

**MINUTES OF
CITIZENS ADVISORY COUNCIL
November 12th, 2025**

CALL TO ORDER:

Robert Barkanic, CAC Chairperson called the meeting to order at 12:36 PM.

CITIZENS ADVISORY COUNCIL (CAC) MEMBERS PRESENT:

Robert Barkanic, Chairperson	Dwayne Mowery
Trisha Salvia, Vice-Chairperson	Jerome Shabazz
George Ambrose	John Walliser
Carol Collier	Tim Weston
Jason Foster	Jessica Shirley
Katherine Heatherington Cunfer	

DEP STAFF PRESENT:

Ian Irvin, Executive Director
Casey Damicantonio, Policy Office
Joshua Neyhart, Policy Office
Lena Smith, Policy Office
Fernando Trevino, Special Deputy Secretary, Office of Environmental Justice
Mariana Fletcher, Director of Environmental Justice, Office of Environmental Justice

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

The Meeting minutes for October and November will be reviewed for approval at the January 2026 meeting.

APPROVAL OF THE NOVEMBER 2026 MEETING BETWEEN EJAB AND CAC

Members of the CAC and EJAB agreed to a meeting date of November 10, 2026, for the combined meeting.

DEP UPDATE

Secretary Jessica Shirley

Over the last two years, DEP has focused on the organization, including structure, core values, and a strategic plan. Overall, DEP has six regional offices and 15 district offices. DEP has a personnel complement of 2800 but has about 2600 roles filled, which is about an 8 percent vacancy rate. There is about 86,000 miles of stream and rivers in Pennsylvania. DEP regulates about 8,000 drinking water facilities providing potable water to 12 million people, or 88 percent of the state. Pennsylvania also has oil and gas wells, including abandoned wells, mines and quarries, and a laboratory performing more than half a million annual tests.

On DEP's 30th birthday in July, DEP looked to see if the agency's mission statement was still relevant and if the agency is meeting it. For example, previously the mission statement referenced Pennsylvania citizens but was expanded to include residents and visitors. The

mission statement was amended to tie back to the Environmental Rights Amendment of the Pennsylvania Constitution because Pennsylvania is only one of three states with this constitutional provision. Additionally, the second sentence of the mission statement emphasized DEP's work with various stakeholders and partners around the Commonwealth, including county conservation districts, businesses, individuals, governments, and other external partners. Finally, when the mission statement was established 1994, it was about environmental restoration. Thinking about 2025 and beyond, the agency needs to think about conservation too by calling out and addressing current and future environmental challenges, like climate change and environmental justice considerations.

DEP also established a vision by being a model environmental agency and move at the speed of business and lead the way in science, innovation, and best practices to ensure clean air, land, and water for the health and safety of present and future generations. This vision ties back to the mission statement but also shows Secretary Shirley's competitiveness by being a model environmental agency.

After establishing a vision statement, the agency is turning to values. Previously, there were four values. DEP polled staff to get input from everyone on their values and what they felt should be the values of DEP. The values are:

- Public service
- Environmental stewardship
- Commitment to customers
- Excellence and continuous improvement
- Communication
- Accountability

Now that the mission statement, vision, and value have been established, DEP has turned to its current focus – goals. Establishing goals is the step before the agency begins working on its strategic plan, which is something that the agency has not had in the last 15 years and is part of modernizing the agency. There are four goals that DEP is striving for:

- Empower a future-ready workforce through innovation, learning, and leadership
- Elevate customer experience in support of Environmental outcomes
- Modernize operations and foster a unified, high-performing DEP
- Build a transparent, data-driven organization

Update on SPEED, which started in June 2025 and stands for Streamlining Permits for Economic Expansion and Development. The agency has seven applications in the review process. Five of the applications are working with their qualified professional, and two applications are in the pre-submission meeting stage. One permit is on track to be issued shortly, and the Department will announce when it does go out.

The Department has started reviewing the Environmental Quality Board's policy for processing rulemaking petitions. The Policy Office will be coming to the Council in January to discuss this activity.

Dr. Strand of the Environmental Justice Advisory Board is officially retiring, and DEP wanted to recognize him for his years of service.

Not yet announced but the Department is currently working on re-establishing the Office of External Affairs to engage and make sure it is bringing resources to the communities that are looking for them.

Questions:

A Council member, upon hearing of the core values, strategic plan, and goals asked about the focus on environmental outcomes that the agency is seeking, which are probably most important for the people of Pennsylvania. Secretary Shirley responded that the environmental outcome goals are part of the budgeting processes, and it is important to make these environmental outcome goals clear to the public, including environmental indicators.

Another Council member asked about the Council's role in establishing goals and a strategic plan. Currently, the strategic plan is looking for a contractor, and the Request for Proposal is public. This presentation was to inform the Council on the ground floor and let the members know how things will move forward over the next few months. But, once a good draft is developed, the agency will present the draft strategic plan to the Council.

A Council member asked about if there is a mechanism to collect feedback from applicants in how the process is going for SPEED and how we can improve it for the future.

Not current processes exist, but the Department is having individuals conversations with the applicants. Because there are only a handful of them, and it is easy to obtain this information. However, we are looking to find a compliment spot hiring someone who can focus on customer outcomes for this.

Lastly- would like to take this opportunity to recognize Dr. Strand formally, who is retiring from the Environmental Justice Advisory Board, with decades of service to the board and the department Dr. Strand is an EJ icon in PA before it was a department. We appreciate you and your service to the department through the board and leadership helping everyone understand the concerns of the communities he represented. We will be sending you a plaque for your dedication. Thank you and congratulations.

PRESENTATIONS:

**Fernando Trevino, Special Deputy Secretary, Office of Environmental Justice, PA
Department of Environmental Protection**

Special Deputy Secretary Trevino's remarks were about Governor Shapiro's and DEP's commitment to Environmental Justice issues. One of the roles of the Office is educating the community on different processed that DEP has and making sure it is providing tools to them, so they can participate in DEP's processes.

DEP, over the last couple years, has focused on elevating the relationship and customer service with every person it interacts with in the communities that need our help the most.

Penn Enviro Screen is a mapping tool to help communities understand their environment and help prioritize items those communities need to advocate for or against. Originally launched in 2024, the Office has continued to build on the mapping tool in 2025 in 3 specific areas

- integrate EJ considerations into every aspect of DEP, including enhancing public participation
- providing an environmental justice coordinator in each of the six regional offices
- being proactive and building better relationships, to facilitate education and trust.

The Office of Environmental Justice has met with more than 210 community-based organizations, 190 individual meetings with stakeholders and community leaders, held more than 50 events and attended and participated in about 100 partner events, provided more than 36 presentations. DEP has received about 1600 permits in EJ area, with only about 11 of those permits trigger the implementation of the Department's EJ policy.

Finally, the Office of Environmental Justice is developing its relationship with EJAB in addition to closely working with colleges like Drexel and Juniata.

**Charles Lee, Scholar in Residence, Howard University School of Law
Former Director and Senior Policy Advisor of Environmental Justice, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

Environmental Justice and Cumulative Impacts

Mr. Lee began by describing his interest in Pennsylvania, including Environment Justice work and its progression.

Mr. Lee started with a high-level description of what is cumulative impacts, which is the total burden of the coexistence of multiple environmental, social, social factors on health, well-being and quality of life. There are several concepts related to the convergence of different environmental on cumulative impacts. One of these concepts is the distinct pattern of cumulative impacts that leads to disproportionate or disparate impacts or, in other words, a concentration of burdens. Much of the literature for years has shown this concept in certain areas of the country, certain hot spots or sacrifice zones such as South side of Chicago or Cancer Alley in Louisiana. It is important to have a conversation about the concentrated environmental burdens, which frequently coincides with a lack of benefits within the community.

One of the first definitions of cumulative impact in the environmental justice space came from California Environmental Protection Agency, which emphasized the totality of exposures and combines all the stressor values into a single score and ranks them. Discussion moved to the various steps in Environmental Justice and Cumulative Impacts around the country over the last 30 years, including things in California, New Jersey, Illinois, Massachusetts, and Washington.

Chicago did a study in 2022 of health impact assessment around the relocation of metal and scrap metal recycling facility from a gentrifying community predominantly made of Latinos and African Americans, this is a whole community approach and the health impacts of a particular policy program. New Jersey did a matrix approach, whereas Massachusetts took a much more traditional risk-based approach that looks at thresholds exceeding a protective level using health endpoints. As of today, there are cumulative impact regulations being developed in New York, Minnesota and Connecticut as well as a host of laws being proposed in other cities and states.

Questions

A Council member asked about Dr. Lee's feelings about the current administration in Washington, D.C. and if it will reverse some of the recent findings that they perceived as DEI? Mr. Lee, not speaking to the current administration, emphasized that the National Academy of Science report, which was commissioned by U.S. EPA during the Biden administration and used the term Environmental Justice 99 times. EJ is endemic to understanding the nature of the issues from real life and science perspective.

Another Council member described an experience with permitting at DEP and diesel trucks going to a facility in the early morning. In this example, the Department had a checklist that it goes through, which is unable to regulate permitted facilities differently based on cumulative impacts. What is the path forward? Mr. Lee discussed legislations on cumulative impacts and the need for a deeper understanding of the issue.

A member of EJAB, providing some background on Governor Wolfe's Executive Order on environmental justice, asked how states can step into the gap that the federal government has left in 2025. States can step into these spaces, but these are not simple questions and may require significant resources to address. Nevertheless, states an experiment with different approaches and evaluate them.

A Council member asked about the appropriate scale of analysis used to different decision contexts. Mr. Lee stated this was a very deep and large question but it is critical to know what kind of decision is being made and the necessary information to gain an understanding of the issues and factors that go into that decision.

Dr. Ben Green, Assistant Professor, Gerald R Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan

Environmental Justice Concerns of Data Centers

Data centers are a specialized facility or warehouse to house and manage IT infrastructure. AI has largely driven the increase in data centers and electricity demands. Hyperscale data centers becoming more prevalent, having a lot more servers and Graphics Processing Units and utilizing a facility that is more than 10,000 square feet. Nevertheless, there are facilities that dwarf the size of hyperscale data centers – for example, OpenAI announced a data center project in Saline, MI that would be 2.2 million square feet and 1.4 gigawatts of energy.

Virginia is the epicenter of datacenters, with Texas and California having a significant number of centers too. There is quite a bit of centers in the Midwest. Resource consumption varies depending on the item being produced with text or image classification being low and video generation being high.

Energy Use - 100-word email using AI would power 14 led lightbulbs for 1 hour. The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that electricity needed for data centers has tripled over the last decade and, by 2028, will consume as much as 12% of electricity production. By 2030, estimates have that consumption at 17%. While many companies were promoting being “carbon neutral” or “carbon negative” around 2018, many of them have dropped these initiatives upon seeing generative AI as the next phase of their business models.

Water Use – that same, 100-word email uses approximately one bottle of water for energy to cool down the GPUs. Google, for example uses 6 billion of gallons of water a year, enough to maintain 41 golf courses. Getting this information on use is difficult to obtain and the companies are hesitant to share. Despite these estimates, water and energy use information is incredibly difficult to obtain because data center companies do not generally voluntarily release this information, including having non-disclosure agreements with local governments. Later in the presentation, Dr. Green talked about how many water issues are localized. Areas like California, Arizona, and Texas do not have the water resources that states like Pennsylvania have even if those states can offset energy consumption with solar panels.

Local Impacts – while much of the attention has focused on global emissions, global electricity and water use, one of the most pressing environmental and economic concerns, including environmental justice, is local impacts. Data centers are creating a surge in electricity demands and straining the grid. One estimate from Bloomberg found that electricity prices have double in the last five years for those living in areas near data centers. With utilities needing to do large infrastructure upgrades, these costs are passed to consumers with data centers getting a discounted or special rate in their arrangements with utilities. With the electricity demands, the continued use of fossil fuel power plants, like coal, is an issue as we generally want to shift to electricity generation that produces less carbon, like renewable energy. For example, a coal power plant in North Omaha that was set to close in 2023 has remained open, and a nearby black neighborhood has some of the highest asthma rates in the country. Greater volatility in the grid can lead to fires and broken appliances in homes because of the electricity instability. Additionally, data centers will use turbines or generators on site to provide additional or backup power, which can lead to significant pollutants in the air leading to asthma heat disease, cancer, and other hospitalizations. Finally, while there is a short-term job increase during construction of the site, there is not much post-construction job creation, even if tax-revenues may increase (but mitigated by state, 36 states have passed incentives for data center development, and local tax incentives to the data center companies).

Questions

One Council member asked about the use of blue hydrogen, which is a phase used in hydrogen hub development.

A member of EJAB asked about the cooling used for the data centers, specifically about water. Most data centers draw their water supply from municipal water supplies, which means the water is potable – the data centers do not use untreated water for their systems. However, there is a movement toward close loop systems and reducing water usage, especially in states that are drier (unlike Pennsylvania).

A Council member talked about two proposed data centers in the southwestern part of Pennsylvania that will be going on a 1400 acre abandoned coal mine with plans to use the water in the mine. He went on to discuss the water-resources of Pennsylvania and how this is one area where the Council. Additional questions were about whether the data centers are pulling water resources in front of or behind the meter, vis-à-vis climate change the potential droughts. Dr. Green agreed that water is a potential point of leverage and added that zoning is another potential point, which has become one of the primary places of fights between data centers and residents not wanting data centers in their communities.

Another Council discussed how the Statewide Water Resources Committee and the State Water Plan have focused on the implications of data centers on water resources. The eastern and central portions of the state have the Delaware and Susquehanna River Basin Commissions, respectively, but western Pennsylvania does not have a similar regulatory regime with respect to its water withdrawal. He went on to discuss one of the shortcomings of Pennsylvania water in law in that anyone can withdrawal from ground or surface water without a review, and municipalities are explicitly prevented from regulating water withdrawal and usage. Additionally, there was a discussion of how data centers in Virginia draw from wastewater systems, not freshwater systems. Finally, some data centers have gone to dry cooling, which is less water intensive, but uses more electricity.

A member of EJAB asked about mine pool geothermal for data centers, which some legislators are talking about, and other countries have started employing, including the United Kingdom. Another question was about the use of abandoned mine land for data centers. Dr. Green discussed some of the desires in using water from a municipal system, including knowing the water has been controlled and treated, whereas groundwater has various externalities, like effecting more people and the constituents in the water. He would go on to say that documentation and reporting on water issues is not as robust as the documentation and reporting on electricity.

Another member of EJAB talked about how regions near the Great Lakes still use reservoirs for water. He went on to discuss how greater education of the public is needed.

Public Comments

The following citizens made public comment please click the link below to read in full.

[2025 Citizens Advisory Council Meeting Schedule | Department of Environmental Protection | Commonwealth of Pennsylvania](#)

Karen Feridun

Lois Bower-Bjornson, Southwestern PA Field Organizer and Clean Air Council

Alice Lu, Policy Analyst and Clean Air Council

Lauren Posey, Environmental Policy Advocate and Protect PT (Penn-Trafford)

Nate Eachus

CAC Committee Reports

- Legislative Committee (Trisha Salvia): Budget impasse and the then imminent signing of the budget, legislation interests of 2026 (SPEED Program, well setbacks, Food Processing Residuals, electronic recycling, Data Centers, Lightning Plan)
- Strategic issues (Ian Irvin on behalf of Jacqui Bonomo): meeting in December, focus on Data Centers.
- Aggregate Advisory Board, Mining and Reclamation Advisory Board, and Radiation Advisory Committee have met over the last few weeks. Normal business with nothing to report to the Council.

New Business/Open Discussion-

- Discussion of the Policy and Regulatory Oversight Committee meeting to discuss the changes in the policy of rulemaking petitions to the Environmental Quality Board
 - Discussion of the Council's interfacing with the Department on the External Affairs position, especially with a Council member previously serving in that role.
 - Further discussion of the Council's and DEP's role vis-à-vis Data Center, including similarities to the beginning of the Marcellus Shale fracking boom seen approximately 15 years ago. Discussion about incentivizing companies for remediation.
- George Ambrose moved to approve 2026 meeting dates. Jason Foster seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.**

ADJOURNMENT:

Next meeting will be January, at 12:30 in Room 105 at RCSOB or online.

Timothy Weston moved to adjourn the meeting. George Ambrose seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

The November, meeting of the CAC was adjourned at 4:21pm.