

**MINUTES OF VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE  
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ADVISORY BOARD  
February 18, 2021**

**Members Present Via Phone:**

Jennifer Baka  
Heather Bedi  
Adam Cutler  
Arthur Frank  
Hazem Hijazi  
Gary Horton  
Rafiyqa Muhammad  
Allison Robinson  
Jerome Shabazz  
Tom Torres

**Non-Members Present Via Phone  
(Commonwealth Employees):**

Allison Acevedo, DEP  
John Brakeall, DEP  
Abbey Cadden, DEP  
Glenda Davidson, DEP  
Justin Dula, DEP  
Allen Landis, DEP  
Bo Reiley, DEP  
Zack Steckler, DEP  
Ann Johnston, AG Office  
Fran Branch, DOH  
Stephanie Hasanali, DOH  
Anil Nair, DOH  
Judelissa Rosario, DOH  
Emily Watts, PennDOT

**Non-Members:**

Stephan Brown  
Andrew Chintz  
Claire Costelloe  
Melissa Muroff  
Jack Eskin  
Fatimah Fair  
Brittany Griffin  
Josie Gaskey  
Glendon King  
Art Leopold  
Vanessa Lynch  
Josephine Martin  
Brandin McDonough  
McKenzie Morgan  
NaTisha Washington  
Renwick Paige  
Sean Peterson  
Christina Ruvo  
Scott Van Bramer

**Call to Order:**

Chairman Cutler called the virtual meeting to order at 9:00 AM with a quorum.

**Approval of Minutes:**

Chairman Cutler solicited additions or corrections to the Minutes of the November 17, 2020 meeting.

**Arthur Frank moved to approve the Minutes of the November 17, 2020 meeting. Jerome Shabazz seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.**

**Review of Action Items from November 17, 2020 Meeting:**

*RGGI Recommendations*

Allison Acevedo noted that EJAB submitted written recommendations to the Secretary on RGGI. The Secretary provided a written response. EJAB's recommendations and the Secretary's response are posted on DEP's website.

DEP is beginning to engage communities around RGGI investments. OEJ is developing a process to engage communities in a way that meaningful recommendations around investments can be made to DEP. OEJ will reach out to EJAB and the Public Participation subcommittee for additional input. The Secretary has agreed to monitor and evaluate air quality impacts within EJ communities. One of the key priorities of the Secretary in the RGGI process is recommending that EJ considerations be incorporated into the RGGI states' model rule. The RGGI process is a key priority for the Secretary, and he is supportive of the RGGI Equity Principles.

**OEJ Updates:**

*EJ Training*

Allison Acevedo stated that OEJ offered EJ training to over 1500 DEP staff over six sessions from December 16-18. The training was developed with the support of the EPA, DEP staff, and other state agencies and focused on an overview of EJ, the history of EJ in Pennsylvania and at DEP, EJ tools and research, and public participation. Mentimeter was used, allowing for real time engagement with staff.

*EJ Policy Revision*

OEJ will host two virtual sessions to gather feedback on the EJ Policy sometime in March. OEJ will draft the Policy in spring and anticipates the public comment period and hearing to occur later in the year. Finalization of the policy and discussions around the implementation process will take place in early spring 2022. A timeline of the EJ Policy revision process is on the DEP website.

*Committee Updates*

Allison Acevedo and Justin Dula are participating in DEP's Diversity Committee and several other subcommittees. John Brakeall and Allison are both active on various Chesapeake Bay Program diversity subcommittees. The DOH Office of Health Equity is moving forward with organizing an anti-racism institute for Commonwealth staff and DEP staff will be participating. The EJ interagency group is continuing to meet.

### *Northcentral/Southcentral*

Bucknell University and Faith Alliance for Revitalization have formed a partnership and are providing interns to help Shamokin Creek Restoration Alliance with several projects in Shamokin. OEJ has been extensively involved in coordination and planning.

John Brakeall is teaching a course on Environmental Justice course at Harrisburg University as part of an Environmental Science and Sustainability program.

### *Northeast/Southeast*

Justin Dula noted that participants of the Scranton Roundtable are continuing to meet because of the roundtable meeting.

In the Southeast, the next technical assistance brownfields grant is in Darby Borough. An advisory committee has met three times and has begun mapping brownfields and holding public meetings around the former Philadelphia Energy Solutions Sunoco site. DEP is going to participate with the EPA and the City to talk about the role of regulators in remediation of that site.

### *Northwest/Southwest*

Allison Acevedo announced that a western regional coordinator should be starting next month, and a formal announcement will be made when it becomes official.

### *Policy Office*

Abbey Cadden offered the following updates:

### *PFAS*

DEP's Bureau of Safe Drinking Water finished collecting over 400 samples of water from public water suppliers to test for 18 PFAS compounds. The data will be used to inform the basis for establishing enforceable regulatory standards for PFAS compounds. These reports should be released soon.

### *Litter Action Plan*

Last year, DEP, PennDOT, and Keep American Beautiful published results from a comprehensive research study. Since the release of those reports, DEP, PennDOT, and Keep PA Beautiful have created workgroups to perform a target analysis of illegal dumping and littering. Strategies will be created to address the problem and nail down strategies to target behavioral changes. Emily Watts from PennDOT indicated that a series of litter workgroup meetings will begin in May and will be held throughout the summer and into the fall to compile recommendations and strategies leaning toward preventing litter. More information will be provided as it becomes available.

### *Diversity*

DEP staff met with Jerome Shabazz and Tom Torres to discuss diversity on DEP advisory boards. DEP created a page on the DEP website where candidates can express interest, thereby creating a pool of names from which to pull for vacancies.

## **SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATES:**

### *Public Participation*

Allison Acevedo noted that the committee has met twice since the November EJAB meeting. Tom Torres stated that the subcommittee has had an opportunity to engage with key stakeholders in key regions, particularly focusing on climate and climate justice issues. The subcommittee believes there is a need to engage folks more specifically around climate justice issues to help shape RGGI implementation and the direction of the proceeds. Jerome Shabazz offered that the key emphasis is that the body should continue and be conceived as a sustainable, necessary committee that will last beyond the initial working group session. Allison Acevedo stated that she had a chance to talk to the EJ Office in New York. That office is developing a long-term group to ensure that community voices are represented and thinking about how those voices are utilized in a meaningful way to make decisions around climate.

### *EJ in PA Symposium*

Rafiyqa Muhammad stated that the planning is moving forward the formation of regional hubs, a designated facilitator and keynote speaker. Rafiyqa Muhammad has worked diligently to form partnerships with the City of Harrisburg, Harrisburg University and others. Arthur Frank worked to have Drexel University sponsor the keynote speaker. Allison Robinson worked have foundations in the western part of the state, including Forbes Fund, Heinz Endowments, and Erie Community Foundation sponsor the event. EJ in PA received a commitment from Covanta to sponsor and is scheduling a meeting with AARP who are interested in sponsoring. Heather Bedi has been given a grant to turn the outcomes from the meeting into a website story map from each of the key hubs which will be a resource to document learning and outcomes and be a community guide.

## **INTERAGENCY UPDATES:**

DOH will have an Office of Health Equity Summit in Pittsburgh in October 2021.

Tammie Peffer from the Department of Education is integrating environmental justice and equity into work around environmental literacy and environmental education. An Environmental Literacy Summit is being planned for June, with the key objectives being EJ and diversity, inclusion, and justice, as well as climate change and climate justice.

## **PENNSYLVANIA ENERGY DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (PEDA)**

Allen Landis from DEP's Energy Programs Office provided an overview of the background, mission, and recent activity of PEDA. Allen discussed the Restart Grant which provides assistance to energy projects to recover from COVID-19, the development of a comprehensive methodology scoring to capture intent and guidelines for grant solicitation, and the projects that were ultimately awarded. Further information was provided about a partnership with the PA Treasury to establish a green bank for which the PEDA Board voted to approve \$2.5 million seed funding for this partnership. Additional information can be found on the DEP website.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Art Leopold would like to create awareness about the closure of the Erie Coke plant and the \$100 million recycling plant, International Recycling Group (IRG), that is proposed on the site. The location is in an EJ area, and the proposal is purportedly to be 10 times larger than any other recycling facility and would process up to 275,000 tons per year. Mr. Leopold was advised by DEP's Northwest Regional Office permitting staff that IRG has not yet applied for permits for

this operation. There is great concern in the Erie community about the proposed facility. Mr. Leopold would like to see public informational meetings held in Erie. EJAB members requested that OEJ work with the Erie community to help facilitate discussions.

### **EPA UPDATES ON ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE:**

Charles Lee from EPA Headquarters provided an update on environmental justice under the new Administration. Charles Lee explained that the recently signed Executive Orders are complex and will take time to evolve. The Executive Orders and the Presidential Memo include advancing racial equity and support; protecting public health and the environment; restoring science to tackle the climate crisis; tackling the climate crisis at home and abroad; and modernizing the regulatory review process. Charles Lee believes EJ has come of age and has now reached the top of the federal policy agenda. Many new initiatives and organizations are being called for, including: a White House Advisory Council; White House Interagency Council; environmental justice officers in every federal department; a climate and economic justice mapping tool; a Justice 40 initiative calling for the allocation of 40% of federal climate-related resources going to disadvantaged, underserved, and overburdened communities; and the establishment of a DOJ Office of EJ.

A lengthy question and answer session included what EJAB could do to support initiatives at the federal level, alignment of state EJ mapping with the climate and economic screening tool, possible interface between implementation of the federal and state level initiatives, additional efforts around mapping to better understand communities, and the concept of equitable investments in EJ communities as part of RGGI. Additional meetings will be set up for further collaboration between the EPA and OEJ.

### **DEP UPDATES:**

Secretary McDonnell provided a brief update on the following:

#### *Budget*

DEP is budgeted at \$164.8 million in general funds with a total spending of \$805 million. The Secretary highlighted in his budget hearing testimony the work the Department is doing on EJ and diversity and highlighted the Spanish translation work that was implemented for the RGGI hearings.

#### *Diversity Committee*

A Diversity Committee has been established looking at EJ issues but also looking at more that can be done internally in terms of messaging, HR, and attempting to bring on a more diverse workforce.

#### *Environmental Council of the States*

Secretary McDonnell is President of the Environmental Council of the States. In that capacity he plans to highlight work to be done on equity, inclusion, and diversity in his presidential report and is planning to highlight those issues at the Council's semi-annual conference to make sure a broader conversation is happening across the nation. The Secretary is looking for opportunities to form ad hoc groups with other states to work on those issues.

### *RGGI*

There were 10 hearings with over 400 participants and over 14,000 comments. DEP is in the process of reviewing the comments and will then prepare a Comment and Response Document. As part of the budget, the Governor is looking to establish a fund specifically focused on the impacts of coal on EJ communities, and DEP will continue to work through that with the Legislature over the coming months. Release of the RGGI equity principles is imminent.

### *Grants*

There are various grants currently open including Driving PA Forward to fund electric vehicle and diesel reduction projects. Approximately one-third of the \$118 million has been awarded.

### **MEMBER UPDATES:**

Heather Bedi reported that the recent Clarke Forum panel was well attended. The speakers provided an overview of air pollution, issues around the coke plant, diesel air pollution issues, and community-related issues around vehicle repair shops in relation to daycare centers.

Allison Robinson noted that the Southwestern PA Region Commission developed a multimodal transportation tool to better coordinate forms of transportation between Counties. There is also a group forming focused on leveraging a circular economy and sustainable supply chain management in southwestern PA.

Allison Acevedo stated that Ron Schwartz, DEP's Southwest Regional Director, has retired. Jim Miller is the new Southwest Regional Director, and John Holden is Acting Regional Director for the Northwest Region.

Jennifer Baka announced that she is helping to organize a Penn State Shale Network Conference around the links between shale development and environmental issues. Registration is currently open.

### **WRAP UP AND NEXT STEPS:**

Justin Dula stated that DEP is working to utilize language access services contracted by the Commonwealth. The Diversity Committee is working to formalize the structure of both phone interpretation and translation of documents, as well as working to set up procedures to ensure those services are made available to all staff.

### **ADJOURNMENT:**

Chairman Cutler requested a motion to adjourn the conference call.

**Arthur Frank made a motion that the meeting be adjourned, which was seconded by Rafiyqa Muhammad. The meeting was adjourned at 1:45 PM.**