



Meeting Minutes

Thursday May 19, 2022

At 3:06pm, Chairman Dr. Jim Johnson called the meeting to order, read the ethics statement.

Board members present:

Chairman Dr. Jim Johnson

Vice-Chair Dr. Marian Johnson-Thompson --
(online)

Jeff Anstead -- (online) at 3:14pm

Veronica Carter -- (online) at 3:49pm

Carolina Fonseca Jimenez

Randee Haven-O'Donnell -- (online) at 4:00pm

Dr. Deepak Kumar

Dr. Danelle Lobdell

Marilynn Marsh-Robinson -- (online)

Sherri White-Williamson

La' Meshia Whittington -- (online) at 3:30pm

Board members absent:

William Barber, III

Naeema Muhammad

Rev. Dr. Rodney Sadler Jr.

Carlos Velasquez

Elke Weil

New Business:

1. Economic Development and Environmental Justice, *Secretary Machel Sanders, Department of Commerce* (1 hour-15 min presentation, 45 min discussion)

Secretary Biser (DEQ) introduced Secretary Machel Sanders (DOC) and shared updates on infrastructure funding. Secretary Biser asked the Board members to review and provide feedback on the infrastructure funding priority rating system documents.

Secretary Sanders provided an overview of the EJ accomplishments and progress of the Department of Commerce's Diversity Equity and Inclusion Office. Secretary Sanders shared several updates:

1. The First in Talent: Strategic Economic Development Plan for the State of North Carolina was established this past year. There are opportunities for engagement with stakeholders and partners related to the First in Talent Plan.

2. NC TOWERS is a task force that provides expert advice to Governor Cooper and state policymakers on ways to advance offshore wind energy projects in North Carolina. There are four subcommittees in NC TOWERS, and the task force will provide a report to the Governor and the General Assembly on June 30th. Secretary Sanders invites board members to share thoughts and comments about the subcommittee topics. The subcommittees will be doing listening sessions and survey to residents about offshore wind. The DEI subcommittee oversees research and recommendations regarding equitable energy transition and infrastructure.

3. To support the recommendations of Governor Cooper's Executive Order 80, Commerce representatives are involved in a regional SMART Power partnership with Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina to establish best practices for offshore wind to benefit all residents.

Secretary Sanders asked members of the Board for ideas on ways to improve equity through the economic development process.

Ms. White-Williamson asked how the Department of Commerce will avoid further burdens to the communities of Eastern NC.

Secretary Sanders replied that research is done on a company's history, but the Department of Commerce needs to work on creating a systematic process.

Ms. White-Williamson asked if it is possible for communities to be informed earlier about the introduction of company infrastructure.

Secretary Sanders replied no because most companies require those deals to be confidential. What the Department of Commerce can do is encourage companies to engage with communities early.

Dr. Kumar asked if the DEI related language in the contracts is enforceable.

Secretary Sanders replied that the language is encouragement and are currently working on incentives.

Ms. White-Williamson asked if there are community members represented in the subcommittees?

Secretary Sanders replied yes, the subcommittee includes community members from across the state.

Ms. Whittington asked is there an incentive for elevating the need for companies to conduct site clean-up.

Secretary Sanders agreed to follow-up with Ms. Whittington with more information.

Chairman Dr. Johnson asked about procurement forecasts and how to define the supply chain process so that communities understand the business opportunities.

Secretary Sanders replied that supply chains have not been mapped out and will take that comment back to the Department.

1. Economic Development and Environmental Justice, *Christopher Chung, Chief Executive Officer, Economic Development Partnership North Carolina*

Mr. Christopher Chung shared a presentation on Economic Development in North Carolina. Mr. Chung discussed Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC) and the economic development during the pandemic.

Ms. Whittington asked what are some incentives that protect local community members and avoid displacing local residents across the state due to property value and increased taxes.

Mr. Chung responded most companies are typically neutral and prefer to get jobs from local talent, but some sectors must pull from outside the community. There are probably some State programs that help source local talent to companies.

Ms. Whittington recommends EDPNC thinks about how and why locations are chosen and including legal language in the economic development planning that protects existing populations from disproportionate harm.

Dr. Kumar asked if there has been any effort from EDPNC in incorporating Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Can EDPNC be creative in trying to incorporate Diversity, Equity and Inclusion?

Mr. Chung responded EDPNC is not a policymaking body. Mr. Chung hopes that EDPNC has done a serviceable job in trying to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion. There's an opportunity to diversify by including more people/organizations at the table during initial talks with companies from a talent sourcing standpoint. EDPNC has increased the diversity of this process in recent years.

Dr. Kumar responded that EDPNC must be creative and expand the effort. Dr. Kumar asked how EDPNC can make DEI more compelling to companies.

Mr. Chung responded EDPNC has only been addressing that at an elementary level and almost always in the context of workforce. EDPNC are open to hear any suggestions from the board to increase DEI efforts.

Dr. Kumar agrees that there is room for innovation with EDPNC and companies increasing DEI efforts.

Mr. Chung responded that EDPNC wants to be authentic with their DEI efforts and want companies that are interested in DEI to know that NC is a resource for them.

Ms. Carter asked regarding Environmental Regulations, what is EDPNC doing to work with local governments and communities to ensure that we don't risk our state being chosen over others because relaxed Environmental Regulations compared to neighboring states?

Mr. Chung responded that there is a small percentage of those types of companies that EDPNC tend to deal with. The top sector out of NC's top 4 sectors that EDPNC are working with currently are companies in electric vehicle related manufacturing with a strong commitment to minimizing environmental impacts. The rest of the top 4 sectors are: 2. food and beverage – consumer package goods, plant-based proteins 3. life sciences and biopharmaceutical manufacturing – tends to be a clean manufacturing company 4. plastic related manufacturing. Each of these has some degree of environmental impact but these may not be the same types of companies Ms. Carter is thinking of.

Ms. Carter responded these facilities still have an impact to the local communities. Ms. Carter asked what EDPNC is doing to ensure to protect North Carolinians at least as well as neighboring states using Environmental Regulations.

Mr. Chung responded seeing more early discussions at EDPNC about the Environmental Justice impacts. In recent years, EDPNC has been more aware of the effects of economic development and successful job numbers.

Ms. Carter responded that EDPNC needs to be more intentional with their DEI efforts.

Secretary Biser commented that DEQ's role is to communicate to companies that NC has rules and regulations that need to be followed. Secretary Biser added that she and Secretary Sanders are committed to working together to think about how to improve the process.

Chairman Dr. Johnson thanked Mr. Chung for his presentation. Chairman Dr. Johnson added that North Carolina needs to have a set of core values—Economic, Environmental and Social values—that guide which companies we accept. We need to ask the question “How does the company's values align with our state's sustainability values?”

2. DEQ's Business Environmental Justice Toolkit, *Bailey Recktenwald, DEQ Chief Strategy Officer*
(30 min-10 min presentation, 20 min discussion)

Ms. Recktenwald presented on DEQ's draft Business Environmental Justice Toolkit. Ms. Recktenwald summarized the Business Toolkit's vision, goals, and content. Ms. Recktenwald requested feedback from members of the board during and after today's meeting regarding the Business Toolkit, especially the “Identifying Potential Environmental Justice Considerations Around a Proposed Site” questions portion. Ms. Recktenwald invited the board members to add any other additions to the Business Toolkit as well as suggestions for the proposed Community Toolkit.

Chairman Dr. Johnson asked how the Business Toolkit fits into the anonymous recruitment process.

Secretary Biser responded that DEQ hopes to include this in the discussions early on and continues to work on improving the process.

Ms. Carter asked if there was a question related to cumulative impacts in the “Identifying Potential Environmental Justice Considerations Around a Proposed Site” questions portion.

Ms. Recktenwald responded yes there is a question that asks, “What other facilities are located in the same area and what impact do they have on the community?”

Ms. Carter suggested to add a step for businesses to check DEQ's Community Mapping Systems for pre-existing sites such as Brownfields.

Ms. Recktenwald agreed and noted that suggestion.

3. Member Updates (10 min)

Dr. Kumar shared three updates. 1. Received a grant from National Institutes of Health (NIH) to create a Research Centers in Minority Institutions (RCMI) center for health disparities research. When COVID started, used funding to create a new center called Advanced Center for COVID-19-Related Disparities (ACCORD). 2. NCCU has launched a new partnership with RTI international, recognizing the importance of environmental science and created a new center called the Center for Applied Research in Environmental Sciences. This new center created a lab looking at effects of environmental burdens at the cellular level as well as social justice and environmental justice issues. 3. A program in NIH is collecting genetic information on one million people and requesting suggestions from the community as to what environmental information to collect. The link to send suggestions was sent to Renee to send out to the board members.

Ms. White-Williamson shared two updates. 1. The Environmental Justice Community Action Network (EJCAN) has been growing extensively over the recent years. 2. Ms. White-Williamson was recently appointed to the High Fund. The High Fund is a gender and climate-based organization meant to raise fund for historically under-resourced organizations.

Ms. Carter shared some updates about receiving the EPA EJ Problem Solving Grant that led to a collaboration with Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment's Duke Superfund Advisory Group. Ms. Carter and the group conducted a Stop, Check, and Enjoy Campaign which educated the public on the safest fish and way to prepare fish caught from the Cape Fear River for consumption. Ms. Carter shared the link to the campaign materials in the chat and will be sent out to the board members by Renee.

Ms. Haven-O'Donnell shared updates about developing a non-traditional entrepreneurial enterprise and uplifting BIPOC businesses. Ms. Haven-O'Donnell is also co-authoring the Race, Equity Commission charge as well as the Community Safety and Law Enforcement charge for the City of Carrboro. Ms. Haven-O'Donnell requested more discussions regarding how State regulations support non-traditional businesses (i.e., container businesses and live-work spaces).

Mr. Anstead requested to work with someone in Commerce to arrange a meeting regarding economic development with North Carolina's State Recognized Tribes. Mr. Anstead now has two granddaughters since the EJE Board's last in-person meeting.

Ms. White-Williamson suggested some considerations from members of the board regarding the Draft ARPA Stormwater Administration Plan. Ms. White-Williamson asked to support the proposal not to rely exclusively on DEQ's Community Mapping System to identify disadvantage communities; but rather to consider information in the application explaining what factors would qualify. Ms. White-Williamson will be sending recommendations to the board members to provide comments.

There were no requests to provide public comment to the board.

At 5:05 pm, Ms. Carter made a motion to adjourn the meeting which was seconded by Dr. Kumar.