



Meeting Minutes

Monday October 5, 2020
6:00 PM
Virtual Meeting

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Johnson at 6:00pm. He informed all in attendance that the WebEx was being videoed and recorded, and Board members were reminded of the ethics statement. Ms. Renee Kramer, DEQ Staff Liaison, called roll.

Board Members Present

Carolina Fonseca Jimenez
Dr. Danelle Lobdell
Dr. Jim Johnson
Jeff Anstead
Dr. Marian Johnson-Thompson
Randee Haven- O'Donnell
Sherri White-Williamson
Veronica Carter
Naeema Muhammad
Jaime Cole
Elke Weil
Marilynn Marsh-Robinson

Board Member Absent

Dr. Susan Jakes
Dr. Deepak Kumar
William Barber III
Rev. Dr. Rodney Sadler
Carols Velasquez

New Business

Introduction of Board Member, Sherri White-Williamson:

Sherri White-Williamson was introduced as the newest Board Member appointed to the Secretary's Environmental Justice and Equity Advisory Board. Ms. White-Williamson is the Environmental Justice

Policy Director for N.C. Conservation Network, an organization that supports and trains a myriad of diverse groups that are invested in and advocating for achievable and equitable solutions.

Presentation and Discussion- Andrea Harris Social, Economic, Environmental and Health Equity Task Force Subcommittee on Environmental Justice and Inclusion: Short Term Goal 2

Dr. Johnson referred to Andrea Harris as the consciousness of North Carolina when it comes to equity and justice issues whether it be social, environmental, economic, or health, and stated that no matter what, she always reminded society about how visible inequities were and that they needed solutions. Upon her untimely death, Governor Cooper established the Andrea Harris Social, Economic, Environmental and Health Equity Taskforce in her memory due to her dedication in solving inequities in society.

Dr. Johnson and DEQ Secretary Regan are members of the Environmental Justice and Inclusion Subcommittee of the Andrea Harris Taskforce. Each Subcommittee is responsible for making recommendations in the domain to which they've been appointed. The Environmental Justice and Inclusion Subcommittee is seeking ways in which it can move the needle on EJ issues and how to address associated problems. The Subcommittee has established two short term goals and one long term goal:

Short Term Goals:

1. Evaluate the feasibility and/or designate a permanent full time position on Environmental Justice, Equity, and Inclusion in the Department of Commerce, Department of Transportation, Department of Natural and Cultural Resources and the Office of Emergency Management.
2. Conduct an inventory on aging infrastructure and buildings (schools, senior centers, etc.) that have exposure to radon, asbestos, mildew, mold, etc. and consider remediation projects of impacted facilities for job creation initiatives.

Long Term Goal:

1. Legislative strategy: Addition/changes to statutes and rules to incorporate environmental justice criteria into regulatory actions.

Dr. Johnson explained that this Advisory Board meeting is focused on Short Term Goal 2, the inventory of aging infrastructure. Dr. Johnson referenced asbestos, radon, mildew, and mold as legacy pollutants and that COVID-19 has shed a light on how many are truly impacted by these legacy pollutants. Chairman Johnson cited that deferred maintenance in a typical school in an EJ community requires about \$4.5 million in remediation resources to fix problems. However, there is a bill proposed in Congress that could help rectify the problem - the Rebuild and Reopen the American School Act was passed by the House and is currently stalled in the Senate.

Dr. Johnson reiterated the question how we deal with aging infrastructure in these communities, and asked whether we can use pilot test sites to refine strategies and apply them in other North Carolina communities that face the same issues.

Chairman Johnson introduced Ms. Kramer to present on the two proposed pilot counties: Edgecombe County and Robeson County.

Ms. Kramer explained how DEQ utilized census block group information to evaluate racial composition and poverty rates throughout the state. DEQ defines an ‘underserved community’ as a census block group with 50% or more minority population, or 10% more than the state or county share, as well as a poverty rate of over 20% and greater than 5% when compared to the county or state. This data was then overlaid with 2020 county health rankings from the University of Wisconsin-Madison/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Combining this information, Edgecombe and Robeson were selected as the two pilot counties. Ms. Kramer shared additional data for both Robeson and Edgecombe counties, including major DEQ permitted facilities, aging school infrastructure, FEMA disaster declarations, and sensitive receptors.

Dr. Johnson explained the thought process will be to focus on Edgecombe and Robeson with regards to Short Term Goal #2 and then thinking of economic development strategies for small businesses to participate in the repair and remediation of infrastructure that results in economic opportunities in these two communities. Chairman Johnson solicited input from the Board on whether or not there are other things that should be considered in order to achieve EJ that can later be shared with the Taskforce.

Board Discussion

Ms. Carter suggested one of the infrastructure categories that should be added are town halls and community centers. Ms. Carter noted that these are places where people vote and hold community events, and that she has seen some pretty damaged facilities to the point that they are unusable for community events or even weather emergencies (i.e. storms).

Dr. Johnson Thompson agreed with Ms. Carter and suggested adding recreational centers for children. She then asked why the Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) wasn’t included in the list of agencies in Short Term Goal 1 because health disparities are a key component in the issues we see in undeserved EJ communities.

Ms. Haven-O'Donnell asked whether or not the Taskforce has information on the amount of toxic materials in schools, especially school supplies (I.e. crayons, dry erase markers, etc.) that are procured. Dr. Johnson said that is something that could also be shared with the Education Subcommittee. Ms. Haven-O'Donnell offered that she had links to share and would email the list the full Board.

Ms. White-Williamson agreed with remediation needs but also noted the problem is that incentives for new job creation are usually for dirty industries and that at some point that there needs to be attention to how certain industries can be incentivized in certain areas across the state. She continued that we must make sure that in these remediation projects that the waste doesn't end up in dumps that already exist in those communities.

Dr. Johnson agreed and that he wanted to connect the dots for there to ultimately be green schools, with open space, with proper ventilation, tree canopies, etc. Dr. Johnson agrees that there are employment and business opportunities with building these green schools.

Following Ms. Haven-O'Donnell, Ms. Carter added that the EPA Superfund Program offers a lot of training when the Agency comes in to clean up a local site. EPA will teach and train small and local businesses on the proper way to remediate, performing mold remediation requires certification. She continued that it is important to obtain certification and identify the small businesses through the

Department of Commerce or Small Business Administration, and partner with the federal government to obtain remediation certification. Ms. Carter also noted that by obtaining certification individuals gain skills that they can apply both in their community but later on to future business opportunities.

Dr. Johnson agreed and pressed for changes in the laws. He went on to state that if individuals have violated the law, they often are prevented from participating in certification programs that would allow them to partake in remediation projects, which are also job creation opportunities. Chairman Johnson added that North Carolina has one of the strictest systems in regards to certification in the country, and recommended this issue be communicated in the next Subcommittee meeting to help think about these issues.

Dr. Johnson-Thompson responded and agreed with Ms. Carter regarding worker training. She referenced her experience at NIEHS where the Agency interacts very closely with the Superfund program. Separate from the Superfund program, NIEHS has a worker training program in which an organization, specifically community-based organizations, are provided funding and worker training. She stated that NIEHS is currently providing funding and training resources to a Louisiana-based EJ organization. Dr. Johnson-Thompson would like for that to be kept in the background as a resource option.

Dr. Johnson asked Dr. Johnson-Thompson to send the information about NIEHS worker training program, and Dr. Johnson Thompson replied that she would share the information connect him with the person in charge of the NIEHS program. Dr. Johnson-Thompson remarked that she thinks this a great approach because not only does allow it for remediation but also allows for some job opportunities and hopes that whatever is done, that there is effort to ensure that there are job opportunities for the people in those communities.

Ms. Carter added, in regards to job opportunities and training, that there might be a need for some remedial training for businesses that informs them on how to apply for and manage grants. If the intention is to go in [to these communities] to help business entrepreneurs realize they can do this clean up. Ms. Carter added that sometimes there are federal grants available to help them target specific areas and communities and if they know how to get those grants then they become valuable to their communities and it's another skill set that they can use to help pay the bills later on.

Ms. Haven O'Donnell asked about the role of community colleges in these certification programs and if there are certification programs available now or if that is something that can be amplified by the state education program.

Ms. Carter responded by stating that there is a community college that is working with the town of Navassa trying to identify the requirements needed for certification to develop the certification classes for the community college. She agreed with Ms. Haven-O'Donnell and shared that thinks local colleges, specifically HBCUs, need to be included in the venture of creating classes that provide remediation certification need to be included in the venture of creating classes that provide remediation certification

Dr. Johnson asked for additional thoughts, and posed a question: If there are a couple of demonstration site communities, what specific variable should we be gathering data on at baseline that then enable us to have a set of key performance indicators and metrics to evaluate impact?

Ms. White-Williamson responded that if we are looking at schools, one indicator can be asthma, because if there are improved school environments, then the rate of asthma should be reduced. She continued that asthma rates are typically higher in EJ communities than in other communities.

Dr. Lobdell added to Ms. White-Williamson's point and shared that in schools where there are higher rates of absence based on illness, another key-indicator, which goes hand-in-hand with asthma.

Ms. Cole suggested another indicator could be the rate of both COVID-19 infections and deaths.

Dr. Lobdell referred to the other goals mentioned and asked whether there was an increase in air quality and if there were some key environmental measures that these remediation efforts would be impacting. She continued on to say the Subcommittee may want to consider looking at levels of lead in the community, and that she thinking of those environmental factors that they are attempting to mitigate, might want to collect before and after data.

Ms. Haven-O'Donnell added that allergies might be another indicator, and recalls working in a building as an educator in which the mold issue was so bad they had to shut down the building. She added to Dr. Lobdell's point about lead paint and also shared her concern about lead dust.

Ms. Carter added that there are monitoring programs that DEQ has, and urges DEQ to continue monitoring asbestos, mold, mildew and other environmental issues.

Ms. White-Williamson asserted that school buses and associated diesel fuel also impact on air quality, especially for children, considering the length of time they often have to wait outside. Adds that there should be a measure of how long school buses are idling near school buildings and how that can be reduced so children have less exposure.

Dr. Johnson affirmed that all of the ideas have been great so far, asked for more.

Dr. Lobdell wondered about some of the social factors, such as considering attitudes before and after the remediation and how that changes perceptions in the community. Sometimes this includes mental health too.

Ms. Carter stated that income should be considered and comparing the number of small businesses in these communities before and after the interventions. She added that whether or not the income of the community increases, they should look at the impact the training and the program at-large is having on the community.

Dr. Johnson-Thompson recalled that there was a mention of green spaces earlier in the meeting, and wondered if there are educational opportunities to introduce students to these issues, and noted the importance of that environmental awareness for students.

Ms. Carter agreed and stated that she believes one way to monitor that is make sure that environmental education becomes part of a curriculum. Dr. Johnson-Thompson agreed and recalled her visit to Northampton County where students there engaged in an air monitoring project in their community. Ms. Carter and Ms. Haven O'Donnell both agreed that EJ and environmental education should be more explicitly stated and part of educational curricula.

Ms. Muhammad mentioned how a professor at UNC Chapel Hill incorporated EJ as a significant part of his curriculum and had done so for the past 20 years. Dr. Johnson stated that there can be a whole cadre of students who are looking into health issues in EJ communities.

Ms. White-Williamson recommended that there should be an EJ coordinator in every state agency because everything is connected. Ms. Muhammad suggested that what is being done at the federal level should be modeled. Ms. Carter stated that the model is already there and that it should be discussed further.

Dr. Johnson then solicited input on how to address the issue that environmental injustice is economically beneficial for certain people. He then asked how we can work to ensure economic benefits are distributed to the people of EJ communities equally.

Ms. Muhammad stated that local governments do not understand EJ, and not really economic justice. She continued that local governments only see the tax incentives from new industry, not the health impacts of these facilities, and that education needs to take place at local governments. Ms. Carter agreed and stated that in order for this to be successful, there needs to be viable economic alternative for local governments. She continued that there needs to be an economic incentive for local governments to be able to choose clean, green industry over polluting industry. Ms. Muhammad agreed and stated that the amount of degradation that has already taken place in these communities must also be considered, which results in a lot of companies not wanting to come to undeserved communities. Ms. Carter added that ultimately we need a way to clean up these communities and abandoned properties.

Dr. Johnson-Thompson asked if there could be any set asides, in response to making sure there is economic justice and making sure that the funding goes to minority groups.

Ms. White-Williamson stated that often times communities were expected to write grants multiple times before ever getting funding from the federal government. To support future efforts, the federal government identified those applications that worked and then made close contact with communities by sending them on tours and having them recognize the communities' needs, which reduced the number of times they had to reapply for grants. Systematically, the issue needs to be looked at more broadly to figure out ways to empower communities, while also reducing requirements to obtain the grants they need.

Ms. Carter whole-heartedly agreed and added that it is not just about getting the grant but also how to manage the grant, especially in small towns where it can throw off the financial sector of those communities. She stated that community colleges could help to alleviate that stress of grant management in small communities and EJ communities and closed her comment by stating that there needs to be a holistic interagency approach.

Dr. Johnson thanked the Board again for providing input and feedback for the Subcommittee and asked that any additional feedback be provided to the website of the full Taskforce. Dr. Johnson adjourned the meeting at 7:07 PM.