

Monmouth County Environmental Justice Community Engagement Session

Where: Long Branch Municipal Building

When: Thursday, November 10th @6:00pm-8:00pm

Roughly 19 participants in-person, meeting also streamed online via Zoom

Spanish and Portuguese virtual interpretation provided

Summary: NJDEP Commissioner Shawn LaTourette along with Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ) Director Kandyce Perry, and EPA Region 2 Senior Advisor for Equity and Chief of Staff Olivia Glenn, led a community engagement session with residents of Monmouth County to discuss environmental justice in Monmouth County. Opening remarks were also provided by Alex Silagi the Environmental Justice Coordinator within the [NJ District of the U.S. Attorney General's Office](#).

Question and Answer with Community:

1. Question about superfund sites – progression, mitigation responses. Specifically mentions visible oil contamination of the Navesink River.

Commissioner LaTourette: Requested more information about the oil slick in the Navesink River.

Attendee: A former gas station on Cooper's Bridge, Highway 35 – Southbound side in Red Bank. The area is also popular for fishing, which is concerning given the visible oil slick on the water.

Commissioner LaTourette: With any sort of pollution, it's important that folks utilize the [WarnNJDEP app](#) to report environmental injustices. This app allows you to take a picture and pinpoint the exact location in concern, which will then be logged and investigated. If this is something that occurs repeatedly, sharing this information with DEP can help enforcement staff identify the route cause. With respect to superfund sites, there's a difference between superfund sites, which are federally listed, and other remediation sites. Oftentimes we'll hear that NJ has the most superfund sites in the country, which can sound concerning. However, we have this many superfund sites because they are identified, and ultimately remediated properly. The cleanup process can sometimes take decades, which is why the number of superfund sites doesn't rapidly decrease. There are far more local sites that are under the [Site Remediation](#) umbrella of the DEP and the information shared about the Navesink will assist in identification.

Earlier this evening we toured an idle contaminated site, and while there is a legal obligation for the responsible party to remediate those sites, it sometimes takes the government a bit to catch up to the issue. Therefore, it's so important for the community to communicate with the government to share these injustices.

EPA Region 2 Sr. Advisor for Equity/ COS Glenn: With regards to the [federal superfund program](#) under EPA administration, if the information mentioned previously coincides with a listed superfund site, EPA will provide the most up-to-date information and point of contact for the remediation project.

2. Long Branch resident expresses concern about leaf and brush accumulation on the sides of streets, which impedes safe biking. Many residents utilize biking as a mode of transportation and

there needs to be a better leaf/brush management process to account for bicyclists. The brown bag system is not in place in Long Branch and instead a piece of machinery circulates around the area every few weeks to collect the piles.

Commissioner LaTourette: While this is not an issue that typically is expressed to the DEP, perhaps this is an issue to be shared with the Department of Transportation (DOT). DOT implements programs that relate to biker safety and complete streets. We will investigate this further.

OEJ Director Perry: There's the [Urban Community Forestry](#) Management Plans – in the guidance the DEP offers for urban communities to create those forestry management plans, perhaps there's something included for leaf management.

The attendee mentioned that all yard waste is piled on the streets in these municipalities and sometimes contributed by landscaping companies. Biking is a low cost and zero emission mode of transportation, and it has to be accounted for in these leaf management practices.

3. Attendee expressed gratitude for EJ Community Engagement Sessions. The term “environmental justice” has become synonymous with Black and Brown communities, which could prevent the unity against these injustices. Has the DEP and EPA thought about the messaging around “environmental justice”?

Commissioner LaTourette: The answer is that there isn't a good answer. We have a tendency to look at issues in a binary way, and that there's always one choice out of the two. There's an inclination that the term falls into that binary category. It is part of a broader societal challenge to not fall into the two channel approach

EPA Region 2 Sr. Advisor for Equity/ COS Glenn: Agrees with the Commissioner and while EPA doesn't have all the answers, there are diligent strides to incorporate all nuances of environmental justice, including race, low income, and limited English proficiency, disproportionate impacts, and lack of environmental benefits. This past September, Administrator Regan established the national [Office of Environmental Justice and Civil Rights](#) with elevated priority. There are 10 EPA regions, and we can learn from one another, including in the merging of EJ and civil rights.

Attendee noted the limited representation in environmental justice and the messaging needs to include more low-income white individuals to connect with environmental injustice occurrences. Need to expand the optics of environmental justice to promote greater participation.

OEJ Director Perry: The messaging piece is important however, if we're building in protections for our most vulnerable communities, we are inherently making life better for all. One doesn't need to happen before the other – this can exist as two parallels where we work to cast a wider net and implement policies that assist those most impacted. We can continue to work with people who aren't bought in by the messaging and not be precluded to help those that need it the most.

Commissioner LaTourette: There can be an inclination that the laws that we have to maintain the environment benefit everyone equally, but the environmental regulatory world is learning that

the implementation resulted in inequities. If we work to improve those conditions in disproportionately impacted communities, we raise the standards for everyone. EJ doesn't mean transferring polluters from one area to another, it means to have cleaner facilities in either location. The improved technology and awareness to conquer those pollutants will be utilized in communities of need first.

4. Attendee talks about the history of contaminated site (Old Jerry Morgan Park and Trautmans Creek) in Long Branch, which was formerly a coal processing plant. He also emphasizes the importance of amending EJ messaging to move away from a Black and Brown issue and engaging other populations, especially in the wake of climate change.

Commissioner LaTourette: Thank you for sharing your story with everyone here today.

5. Long Branch resident expresses concern about Jackson Woods Park. There is contaminated water that runs through the park and into the Manahasset Creek. Last winter the resident egret passed away and was found in the oil slick in the park. The water was tested, and the oxygen levels were extremely low, which is also reflected in the lack of wildlife in the area. Additionally, nearby sewers are uncovered and often filled with garbage, along with other areas in the park. There is also a flooding issue which further carries contamination.

Commissioner LaTourette: Folks can contact NJDEP any time at 1-877-WARN-DEP (1-877-927-6337) or through the [non-emergency WARN NJDEP app](#) to report any issues in real time.

Attendee notes that the issue has been brought to the attention of Clean Ocean Action, the City of Long Branch, and is hoping someone can provide support.

6. One of the key components of environmental justice is equitable access, including with access of information. Virtual meetings should continue going forward.

Commissioner LaTourette: Thank you and feel free to provide additional information to OEJ Director Kandyce Perry.

7. Agrees that access is an important component of environmental justice and specifies safe and equitable access to parks, trails, and recreation spaces.

Commissioner LaTourette: Pans to EPA Region 2 Sr. Advisor for Equity/ Chief of Staff Olivia Glenn, who has extensive experience in equitable outdoor recreation. Adds that in addition to DEP's mission of flooding and pollution control, we oversee the state park system and invest in local park systems as well. There are a lot of investment needs with parks across the state and the greater community engagement to elevate the needs of recreational spaces, the more aware DEP will be of ways to support. There's an initiative through DEP called [Outside Together](#), which builds the statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation plan that will establish funding priorities in state park and local/ county parks.

EPA Region 2 Sr. Advisor for Equity/ COS Glenn: Thank you for recognizing the work that DEP and EPA are doing together. Over the summer, EPA hosted a national brownfields conference and one

of the awards received was for a project in Camden, where a landfill was transformed into a waterfront park, becoming the largest park in the city of Camden. As the Commissioner stated, the work is more than flooding and pollution control, our agencies ensure equitable access for people to enjoy the spaces NJ has to offer, and any opportunity to utilize funding to achieve that equity is extremely valuable.

8. Long Branch resident mentions program that covers half the purchase cost of electric garbage trucks. While the program is voluntary, it would be helpful for DEP to mandate the shift to electric trucks once it comes time to replace the vehicles. Often the people who work on the trucks are Black men who are being exposed to diesel exhaust, which is a cancer-causing agent. Perhaps money from [RGGI](#) funds can be required to go towards these replacements.

Commissioner LaTourette: There is no question that diesel exhaust is dangerous. There are a few pieces of regulations that DEP utilize to hasten turnover of heavy duty and medium duty vehicles. While the turnover will take some time, it's important to let your local government know that there is money available. With respect to mandatory turnover, this is something for a legislative body to consider, but in the meantime [DEP will certainly continue to make those resources available](#).

9. Online attendee thanks the DEP and EPA for making the session accessible for those who are unable to attend in person. She recently worked in a volunteer event to demonstrate oil pollution in the Navesink River. While many of the attendees of the event understood the importance of protection and preservation, there is still a persistent problem of pet waste which ultimately pollutes the river. What methods of communication and consistency of that messaging will DEP and EPA implement?

Commissioner LaTourette: Questions like this provide reflection on the proverb of "leaving the space better than it was found". In many cases, environmental issues result from many individual acts. Absolutely there are large-scale pollution sources, but often these issues result stem from diffuse situations. Every act matters and can change outcomes – how this is communicated can be through forums such as these [EJ Community Engagement Sessions](#) and through volunteer organizations.

EPA Region 2 Sr. Advisor for Equity/ COS Glenn: A few weeks prior, EPA celebrated the 50th anniversary of the [Clean Water Act with an event in Camden, NJ](#). During the event, attendees reflected on progress since the enactment. The challenges have changed from 50 years ago, but the path going forward still is crucial on community engagement and support. The state and federal governments can't accomplish initiatives without these community partnerships.

10. Long Branch resident has extensive experience with DEP. He expresses concerns about relationship between DEP, Long Branch municipality, and the environmental commission. An application for redevelopment allegedly violated the Coastal Area Facility Review Act. The area is located between Morris Avenue and North Bath Avenue (290 Ocean Ave). Resident expressed these concerns to city council and the planning board. The matter will be brought to the U.S. Attorney General's office.

Commissioner LaTourette: We will look into this matter further. Thank you for sharing.

11. Freehold Borough resident expressed concern about illegal dumping and homelessness on Conrail railroad property. Freight trains infrequently use the rails, and the surrounding property is inundated with brush. Is there any way to require the municipality/Conrail to maintain this property? Additionally, another property in Freehold that experiences frequent flooding and the building itself is a health hazard with mold and overflowing garbage. Is there something DEP can do to assist? Expresses frustration over municipal government inaction.

Commissioner LaTourette: We can reach out to the Borough to inform them of DEP's [illegal dumping programs](#) and trainings. Through available resources, such as camera installation and coordination with the county prosecutor's office, DEP can train the municipality/county in solid waste enforcement. With respect to the building, the [Department of Community Affairs](#) might be an applicable resource, as they work with local governments to perform certain inspections.

12. Is there a timeline for the [EJ Rule proposal](#) to be adopted?

Commissioner LaTourette: We are in the process of going through and preparing responses to submitted comments, but DEP is still on track to adopt at the turn of the year.

Closing remarks from the panel.

NJDEP Follow-Up Action Items:

- Identify DEP programs with jurisdiction over Navesink River to assist with water quality concerns
- Identify the correct Department to assist in municipal leaf management practices
- Field Jackson Woods Park concerns to appropriate DEP programs
- DEP will look into attendee's concern at 290 Ocean Ave
- Connect Freehold Borough resident with the Department of Community Affairs and identify potential illegal dumping enforcement actions