

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE SUBCOMMITTEE

Draft Meeting Summary: July 10, 2024

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>EJ Subcommittee Members in Attendance: Hon. Dave Snyder, Co-Chair Hon. Kristin Mink, Co-Chair Hannah Ashenafi, DOEE Hon. Tom Dernoga, Prince George's County Danielle Sims, DEQ Noble Smith, MDE William Washburn, ACPAC Vice Chair Elder Dr. Jacqueline Norris</p> <p>Additional Attendees: Tauhirah Abdul-Matin, AECOM Khrystle Bullock, AECOM Kathryn Hastings, MDE Joseph Jakuta, DOEE Ziwei Liu, Equitable Cities Xavier Lofton, Equitable Cities Leila Mekias, AECOM Valeria Menendez, Equitable Cities</p> | <p>COG Staff: Alissa Boggs, COG DEP Leah Boggs, COG DEP Robert Christopher, COG DEP Jen Desimone, COG DEP Jeff King, COG DEP Jane Posey, COG DTP</p> |
|--|---|

1. WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS, APPROVAL OF MEETING SUMMARY, AND PUBLIC COMMENT

Kristin Mink, Co-Chair

Co-chair Mink called the meeting to order, introductions were given, prior meeting summary was approved, and public comment given.

Public Comment Summary

The speaker emphasized the importance of stakeholder engagement in addressing environmental justice (EJ) issues, particularly air quality. They noted the significant volume of feedback received during the May 22 MWAQC meeting, highlighting dozens of comments from various communities, universities, advocacy groups, and national experts.

Key Points from Public Feedback:

1. **Urgency and Seriousness:** Researchers highlighted the high-risk nature of air quality issues, stressing the need for quick action.
2. **Action-Oriented Plans:** EJ communities and advocates emphasized the need for immediate emission reductions, deadlines, and progress benchmarks. They opposed any non-substantive guides or toolkits.

3. **Utilizing Existing Programs:** Suggestions were made to use existing control programs in MWAC SIP and state SIP to address diesel emissions, dust, and stationary sources, especially in EJ areas.
4. **Success Stories:** The Cheverly area was cited as a success, with existing programs reducing emissions and empowering communities. A briefing from MDE on this plan was recommended.
5. **Community-Based Monitoring Networks:** Advocated for COG to assist communities in setting up air monitoring networks, leveraging EPA funds and university assistance.

Recommendations:

- Avoid reinventing the wheel; build on existing knowledge and experience.
- Ensure the action plan is highly focused on air quality.
- Expedite the process to develop and implement the action plan, as there has been a significant delay since the unanimous vote in May 2023.

The speaker offered their assistance and emphasized the critical nature of the issue, urging the committee to capitalize on the region's existing expertise and success stories.

2. STATUS UPDATE ON EJ SUBCOMMITTEE WORK ACTIVITIES

Jeff King, COG Staff

Jeff King provided updates on the following:

1. **EJ Subcommittee Activities:**
 - Regular meetings are scheduled for the 4th Wednesday of each month, with an additional meeting in July.
 - Discussions on rescheduling the September and November meetings due to conflicts.
2. **Public Comment Technology:**
 - Successful implementation of public comment technology.
 - Suggestions for better notice and alternative timings for public feedback.
3. **Engagement Strategy:**
 - AECOM and Equitable Cities have developed a proposed engagement strategy, which is the main focus of today's meeting.
 - A public engagement session is planned for the ACPAC meeting on July 15.
4. **Tracking Public Comments:**
 - Developing a method to track and document public comments, considering the use of AI.
5. **Document Sharing:**
 - Working on the best ways to share documents and finalizing a monitoring primer.
6. **Master List and RACM List:**
 - Creating a master list to document and prioritize ideas.
 - Revisiting the RACM list to apply EJ screening criteria.
7. **EJ Toolkit:**
 - Developing an EJ toolkit focused on best practices for community engagement.

Next Steps:

- Input needed on rescheduling meetings.
- Refining engagement strategies.
- Preparing for the public engagement session.

Additional Discussion:

A concern was raised about missing public comments. Jeff King acknowledged the issue, suggesting it might have been due to an email error. Efforts will be made to recover and include these comments. Further discussions on the format and summaries will be held after the AECOM presentation to incorporate their input effectively.

3. COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY PRESENTATION

AECOM Staff

Tahira Abdul-Matin, with Xavier from Equitable Cities, presented a draft stakeholder engagement strategy for the Environmental Justice (EJ) subcommittee. The strategy aims to gather feedback for ongoing improvements.

Key Points:

- 1. Strategy Overview:**
 - Two-part approach: stakeholder engagement and action plan development.
 - Use the EJ screen tool to identify underserved communities based on air quality and socioeconomic indicators.
- 2. Phase One - Pre-Action Plan:**
 - Engagement in four clusters: Prince George's County and DC, Fairfax and Arlington Counties, Montgomery County, and Prince William County and Manassas Park.
 - A metro-wide public meeting will also be held.
- 3. Phase Two - Post-Action Plan:**
 - Same locations to ensure consistency and build trust.
 - Focus on feedback for the draft action plan.
- 4. Implementation Steps:**
 - Partner with local organizations for outreach.
 - Develop outreach materials and provide virtual access for those without reliable internet.
- 5. Public Engagement Strategy:**
 - Use community partners, social media, and email for broader outreach.
 - Virtual listening sessions with technical support and language accessibility.
- 6. Challenges and Solutions:**
 - Emphasis on clear communication of data, shifting from percentiles to absolute numbers.
- 7. Discussion and Feedback:**
 - Need for both virtual and in-person engagement to reach more people.
 - Leverage existing community meetings and spaces like libraries.
 - Focus on including marginalized communities.
- 8. Next Steps:**
 - Refine the engagement strategy based on feedback.
 - Inform and involve all relevant stakeholders, including local officials and community groups.

Conclusion: The presentation highlighted the need for a comprehensive and inclusive engagement strategy to support the EJ subcommittee's work. Feedback will be used to improve the plan and ensure effective community participation.

4. FEEDBACK FROM THE PUBLIC ON EJ ACTION PLAN DEVELOPMENT: ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Kristin Mink, Co-Chair

Overview: Public feedback regarding the development of the EJ action plan was facilitated by COG staff.

Key Concerns:

1. **Generic Approach:**
 - The strategy appears generic and has likely been presented in other contexts.
 - It doesn't align with MWAQC's specific request for a focus on air quality and environmental justice.
2. **Existing Work Overlooked:**
 - Much of the work, such as EJ screen and listening sessions, has already been completed in many areas.
 - Suggested the contractor is starting from scratch instead of building on existing efforts.
3. **Misleading Public Expectations:**
 - Current plan risks misleading the public to think issues beyond air quality, such as broadband and public health, will be addressed.
 - Emphasized the need for a focused approach on air pollution and environmental justice.
4. **Recommendation for Expert Briefing:**
 - Proposed a briefing for the contractor by local experts, including Bill Washburn, to provide context on existing work.
 - Suggested MDE should brief on the ongoing successful efforts in areas like Cheverly.
5. **Resource Efficiency:**
 - Stressed the importance of using limited resources efficiently by leveraging existing data and previous community engagements.

Additional Comments:

- **Support for Specific Focus:**
 - Other experts, like Elder Dr. Norris, expressed support for the current plan's broader approach.
 - Emphasized the importance of including diverse community voices and leveraging existing community relationships.

Next Steps:

- **Detailed Plan Development:**
 - Move forward with the high-level approach but include detailed plans for community group engagement and specific outreach methods.
 - Incorporate feedback from experts and existing public comments.

Conclusion: The public feedback highlighted a need for the engagement strategy to be more focused on air quality and to build on existing efforts. Moving forward, detailed planning and incorporation of expert input will be crucial for effective community engagement. It was proposed and accepted that the next meeting of the EJ Subcommittee would have a continued focus on the details of the engagement strategy.

5. ADJOURNMENT

Kristin Mink, Co-Chair

The meeting was adjourned.

All meeting materials including speaker presentations can be found on the MWCOG website by clicking the link below –

<https://www.mwcog.org/events/2024/7/10/ej-subcommittee/>

The next EJ Subcommittee meeting is July 24, 2024.

Reasonable accommodations are provided upon request, including alternative formats of meeting materials. For more information, visit: www.mwcog.org/accommodations or call (202) 962-3300 or (202) 962-3213 (TDD)