

November 2024 Listening Session Summary

Title: NJ Interagency Council on Climate Resilience Listening Session

Date: Wednesday, November 20th, 2024

Moderator: Nathaly Agosto Filión, *Deputy Chief Climate Resilience Officer*, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

Panelists:

Sarah Friend, *Environmental Scientist*, New Jersey Highlands Council

Pamela Garrett, *Director, Division of Environmental Resources*, New Jersey Department of Transportation

Donna Rendeiro, *Executive Director, State Planning Commission*, Office of Planning Advocacy, NJ Business Action Center, New Jersey Department of State

Session Overview:

The [New Jersey Interagency Council on Climate Resilience](#) (Interagency Council) hosted its second Listening Session during the [2024 NJ League of Municipalities Annual Conference](#) which was held at the Atlantic City Convention Center from November 19th-21st, 2024. The Conference gathered local government officials, providing opportunities to share newfound and useful knowledge while building face-to-face connections.

Approximately 60 conference attendees representing a diverse array of disciplines and sectors joined the breakout session entitled “NJ Interagency Council on Climate Resilience Listening Session” which provided the audience with a comprehensive understanding of the Interagency Council’s core purpose, authority, policy framework, publications, recent accomplishments and current initiatives. Following a moderated panel session, attendees were invited to offer verbal and written feedback with ideas, comments, or concerns related to the Interagency Council’s work. A summary of feedback gathered from program attendees is provided below. Session slides and handouts can be accessed at: resiliencecouncil.nj.gov.



Feedback Summary (*Themes generated by artificial intelligence and revised by state officials*):

Q1: What would you like to see state agencies do (more of/less of)?

- Expand Collaboration and Public Engagement:
 - Partner with universities for research, seminars, student internships, and grant opportunities
 - Involve graduate students in resilience planning and monitoring.
 - Increase public understanding through reports and invest in tools for information sharing.
 - Add additional agencies to the Interagency Council and interact w/ federal agencies.
- Streamline Processes and Improve Guidelines:
 - Simplify regulatory processes for nature-based and restoration projects.
 - Develop and integrate resilience and restoration guidelines into municipal planning.
 - Enhance interagency coordination and avoid conflicts with federal resource agencies.
 - Phase out asphalt and turf protection.
- Focus on Adaptation and Resilience Actions:
 - Prioritize adaptation over existing land-use rules.
 - Identify climate "hot spots" (e.g., urban heat islands) to help municipalities collaborate.

Q2: How can state agencies best support municipal and local-level climate resilience actions?

- Provide Funding and Technical Support:
 - Funding for flood abatement, parks in overburdened communities, and local planners.
 - Offer technical assistance to municipalities for resilience projects and staff training.
 - Incentivize towns to address climate risks and keep in-house expertise.
- Enhance Capacity Building and Streamline Coordination
 - Establish municipal support teams and training pathways for collaboration between local departments (e.g., stormwater managers, flood plain managers, land use boards).
 - Highlight municipal weaknesses to encourage climate adaptation actions.
 - Coordinate interagency approvals for regional projects.
 - Create better online resources and best practices for holistic adaptation planning.
- Prioritize Green and Resilient Projects:
 - Advocate for parks, open spaces, and green infrastructure in vulnerable communities.
 - Simplify the permitting process for resilience initiatives.
 - Encourage prioritization of resilience action at the local level and long-term planning.

Q3: What is the one action you believe state agencies should prioritize in the next 5 years to strengthen New Jersey's overall resilience to climate change?

- Increase Funding and Resources:
 - Secure funding for habitat restoration, flood mitigation, and resilience education.
 - Use toll contributions for restoration and provide fiscal incentives for adaptation actions.
- Promote Sustainable Infrastructure and Community Engagement:
 - Require resilience standards in transportation projects.
 - Convert brownfield sites into wetlands and restore highway-adjacent habitats.
 - Assess roadbeds as protective ensuring projects meet state elevation requirements.
 - Hold summits and public meetings to update stakeholders and gain buy-in.
- Support Planning:
 - Develop training for staff and contractors on nature-based solutions.
 - Incorporate ecology, wildlife and climate considerations into early project planning.
 - Produce resources, making resilience and adaptation planning accessible to municipalities.