set to expire. Hegins Mining Company applied for a new Coal Refuse Reprocessing permit that qualifies as a trigger permit. John Brakeall and Pottsville District Mining Office staff are carrying out the EJ Public Participation Policy for this permit application.

Recent public outreach includes:

Edgar Thomson Works – Nora Alwine met with representatives from the group North Braddock Residents for our Future on June 8 to discuss concerns regarding the proposed natural gas development on US Steel’s Edgar Thomson Works property located east of Pittsburgh. The organization requested a meeting with both US Steel and the operator, Merrion Oil & Gas; however, one has not yet been granted. Nora is acting as a liaison between the operator and the community.

Chester Air Quality Meeting – Secretary McDonnell and the Southeast Regional Office (SERO) staff hosted a roundtable meeting on April 20 in the City of Chester with a focus on environmental justice. Many of the questions from the roundtable involved air quality, so the Air Quality program in SERO offered to lead a meeting focusing on air quality permitting, monitoring, and funding opportunities available through DEP to improve air quality. A follow-up meeting focusing on Air Quality was held on June 26 at the Faith Temple Holy Church in Chester. EJAB members Dr. Strand and John Waffenschmidt participated in the meeting.

Erie Coke – There is an ongoing stakeholder engagement process regarding the Erie Coke facility. A Title V permit renewal and NPDES permit renewal are being reviewed. The stakeholder group is composed of 25 individuals who are involved in the permit process and have attended numerous meetings. The stakeholders felt the facility tour held in May was eye-opening and exceeded expectations. The stakeholders now feel they have a direct line of communication with representatives of Erie Coke and have been impressed with Erie Coke representatives’ willingness to answer questions. The next meeting will focus on health concerns regarding emissions from the plant. Individuals from the federal Environmental Protection Agency, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, Pennsylvania Department of Health, ECHD, and DEP’s air monitoring group will contribute to the discussion.

EJAB collaboration includes:

Chester Air Quality Meeting – Hosted by Dr. Strand with John Waffenschmidt in attendance.

Geisinger Meeting – Carol Parenzan coordinated a meeting between Middle Susquehanna Riverkeeper, Geisinger Health, and the Office of Environmental Justice to discuss Geisinger’s Medicine Take Back program and opioid abuse and environmental justice communities. The meeting is scheduled for July 17.

Draft EJ Public Participation Policy

Comments on the previous draft of the policy were submitted by four EJAB members. The feedback included citation of the Environmental Rights Amendment, a clearly defined difference between public hearings and public meetings, and clarification regarding recorded testimony at public meetings and its relationship with Comment-Response Documents. DEP included revisions to optimize the flow, organization, and cohesiveness of the document. Nora Alwine stated that the Secretary felt it would be prudent to include more information regarding the preapplication portion of the permit review process, resulting in a clearly defined preapplication conference section of the policy. Any additional public comments can be submitted through eComment during the open comment period of July 14-August 28.

Board Strategic Planning

Communications Subcommittee

EJAB requested that DEP provide an electronic version of the EJ Public Participation Policy to the Board members for the ease of distribution to communities. EJAB also suggested that social media outreach via Twitter or Facebook would be effective in disseminating information in an active way. Chairman Cutler asked for volunteers to serve on a Communications Subcommittee and John Waffenschmidt indicated his willingness to serve on the committee. Chairman Cutler will email members of EJAB for additional volunteers.

Progress Tracking Tool

Discussion was held regarding a tracking tool building on the idea of transparency and accountability, what the tool looks like, and what it captures.

Plans for next EJAB meeting

EJAB members discussed at length the proposed structure of the August 28 meeting in Williamsport, whether listening session or regular agenda, and the Board hopes to accomplish at the meeting.

Adjournment:

Chairman Adam Cutler requested a motion to adjourn the conference call. John Waffenschmidt made a motion that the meeting be adjourned, which was seconded by Tom Torres. The call was adjourned at 10:35 A.M.