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SHAWN M. LATOURETTE
Commissioner

Agenda

Environmental Justice Advisory Council

February 12, 2025, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm
Microsoft Teams and Conference Call

Council Members

Present:

Absent:

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

Approval of December 13th Meeting Minutes – Motion made by Melissa Miles and seconded by Jackie. All approve, no opposed.

Brief on the Federal Transition & EJ Initiatives Efforts to Better Regulate Scrap Facilities- DEP Commissioner Shawn LaTourette

- The Commissioner emphasized that, while elections and political changes have an impact, the work done by professionals at DEP is larger than the political landscape. The mission of environmental justice and providing services to the public is an enduring one that transcends political cycles.
- The Commissioner acknowledged that there are gaps and loopholes in existing solid waste management laws, particularly regarding the regulation of scrap metal facilities. These facilities have not been regulated as thoroughly as other waste facilities, potentially leading to negative environmental impacts.
- Question by Jeffery Perlman: Is transportation funded fairly and what funding is being withheld?
 - Response Commissioner LaTourette: The Department of Environmental Protection is not alone in addressing the potential impact of federal funding

freezes or withdrawals. Instead, all state agencies in New Jersey are working together in a coordinated way to respond to these challenges.

- Question by Andy Kricun: , Are there other things that you know that can protect against federal tax or change administration?
 - Response by Commissioner LaTourette: There will be an inventory of how far the team has come and the remaining work that still needs to be done. This inventory will serve as a detailed guide to understanding both accomplishments and the challenges ahead.
- Question by X Braithwaite: I understand this is like a close committee, but to what extent can we share like the updates that we're being given in this, I guess space?

So like I said, almost all the communities I work with are impacted and they're asking questions about how we can still build power still. So to what extent can we use the knowledge that we gain here?

To reach the communities that we serve and just like as general.

Outreach to, you know, empower communities that we don't serve with the knowledge that we gain here.

 - Response by Commissioner LaTourette: I think that you know, there are discussions within this group that are confidential. When they are, we can make sure we're all making that clear to one another. But by and large, what we all learn here is twofold. It helps the DEP and it's in its work to administer its programs. It's also intended to help you. It communicates with your communities and partners across the state about these issues, you are free to share anything that I have said by all means. So you know if there is a question about what? Points of information that you can share, thoughts that you might want to solicit from Kandyce and team to be responsive to the community. That is what we are here for.

Continuation of Environmental Justice in New Jersey- Kandyce Perry

Kandyce confirmed that the *Justice 40* policy, which was created during the Biden administration, has been repealed at the federal level. However, while the policy itself no longer exists, the underlying intent and spirit of the policy will continue to guide the work in New Jersey. The state is revising its internal policy to remove references to *Justice 40*, given that it no longer exists as a federal concept. The focus will remain on directing 40% of applicable funding to New Jersey's adversely impacted, overburdened communities, without the federal designation of "disadvantaged communities."

Discussion on Public Meetings Proposal- Myla

- The original plan was to hold open meetings in April and October where the public could share their thoughts, but logistics and time constraints have delayed this conversation. The goal is to create a space for the public to participate and voice their concerns about the operations and activities of the Environmental Justice Advisory Council (EJAC) and the Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ).
- How to best receive and respond to public comments
 - Should the meetings be structured so that members of the public can give testimony or comments without an immediate response from the Council, and the feedback is then used to inform future work plans? This would mean that EJAC members would not respond directly in real-time but rather use the testimony to guide decisions after the meeting.

- Alternatively, should there be a direct interaction, where EJAC members or OEJ respond to public comments either via email, in meeting minutes, or even during the meeting itself?
- Myla suggested having some way to screen the comments or questions in advance, such as through a survey or allowing people to submit their concerns before the meeting. This would allow the Council and OEJ to either address the questions during the meeting or present them as written comments, with a choice of calling individuals to speak or reading their comments aloud.

Youth Involvement & Representation- Melisssa Miles

Melissa mentioned an email she received from a young person who expressed interest in working with the EJAC. However, there are still some unanswered questions about the individual's age and their specific interests in joining the Council. Individuals must be over 18 to participate in the EJAC. The Council currently does not have a formalized program for youth or student participation. If someone over 18 is interested, they can apply directly when positions become available. While there has been informal participation from youth groups in the past, there is no structured pathway or youth development program in place to guide their involvement or prepare them for leadership roles like being a member of the EJAC.

The executive committee and E-board were asked to suggest or make comments on how to better integrate youth into the work of the EJAC. They suggest the importance of thinking about pathways for young people to prepare for leadership roles, specifically on the EJAC.

Suggestion by Bill: STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) program being targeted for the summer, which will serve as an introduction to the type of work the EJAC does. This program is intended to engage young people, particularly those between the ages of 16 and 24, and give them a hands-on, informative introduction to environmental justice and related fields.

Suggestion by Timi Lindsey: Include opportunities for youth to explore different parts of the state, allowing them to see first-hand the environmental challenges and solutions that are being implemented. This could involve field trips, community forums, or hands-on activities that allow young people to interact with environmental justice experts and advocates.

Comment by Ty: In rural areas, transportation is a major obstacle for including youth in environmental justice and STEM initiatives. Specifically, in places like Salem and Cumberland County, distances are large (up to 20 miles), and many families don't have the resources to transport their children to events or activities. This creates a clear challenge in engaging these youth, as they can't easily access opportunities outside their immediate area.

Reflections, Resources, & Information Sharing

Kandyce expressed she is open to sharing valuable information, like newsletters and email updates, specifically with the Council to ensure they stay informed. However, she wouldn't send mass emails to the public directly, keeping communications more targeted to groups like this Council. Kandyce invited the group to share any ideas or reflections, either now or later, on how OEJ can better reach and serve environmental justice communities. She also encourages the Council members to reach out to DEP staff for further discussion.

Adjourn 11:54am.