

**MINUTES OF MEETING OF THE  
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ADVISORY BOARD  
FEBRUARY 21, 2024**

**MEMBERS PRESENT in-person:**

Adam Cutler, Chairman  
Dr. Horace Strand, Vice Chair  
Sophia Lee  
Rashida Lovely  
Jackie Omotalade  
Jerome Shabazz

**MEMBERS PRESENT via phone:**

Dr. Jennifer Baka  
Dr. Heather Bedi  
Dr. Lisa DePaoli  
Gary Horton  
Bobby Hughes  
Rafiyqa Muhammad  
Joylette Portlock  
Mia Ray  
Tom Torres

**DEP STAFF PRESENT in-person:**

Fernando Trevino, Office of Environmental Justice  
Justin Dula, Office of Environmental Justice  
Andrea Fields, Office of Environmental Justice  
Jordi Comas, Office of Environmental Justice  
Ariana Genna, Office of Environmental Justice  
Jennifer McLuckie, Office of Environmental Justice  
Winnie Okello, Office of Environmental Justice  
Louie Krak, Office of the Budget  
Lena Smith, Policy Office

**DEP STAFF PRESENT via phone:**

Amelia Benson, Office of Environmental Justice  
Dong Yoon Kim, Office of Environmental Justice  
Amani Reid, Office of Environmental Justice  
Juan Serrat, Office of Environmental Justice  
Thomas Donohue, Office of Oil and Gas Management  
Nikolina Gaudin, Office of Chief Counsel  
Rocco Giammaria, Legislative Office  
Lawrence Holley, Office of Waste Air and Radiation Management  
Lisa Meade, Legislative Office  
Sarah Pinter, Energy Programs Office  
Robert Sax, Legislative Office  
Jessica Shilladay, Office of Field Operations  
Colleen Unroe, Policy Office  
Mark Vottero, Office of Waste, Air, Radiation and Remediation  
Kimberly Yeakle, Office of Field Operations

**NON-MEMBERS PRESENT via phone:**

Doug Carton  
Chris Davies  
Nathan Eachus  
Megan Emes  
Jeremy W. Hancher  
David Hess  
Yvonne Hollins  
Andrew W. McMenamin  
Mark Moore  
April Niver  
Andrew Ritter, Jr.  
Pete Staudenmeier  
Nick Troutman  
Kristin Volchansky, Action Together NEPA  
[Contrenabaltimore@gmail.com](mailto:Contrenabaltimore@gmail.com)  
Geno  
Kara  
Stacey, SRBC

**NON-MEMBERS PRESENT in-person:**

Dr. Arthur Frank, Drexel University  
Rebecca Fisher, Central PA Food Bank

**Call to Order:**

Chairman Adam Cutler called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM

**Approval of Minutes:**

Chairman Cutler solicited additions or corrections to the Minutes of the November 14, 2023 meeting. Hearing none, Chairman Cutler requested a motion to approve the Minutes.

**Jerome Shabazz made a motion to approve the Minutes of the November 14, 2023 meeting. Rafiyqa Muhammad seconded the motion. With no abstentions, all were in favor, and the motion was unanimously approved.**

**Board Membership Status Updates:**

The Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Interim Acting (IA) Secretary Jessica Shirley joined the Environmental Justice Advisory Board (EJAB) meeting and gave a warm welcome. IA Secretary Shirley discussed the work of DEP and EJAB, how it doesn't go unnoticed and making sure we understand the issues folks are facing in communities. Partnerships with advisory boards are important to hear what the issues are and the needs that communities have.

IA Secretary Shirley recognized Dr. Arthur Frank, a 20-year term member of the EJAB, who is not renewing his term this year. Dr. Frank has been an amazing voice on the board, who was health focused, making connections and representing his community. The DEP thanks Dr. Frank for his invaluable time served.

Chairman Cutler recognized Hazem Hijazi, a 14-year term member of the EJAB, who is not renewing his term this year. Hazem has contributed greatly to EJAB's work, with a scientific based knowledge. The DEP thanks Hazem for his invaluable time served.

Chairman Cutler introduced three new members and made introductions. Sophia Lee, who works with the Girls Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania, Jackie Omotalade, works on Justice40 implementation with Dreams.org and Mia Ray, working with Penn State Hershey Medical Center, specializing in human health.

**Food Recovery Infrastructure Grant and 902 Recycling Program Development and Implementation Grant:**

*Jessica Shilladay, Organics Recycling Coordinator, Office of Field Operations*

*Mark Vottero, Group Manager, Office of Waste, Air, Radiation and Remediation*

Mark discussed DEP Recycling Grants; the 902 Recycling Grant and the Food Recovery Infrastructure Grant (FRIG). These grants are financed by a \$2-per-ton recycling fee, established by Act 101 in 1988, establishing the recycling fund. Both programs provide special consideration to those that will enhance, and impact identified EJ areas.

Jessica presented on FRIG, developed in accordance with Act 101, with the intent to reduce the amount of fresh, safe and wholesome foods, from entering the waste stream. Awards for the second solicitation were announced with 114 applicants awarded \$4.2 million in grant funding. Of the 114 non-profit organizations that received a portion of the grant, 102 organizations were identified to impact an EJ area.

Mark discussed 902 Recycling Grant, awarding \$16.3 million in grant funds, in July of 2023. Of the 80 Grant Awards, 39 were identified as impacting EJ areas. Dauphin County was awarded \$55,354 for funding a County-wide recycling education program. Lawrence County was awarded \$42,778 for funding of recycling educational advertising and recycling fact sheet development and printing costs. Recycling education is vital to educating communities.

Jessica briefly spoke about the PA DEP Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling Grant (SWIFR). This is an EPA grant for funding for states and territories to improve post-consumer materials management programs. The DEP was awarded \$511,502 to enhance PA's efforts to meet SWIFR grant elements, working together with the PA Recycling Market's Center, to accomplish goals.

Q&A centered around the funding that is available and how it is divided.

**Funding Update:**

*Louie Krak, Infrastructure Coordinator, Office of the Budget*

Under the Infrastructure and Investments Job Act (IIJA), DEP's Oil and Gas Program is projected to receive \$400 million to plug orphaned and abandoned wells that are leaking methane and hazardous air pollutants into the environment. 124 wells have been plugged with the IIJA funding.

Additional well plugging funding will be available from the Inflation Reduction Act. Through the Methane Emissions Reduction Program or MERP, DEP is receiving \$44 million to provide the funding for plugging marginal conventional wells.

Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG), has \$5 billion available nationally, broken into two separate funding streams. The first round, for planning around in-depth climate action plans, and round two, the implementation plan. DEP has received a \$3 million planning grant. Focus for the first deliverable was developing a Priority Climate Action Plan (PCAP), primarily focused on reducing greenhouse gas in PA's industrial sector.

Q&A centered around how to scale up organizations to be able to receive grants and how to offer technical assistance. Making connections between organizations, along with connecting the need with the resource.

### **Climate Change Updates:**

*Sarah Pinter, Energy Programs Specialist, Energy Programs Office (EPO)*

EPO has been working with the US Climate Alliance and has also developed an [Energy Funding and Assistance Finder](#), a tool for information on energy-specific funding and technical assistance opportunities.

Additional information can be found here: [About CPRG Planning Grant Information | US EPA](#)

### **DEP Updates:**

*Ramez Ziadeh, Executive Deputy Secretary, Secretary's Office*

Ramez provided an update on permitting within DEP. In January of 2023, Governor Shapiro signed an Executive Order to improve the licensing and permitting efficiencies. All agencies are required to catalog and analyze licensing and permitting review timeframes and establish new review timeframes.

Since mid-2023, DEP was able to catalog approximately 800 different authorization types. In coordination with Office of Transformation and Opportunity (OTO), timeframes were analyzed, in addition to addressing application fees. If the agency doesn't meet the established timeframes for applications, OTO created a platform, PAYback, where applicants can request a refund for application fees.

Q&A centered around the system changes within the department, transparency and making sure the new systems are user friendly for the public. DEP has a new customer service experience officer, focused on improving systems and the user experience.

DEP is receiving feedback from external users of permits. Learning what their experience has been, what they liked and what they didn't. DEP will look at the wide spectrum of permitting and different stakeholders feedback, to improve systems.

### **OEJ Updates:**

*Fernando Treviño, Special Deputy Secretary, Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ)*

Fernando provided a brief background on OEJ staff for new members. OEJ went from a staff of four to a staff of twelve. Now including one regional coordinator per each of the six regions in Pennsylvania. The OEJ was also elevated to include a Special Deputy Secretary and Deputy Director.

*Justin Dula, Director, OEJ*

OEJ is working through and reviewing over 600 comments that were received from public comment on the Interim-Final EJ Policy (Policy). This policy looks beyond public participation process, working to build connections throughout DEP. Compliance and Enforcement working with conservation districts. OEJ will advise EJAB throughout the policy revision, of any changes. Policy office staff have been assisting. OEJ has been intentional with proactive community engagement and reaching out to new communities to have new voices.

Fernando elaborated on proactive community engagement and the EPA awarding DEP with a one-million-dollar grant to further community engagement. Twelve Community Based Organizations have been intentionally chosen to receive grants and work with DEP. More information will be released soon.

Q&A centered around coordination efforts between departments and how this affects the communities. Concerns arose on cumulative impacts and making sure the community isn't overwhelmed and there is help for the permitting process.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

*Chris Davies, resident of Greene Township, Pike County*

Mr. Davies shared thoughts on the FRIG, how money would be better spent on educating folks how to eat more plant based and gardening. Focusing on food storage is likely to incentivize processed foods and foods not grown locally. Mr. Davies suggested that the most meaningful recycling is invisible, requiring no grants. Eating more whole plant-based foods, suggesting you don't produce any plastic, as fresh produce doesn't require packaging and requires less refrigeration. Grants overall seem to be treating symptoms, not root causes.

In response, Rashida Lovely acknowledged Mr. Davies comment. Rashida shared that she has seen incremental change in DEP over the years, understanding the need for a lower-level approach. In addition, sharing that change is coming.

**Interagency Updates:**

None

**Subcommittee Updates:**

Chairman Cutler summarized Rashida Lovely's, Public Defenders memo. This proposal would initially need to go to the Attorney General's Office (AG), not something that EJAB can lobby to the AG's office. Figuring out where such an entity would exist, if it could be created, and how does EJAB best advocate for it.

Fernando shared that DEP is a regulatory agency for the permitting process, needing to stay neutral and being unable to host an office that would advocate for one side or the other. The memo and advocacy are not being opposed, in an individual capacity, but to create this very expansive office and staff, would need to be created by the Legislature.

Q&A centered around empowering communities to be better represented, mirroring what other agencies are doing and what practices are being used. Look at creative ways to educate communities.

**Discussion for future presentations:**

Suggestion to be more strategic for future presentations, bringing issues or suggestions to allow OEJ to get the proper folks to speak to EJAB. Thinking of topics, such as funding, legal, integration of health equity, lead, food and community solar legislation. Lessons learned from the PennEnviroScreen tool and discussion on the different ways to use this tool to identify the needs of the community and advocacy needs.

**Wrap Up and Next Steps:**

Next meeting will be May 14, 2024, in the City of Chester area (virtual and in-person).

**Adjournment:**

Chairman Cutler requested a motion to adjourn the meeting.

**Dr. Strand made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Jerome Shabazz seconded the motion, and all were in favor.**

The February 21, 2024 EJAB meeting adjourned at 2:05 PM.