



Meeting Minutes

Thursday February 9, 2023

2:00 PM –6:00 PM

Green Square Training Room

217 West Jones St, Raleigh NC

At 3:00pm, Chair Johnson called the meeting to order and read the ethics statement.

Board Members Present:

William Barber, III

Veronica Carter

Randee Haven-O'Donnell

Chairman Dr. Jim Johnson

Vice Chair Marian Johnson-Thompson

Carolina Fonseca Jimenez

Dr. Danelle Lobdell

Marilynn Marsh-Robinson

Naeema Muhammad (virtual)

Elke Weil (virtual)

Sherri White-Williamson

La'Meshia Whittington

Board Members Absent:

Jeff Anstead

Dr. Deepak Kumar

Rev. Rodney Sadler Jr.

Carlos Velazquez

New Business

I. Secretary Elizabeth Biser, Welcoming Remarks

Secretary Biser reflected on the work of the Environmental Justice and Equity Board in the light of Black History Month. She presented updates from the special meeting on wood pellets: the permit issued included pollution control equipment and monitoring conditions and a meeting was held with the company to address community concerns. Secretary Biser introduced the Flood Resiliency Plan and emphasized the need for voices from residents in high flood risk communities. She also encouraged counties to apply for water infrastructure funding opening at the end of the month for projects to replace lead service lines throughout the state. She also encouraged attendees to apply to grants from the Inflation Reduction Act since the EPA just announced \$100 million available for Environmental Justice grants.

II. Elizabeth Christenson, NC DEQ; Hope Morgan, AECOM, Outreach & Engagement Lead: "North Carolina Flood Resiliency Blueprint"

Ms. Christenson described the goal of the Flood Resiliency blueprint to reduce flooding across NC, flooding impacts, and increase flood resiliency. Ms. Morgan presented on the specifics of coordinating stakeholder engagement in historically marginalized communities and Tribal experts in flood-prone basins.

Ms. Johnson-Thompson commented that it would be of value to reach out to EJ organizations in NC in the planning phase to involve the community.

Veronica Carter asked why the Neuse River Basin is being targeted first. She commented on the common flooding in the Cape Fear Basin, where she lives.

Marc Recktenwald, Division of Mitigation Services Director, DEQ, explained that the Neuse River Basin was chosen based on data availability and coordination with the pilot flood mitigation program in Goldsboro.

Ms. Carter noted that Southeastern North Carolina takes on the brunt of impacts from hurricane season and expressed concern that the conditions to mitigate flooding in Goldsboro might not be an accurate model for the frequent and seasonal flooding of the Cape Fear River Basin.

Ms. Morgan clarified that the model in the Neuse River will not be the same application for all basins, and outreach will be unique to each basin and community.

Dr. Danelle Lobdell requested the overall project timeline and asks which basin will be next.

Ms. Christenson responded that the goal for this upcoming year is getting statewide engagement. For 2024, the goal will be to apply the support tool to all basins in NC to allow priority to be applied for mitigation strategies.

Ms. Naeema Muhammed agreed with Ms. Carter and spoke about her involvement in recovery efforts for Hurricane Florence. She recommended someone from the Florence Recovery Coalition as a potential advisor.

Ms. Carter added that recovery efforts from Hurricane Matthew are still ongoing because they were hit with two major storms before recovery could be completed.

Ms. La'Meshia Whittington asked about criteria for identifying EJ communities and historically marginalized communities and wanted to know about overlapping areas for these criteria.

Ms. Christenson explained DEQ's system to identify potentially underserved communities, and the White House's CEJST tool. Even if communities don't consider themselves EJ communities, there is an ongoing look into what metrics should be used to prioritize risk management.

Ms. White-Williamson asked if any Environmental Justice communities have been identified in the Neuse River Basin yet.

Ms. Christenson responded that research had been performed on the area, but no outreach had been initiated.

Mr. William Barber III asked what metrics are being used to measure effectiveness of outreach strategies.

Ms. Christenson responded that they identify sensitive receptors in communities to improve outreach. There were not any markers to measure response at the time.

Mr. Barber III agreed that developing a way to make sure outreach is effective would be beneficial. He also asked about the relationship with AECOM and if there is room for compensation for community members that help with the program to prevent extractive techniques.

Ms. Christenson responded that they are unable to disclose details of compensation for AECOM at this time.

Ms. Haven-O'Donnell recommended returning to previously involved community members. She asked about the process for identifying those community members.

Ms. Morgan responded that they went through existing plans and identified members active in those plans. This list was edited based on people who live in flood-prone areas, which has developed a list of about 1200 people who are experienced in flood response. This list will grow as more people demonstrate interest for involvement.

Ms. Fonesca Jimenez reminded the board about a presentation from farmworkers at the previous meeting describing their experiences with flooding and asks the board to keep farmers in mind for flood resiliency programs.

Ms. Whittington asked how unincorporated territories are being involved.

Ms. Morgan responded that outreach to unincorporated territories has been difficult without officials, but they have been trying to reach out individually.

Ms. Carter recommended finding local leaders and looking for places of employment to see how their access is impacted. There are often backroads not on maps.

Chairman Johnson recognized that this is an important and sensitive topic for the members of the board and suggests creating a sub-committee for further involvement on this project. Ms. Whittington is

named chair of the sub-committee with additional members Veronica Carter, William Barber III, and Naeema Muhammad.

III. Carol Caldwell, Reverend Keith Graham, Michelle Lovejoy, Andy Shoenig, and Katheryn Gaasch; *NC Inclusive Disaster Recovery Network Research Team: "Equitable Community Engagement for Effective Mitigation Planning."*

Presented on the inequalities of disaster impacts and their process of evaluating the effectiveness of community outreach. They will be working with the Flood Resiliency Blueprint going forward.

IV. David Lambert, *DEQ*; Ashley Sherrill Cagle, *Wake County Economic Development*; Timothy Love, *Buncombe County*; Martie Butler, *Richmond County*: County Level Economic Developers Panel Discussion

Each speaker responded to 1) ways that their respective counties engage communities in economic development processes and 2) what processes counties use to incorporate public comment on plans.

Mr. Barber III asked Mr. Love how to prioritize BIPOC networks for people that are economically minded and asks if accelerated hiring programs are present for entrepreneurs.

Mr. Love responded that small-business programs give access to loan funds without collateral in place. He added that public engagement was not enough in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and they had to be more willing to meet people where they are.

Ms. White-Williamson commented that most environmental justice communities are created when bad industries are placed in communities and critiques that prevention methods were not addressed the discussion.

Ms. Butler replied that Richmond County does not have tools to distinguish good and bad industries and that they rely on DEQ for that identification.

Ms. White-Williamson expressed disappointment because there is no relief provided to people living in those communities.

Ms. Carter added that rural areas in Brunswick County suffer remnants of climate injustice from a mindset of "any job is a good job". She explains that state laws and legislature do not have the power to manage industries and argues that there needs to be collaboration between state, county, and municipal officials to prevent ecological damage.

Ms. Johnson-Thompson asked if there are community members reporting pollution problems to county economic developers.

Panel members offer no audible response [heads shake no].

Ms. Whittington added that in rural areas there is a culture of not discussing health impacts because they prioritize their jobs and providing for their families. Noting that there is an influx of brown and black communities in rural areas, she asked what plans are in place to recruit jobs for these populations being pushed out of urban areas from new industry.

Ms. Cagle responded that there seemed to be a misunderstanding of what the responsibilities of economic developers are. She described her county's plan for "Better Wake" to dismantle systemic racism, and they aim to put good paying jobs in less populated areas of the county.

Ms. Whittington underscored the Board's passion.

Mr. Lambert underscored that this is a conversation and need to continue having these dialogues.

V. Peter Ledford, Governor Cooper's Office: Executive Order 246 Update

Mr. Ledford reviewed sections of Executive Order 264 that focus on Environmental Justice. He expressed the desire to have conversations with communities resulting from the Executive Order in March. He requested feedback on what communities to go to.

VI. Shadi Eskaf, DEQ, Department of Water Infrastructure: "Update on BIL Funding for Lead Service Line Replacements"

Mr. Eskaf gave an overview of lead service line replacement updates, which included applying for funding, identifying projects, assisting small systems with identifying service lines, and creating a Priority Rating System.

VII. Discussion

Chairman Johnson opened the Board to discussion on hosting a cumulative impact special session in March and holding the next quarterly meeting in Sampson County.

At 5:07pm, Chairman Johnson adjourned the meeting.

Public comments begin at 2:03:35 on the recorded meeting, accessible at: [Secretary's Environmental Justice and Equity Advisory Board Meeting 02/09/2023](#)