



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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Meeting Minutes

Environmental Justice Advisory Council

April 9, 2025, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm

Microsoft Teams and Conference Call

Council Members

Present: Dr. Galia Shokry, Jeffrey Perlman, Melissa Miles, Dr. Robert Laumbach, Tyrese (“Ty”) Gould-Jacinto, William Casey, Dr. Amy Tuininga, Andy Kricun, Nicole Brown, Chloe Desir, X Braithwaite, Michael Morgan, Jackie Park Albaum, Timi Lindsay

Absent: Krishna Garlic, Dr. Denalerie Johnson-Faniel, Terrance Bankston, Chief Vincent Mann

NJDEP Staff: OEJ Director Kandyce Perry, Myla Ramirez, Christina Gonzalve, Anna Maria O’Conner, Chaneice Martin-Torres, Chloe Landau, Nadia Akbar,

EJAC Meeting – Microsoft Teams

Approval of February 12th Meeting Minutes – Motion made by Melissa Miles and seconded by Andy Kricun.

Run through and discuss the agenda for the public meeting- Melissa Miles

Discussed that the meeting will include a chat feature; however, attendees will only be able to message the host and co-hosts directly. OEJ will designate chat moderators to serve as points of contact, allowing all participants to reach out to them with any questions during the meeting.

Public Zoom Meeting

Opening Remarks, Kandyce Perry Director, Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ)

- **Outlined the meeting's purpose:** to provide context and listen to community concerns, helping to shape the Environmental Justice Advisory Council’s (EJAC) work plan moving forward.
- **Federal transition impact on NJ: Federal vs. State jurisdiction**
Acknowledged recent federal rollbacks on environmental justice and broader environmental protections.

- Emphasized that New Jersey's commitment to EJ remains unchanged under the Murphy administration.
 - NJDEP retains authority to act on many EJ issues through state laws. The DEP will continue to enforce policies, fund overburdened communities and support systemic reforms despite federal shifts.
 - The pre-meeting survey generated over 40 responses with community concerns including: Conservation, Flooding, Waste management, Climate resilience, Environmental education.
 - Explained that some matters fall outside DEP's jurisdiction
 - The DEP commits to transparency and referrals when an issue falls under another agency or level of government
- **Programs & Areas of DEP Responsibility:**
 1. **Fish & Wildlife** – Protects NJ's wildlife resources.
 2. **State Parks, Forests & Historic Sites** – Maintains public recreation areas.
 3. **Contaminated Site Remediation** – Cleans and redevelops polluted lands.
 4. **Water Resource Management** – Ensures clean water.
 5. **Watershed & Land Management** – Oversees land use, wetlands, and flood impacts.
 6. **Air, Energy & Sustainability** – Reduces pollution, promotes green tech.
 7. **Community Investment** – Supports local governments, grant access, and economic revitalization.
 8. **Climate Change Program** – Plans for a clean energy future by 2050.
 9. **GIS/Mapping Program** – Uses data to inform decisions and understand communities.
 - Community members were urged to engage at all levels of government – local, county, state, and federal – to influence environmental decisions early in the process. Asked the community members to stay connected via the OEJ website and newsletter for updates and future engagement opportunities.

Ground rules for public comment session- Melissa Miles

Reminded meeting participants that the focus of the discussion is on environmental issues in overburdened communities that need more attention from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). Emphasized that the topic is broad, therefore, participants were encouraged to speak about relevant issues in their communities. Everyone was asked to adhere to the topic, and it was noted that each speaker would have two minutes to share their comments.

Public Comments from Pre-Registrants- Names called by Moderator and EJAC Chair Melissa Miles

The following comments are acknowledged as received by EJAC and by OEJ:

- Sean Moh~~ean~~^{an}- Resident of Camden



Expressed gratitude to NJDEP leadership and staff for their continued commitment during challenging times. He highlighted a critical environmental justice concern related to the February 21st fire at EMR Metal Recycling in Camden, which was the facility's 6th fire in recent years.

- Anthony Patire-Resident of West Milford

Expressed concerns regarding the long-standing environmental issue tied to a man-made lake in West Milford Township, created under a permit issued by the New Jersey Water Commission in 1929. There has been no resolution to address the pollution from the site, which contributes to the drinking water supply for over 6 million people.

- Alicia Lawrence- Resident of Waterfront South Camden

Spoke about the impact of the February 2025 fire at European Metal Recycling (EMR). She and others were displaced, with some residents trapped in their homes and pets reportedly dying from exposure. Alicia spoke about being diagnosed with carbon monoxide poisoning following the incident. She called for the non-renewal of EMR's leases, on the grounds that it may potentially cause fires in the future and environmental harm.

- Francesa Rodriguez-Resident of Newark

She urged the council to take bold climate and environmental justice action in Newark. She called for a ban on new polluting infrastructure, including the proposed fourth PVSC power plant, and for phasing out existing ones. She proposed upgrades to major transit hubs and support for businesses to adopt low-emission practices. Francesca also advocated for green building mandates, subsidies for homeowners, and the creation of community-owned resources like hydroponic farms and solar hubs.

- Hope Mead-Resident of Camden

Shared her accounts of how she had no choice but to evacuate her home during the February 2025 EMR fire. She described seeing smoke over her house as she evacuated. She along with her 2-year-old child, returned to their home which had a smell of a metallic, smoky odor that required cleaning. She called for stronger, enforceable policies to prevent such incidents and advocated for shutting down EMR until it can prove it can operate safely. She also supports non-renewal of EMR's lease.

- Christian Rodriguez- Resident of Newark

Spoke as a long time Newark resident and environmental justice advocate, focusing on the constant odor pollution in the Ironbound and Jersey City communities. They emphasized that these foul odors are more than a nuisance; they're a daily reminder of environmental injustice disproportionately affecting low-income communities of color. Christian noted that the worst often occur after hours, on weekends, and during holidays.



- Ruth Pierce-Resident of Bridgeton, Cumberland County

Raised concerns about ongoing environmental neglect in her community, including Trash, graffiti, and litter along the Cohansey River near a local food pantry, Unfinished or poorly managed cleanup projects, and a remediated gas station on Broad Street where six unlabeled drums remain, including one that has tipped over.

- Imani Burton- Resident of Bloomfield

Spoke against NJDEP's recent approval of a new backup gas generator at the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission in Newark which is an already overburdened environmental justice community. Imani urged the DEP to redirect resources and focus on renewable energy development, rather than continuing to permit fossil fuel-based infrastructure.

- Yvette Jordon- Resident of Newark

Yvette, an advocate for clean water, shared her personal experience of living with unclean water due to lead contamination. She became involved in the fight for clean water in 2018 when her home was found to have lead levels exceeding federal limits. While acknowledging the progress made by the city and state in addressing the issue, she stressed that more still needs to be done.

- Stephanie Martinez- Resident of Newark

Raised concerns regarding the \$24 billion New Jersey Turnpike expansion project. She expressed that the project violates environmental justice (EJ) laws, as 72% of the residents living along the highway are racial or ethnic minorities. Martinez highlighted the historical pattern of highway expansions displacing communities of color, damaging cultural and environmental areas, and worsening air quality, which exacerbates health problems like asthma in these communities.

- David Steinberg

Recited a poem which focused on environmental action. His message emphasized that big change doesn't always require grand gestures but can start with small, simple steps that communities can take. He expressed that even small efforts from individuals, communities, and local groups can collectively make a difference in creating a greener world.

- La'Shae Harris-Resident of Camden

Spoke about the severe environmental injustices faced by the community, due to the repeated fires at EMR the facility. She highlighted that there has been a lack of regulation, communication, and action from both local government and the corporation responsible.

- Kweli Cambell- Resident of Orange



Discussed the challenges faced in the community, particularly regarding Metacap Park, which is underdeveloped and underutilized. The community had applied for the Green Acres Fund, and as a result, they received funding for renovations. However, during testing for these renovations, historic fill was found, which requires remediation. Kweli expressed that the ongoing issues and concerns may not be addressed in redevelopment plans for Orange, especially with the rapid development happening in the area.

- Tara Stafford Ocansey- Resident of Jersey City

She discussed the challenges faced by her overburdened community, particularly in relation to toxic pollution from nearby industrial areas and high asthma rates in parts of Jersey City, with some areas in the 80th percentile for asthma incidents. Other pressing issues include unsafe streets, traffic concerns, and the lack of green spaces, making it difficult for students to spend time outdoors during the school day.

- Nikki Baker

She highlighted the importance of addressing chemical exposures in areas with dense populations, particularly near homes, schools, clinics, and hospitals. She emphasized that exposure to harmful substances in the air, water, soil, and dust often leads to higher rates of respiratory issues and other health concerns. She called for better community education and information about environmental hazards and the solutions that residents can take to protect themselves and their families. She advocated for clearer communication and more accessible information to help communities understand and address these critical issues.

- Elorm Ocansey

Raised three primary concerns from the community of Whitesboro, New Jersey, located in Cape May County. The issues he addressed relate to air, land, and water, focusing on local challenges impacting residents.

- Daniel Blanco- Student at Rutgers University

Spoke about the environmental challenges in Camden, New Jersey, particularly urban heat, food deserts, and asthma rates. He emphasized the need for green spaces like community gardens and tree planting to combat urban heat and improve air quality. He also called for community-centered climate adaptation, stressing that Camden residents, especially those from overburdened communities, should play a key role in climate planning. He advocates for co-production, where residents collaborate with experts to design solutions based on their lived experiences

- Rachel Davis

Emphasized the human right to safe drinking water. She strongly supported New Jersey's efforts to update the lead and copper rule, advocating for no-cost lead service line replacements in



overburdened communities. She expressed concern for communities suffering disproportionately from lead exposure, and the cost of replacing lead pipes should not fall on those who have been most affected by systemic disinvestment. She stressed that environmental justice requires prioritizing the health of overburdened communities.

- Nancy Fiedler

Expressed her concern regarding air pollution from neighboring states, highlighting the potential impact on New Jersey's overburdened communities. While acknowledging the efforts being made in New Jersey to address environmental pollution, she raised the issue of pollution from states that may not be taking similar actions to reduce emissions. She asked what could be done to protect New Jersey communities from cross-border pollution and prevent them from suffering due to actions in neighboring states.

- Kathleen Spaeth-Resident of Linwood

Spoke about environmental concerns in the overburdened community of Pleasantville, New Jersey, which is located near her residence in Linwood, Atlantic County. She raised two key issues:

1. Trash Train and Rail Transfer Station: There is an application before the Pleasantville Planning Board to build a trash transfer station that would handle construction and debris waste from across Atlantic County and beyond. The facility would receive over 100 trucks daily. Although the Planning Board initially rejected the proposal, the applicant plans to appeal. Spaeth emphasized the economic strain of the community and the environmental risks posed by such a facility.
2. Cannabis Overlay Districts: Spaeth also highlighted concerns over odors from cannabis facilities in Pleasantville and other parts of New Jersey. Although these facilities are legal, there is an enforcement issue regarding odor control. She requested that the Environmental Justice Advisory Council (EJAC) collaborate with the regulatory agencies to strengthen enforcement and regulations around cannabis odor issues, stressing the need for better and more specific solutions.

- Keith Voos- Resident of Middlesex

Raised concerns about incinerators in New Jersey being wrongly classified as clean energy sources despite their significant pollution. He highlighted that these facilities accumulate numerous DEP violations without enforcement or consequences. He asked the Environmental Justice Advisory Council (EJAC) to push the DEP to deny lease renewals for repeat offenders.



- James Shope

Emphasized the need for better local engagement and outreach from the NJDEP. He stated that although state-level progress is being made in heat and health research, this information often fails to reach or resonate with affected communities.

- Syd Chen- Resident of Newark

Urged the Environmental Justice Advisory Council (EJAC) and NJDEP to partner more closely with the Department of Transportation (DOT) and Division of Highway Traffic Safety. He stated that traffic violence, including injuries and deaths from vehicle crashes, is a major environmental justice issue. He highlighted the significant toll traffic violence takes on overburdened communities and stressed the need for collaborative action to reduce these incidents and save lives.

** Individuals who couldn't finish their thoughts within the 2-minute time frame were encouraged to submit their comments via email to environmentaljustice@dep.nj.gov*

E-MAILED COMMENTS

- Robert Rashkes

I attended the Environmental Justice Advisory Council Public Meeting on Wednesday April 9th. I was only able to attend via phone and not by computer and was unable to change the phone number I was calling from to my name. I heard my name called and raised my hand on the phone number I was calling from but was not recognized. I previously submitted public comment to the Council requesting consideration for a public media campaign on the dangers of recreational wood burning. I wanted to bring to the Council's attention that recreational wood burning is especially harmful to the environmental justice community because many lack the financial resources to install air conditioners during the summer and to afford the increasing utility bills necessary to run the air conditioners which allow the smoke to enter homes directly which result in harmful impacts to those most vulnerable.

I also hope that members of the Environmental Justice Advisory Council attend the NJDEP's Clean Air Council in person public meeting on April 23rd as there is commonality to many of the issues both Councils need to address.

I would also like to suggest that if you wish to hold virtual public meetings instead of in person meetings, that you come up with a way to recognize all attendees and not just those attending by computer.

- Cassie Bolinger, Program Coordinator, NJ Future, Trenton

Exposure to lead in soil in overburdened communities requires more attention from NJDEP. Lead is unsafe at any level of exposure.



Due to historic contamination from industry, vehicle emissions, lead paint, and also current pollution from industry, lead in soil is found at unhealthy levels in many NJ communities.

In Trenton, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has proposed listing the East Trenton neighborhood as a Superfund site because of lead in soil contaminated by historic pottery manufacturing. This is just one example of an affected area.

NJDEP can investigate additional areas in NJ for lead in soil contamination, prioritizing environmental justice communities. NJDEP can also support lead in soil remediation.

I would like to connect you with advocates in Trenton and Newark to discuss this further and provide additional information

- David Steinberg, International Writers and Artists Association (IWA)

Sent an attached document titled, “Low- or No-Cost Actions to Support Overburdened Communities,” with recommended actions for the following categories: air quality; pollution & contaminated sites; water quality; green space; climate resilience; and community engagement. He also shared the text of his poem he had recited during the meeting, “Small Steps, Big Change.”

- Christian Rodriguez (they/them), Newark resident and EJ activist.

My main concern is the odors that our community in Newark and parts of Jersey City are experiencing. These are my concerns and recommendations that I hope the NJ DEP can consider.

1. Chronic and Unjust Burden of Odors in Ironbound:

- Residents of the Ironbound and Jersey City are subjected to persistent, foul odors from nearby industrial facilities that severely impact our quality of life. Mainly Darling Ingredients.
- These odors are not just unpleasant, they are a daily reminder of environmental injustice and the disproportionate burden low-income communities of color continue to bear.

2. After-Hours Odor Releases Are a Loophole:

- Many facilities release the worst odors after 5 p.m., on weekends, and during holidays—times when the Newark Department of Health is closed and enforcement is practically non-existent.
- This allows polluters to escape accountability while residents suffer in silence.

3. Inadequate Fines Provide No Real Deterrent:

- Current fines, like \$16,000, are negligible to billion-dollar corporations. For them, it’s simply the cost of doing business.
- Meanwhile, residents are forced to pay higher electric bills because they can’t open windows to cool their homes due to the unbearable stench. We have to run air conditioning even on cool days, which is an added financial burden.

4. Residents Deserve Enforcement, Not Excuses:



- We call for NJDEP to enforce stricter odor standards and increase penalties for after-hours and repeat violations. The fines should scale based on company revenues to make non-compliance a real cost, not just a slap on the wrist.

5. Community-Led Enforcement:

- I propose the creation of a “Community Odor Watch Program”, where trained residents can be deputized as community health inspectors with the authority to document and report violations in real time.
- This program would fill the gap during nights and weekends, empowering residents to be part of the solution while holding polluters accountable.

6. Transparency and Accountability:

- Require facilities to publicly report emissions, especially those that occur outside of business hours.
- Establish a real-time alert system so that community members can be informed and protected when high-odor or toxic releases happen.

7. This is an Environmental Justice Issue:

- Newark is already overburdened with industrial pollution. Continued inaction is not just a public nuisance it’s a denial of our right to breathe clean air and live in dignity.

- Kristina Weise

Is it true that NJDEP spent \$5 million dollars funding artificial turf projects in the state of New Jersey? Last evening, Ridgewood's Village Manager gave this figure. See public timestamp: <https://youtu.be/y3qTK17U9iU?t=10466>.

Is it accurate?

- Carla Giaudrone, Rutgers Camden professor, Voces de la Comunidad (Urban Initiative Fund)

I’m a professor at Rutgers working on a project called Voces de la Comunidad (Urban Initiative Fund). Our mission is to make climate and environmental research accessible, relatable, and relevant—especially for Spanish-speaking and overburdened communities. In Camden, over 40% of the population identifies as Hispanic, and many residents primarily speak Spanish. This makes bilingual resources essential to ensure that everyone has equal access to important information about environmental and health issues.

Bilingual materials also affirm the value of cultural and linguistic diversity, ensuring that residents can participate fully in conversations about their environment, share their own experiences, and advocate for change in their own voices.

Right now, we’re partnering with researchers from the Department of Environmental Sciences on a project that looks at extreme heat in Camden. Dr. Ben Lintner and Dr. James Shope are leading efforts to study how heat is distributed across the city. Their team is installing a network of sensors in different neighborhoods to collect real-time temperature data during the summer.



This data will help reveal which areas are most affected by extreme heat and support public health planning, environmental justice advocacy, and more equitable urban design.

This research becomes much more valuable for the community when it's paired with bilingual information and inclusive outreach. Many Camden residents, particularly those who speak Spanish or have limited access to public meetings and scientific reports, are often left out of these conversations. That's why *Voces de la Comunidad* is working to ensure that materials—like flyers, presentations, and community updates—are available in Spanish as well as English, and that residents have opportunities to share their own experiences and concerns. Listening to the voices of those most affected, and making sure information is accessible in their language, is essential to building trust, raising awareness, and creating meaningful change.

Voces de la Comunidad (<https://www.instagram.com/voces.camdennj/>)

- Anthony E. Patire, Patire Family Patriarch and Sole Member Marshal Hill, LLC.

I thank everyone for there time and initiative to over look some wrongs that have occurred through the years. The Patire Family and myself have 70 years blood, sweat and tears in the ownership of West Milford Lake.

The need for a hydraulic and environmental engineer is essential to assess the Patire's rightfulness and injustice. Please inform in order to ensure the integrity of the statements I wish to present.

Be Well and Thank you very much.

Response

The NJDEP and EJAC thank all participants for taking the time to share their concerns and suggestions. These comments will guide EJAC in their role as advisors to the NJDEP on advancing environmental justice in NJ and the work of EJAC's four working groups: Air, Water, Land and Environmental Education and Communication. Some concerns have been shared with other DEP programs and are being addressed individually.

A number of people raised concerns about the presence of odors in their community. Please see NJDEP's [Odor Fact Sheet](#) with more information about this issue, including how odors are regulated by the department and how specific odor issues can be reported. NJDEP also recently conducted an Odors 101 community training, a recording of which will be posted on [OEJ's EJ Seminar Series](#) webpage.

A number of residents of Camden talked about the February 21st fire at the EMR Metal Recycling facility in Camden and the history of fires at the facility. DEP's leadership has been following the situation and acknowledges the frustration with the status quo. Part of the reason why the status quo has been sustained is because of legal and regulatory gaps which do not give DEP authority to regulate scrap facilities like other similar industries such as recycling and solid



waste. The DEP Commissioner has talked to legislators about closing those gaps and DEP will be a partner to the legislature on this issue. Concerned residents are encouraged to contact their legislators, particularly Assemblyman Moen who has introduced legislation on this topic.

A question was e-mailed about NJDEP funding projects that include artificial turf use. DEP's Green Acres program continues to prioritize the installation of natural turf over synthetic turf but understands that some applicants believe synthetic turf may best meet their community's needs. Green Acres periodically re-evaluates the safety and environmental impact of synthetic turf fields, as more research is done on their benefits and risks.

The DEP's Division of Science and Research has conducted several reviews of existing research on Green Acres' behalf, which can be found at <https://dep.nj.gov/dsr/environmental-health/>. Based on their findings, Green Acres will continue to fund the construction of synthetic turf fields, but applicants are required to conduct their own due diligence and share it with the public. By reviewing the available information and weighing the potential benefits and risks, applicants can make an informed decision for their communities. If applicants choose to install an artificial turf field, the information gathered through the due diligence process may help limit the risks associated with this type of recreation facility.

Applicants requesting Green Acres funding for a synthetic turf field must complete a Synthetic Turf Field Addendum to the Environmental Impact Assessment and explain the reasons they are choosing synthetic over natural turf. Applicants also must review their due diligence with the public, including the findings and reasons for choosing synthetic turf over natural turf. We encourage residents to participate in the public engagement process that is required for all Green Acres projects by providing feedback to their elected local government representatives.

