



Meeting Minutes

Thursday August 11, 2022

At 3:05pm, Chairman Dr. Jim Johnson called the meeting to order, read the ethics statement.

Board members present:

Veronica Carter (online)

Chairman Dr. Jim Johnson

Vice-Chair Dr. Marian Johnson-Thompson

Carolina Fonseca Jimenez

Dr. Danelle Lobdell

Marilynn Marsh-Robinson

Naeema Muhammad (online)

Carlos Velazquez

Sherri White-Williamson

Board members absent:

Jeff Anstead

William Barber, III

Randee Haven-O'Donnell

Dr. Deepak Kumar

Rev. Dr. Rodney Sadler Jr.

Elke Weil

La'Meshia Whittington

New Business

I. Welcoming Remarks, Elizabeth Biser, Secretary, DEQ (5 min)

Secretary Biser confirmed NCDEQ's commitment to incorporating environmental justice in the economic development process through the continuation of dialogue with the Department of Commerce. Secretary Biser also addressed the state and federal funding for water and wastewater infrastructure. North Carolina directed more of the ARPA federal funding than any other state in the country toward water and wastewater funding. DEQ awarded \$789.4 million in water and wastewater infrastructure for 385 projects throughout the state. Secretary Biser highlighted DWI's outreach to underserved communities during this first round of ARPA funding; as well as EPA and USDA's new wastewater pilot program providing technical assistance to North Carolina residents related to water and wastewater infrastructure. DEQ has made changes to the Priority Rating System to be more inclusive and will be in effect this fall.

II. EJ considerations in hurricane recovery, Cesar Castro, NCORR (30 min)

Mr. Castro presented on how NCORR approaches equity regarding hurricane recovery.

Ms. White-Williamson asked how NCORR is addressing communities living in hotels after disasters.

Mr. Castro responded that moving forward, policy changes and operational procedures are being implemented to slowly build means to address short comings.

Ms. White-Williamson asked if there has been any direct outreach to impacted communities about these changes.

Mr. Castro responded yes, NCORR has constant communication to houses they serve.

Ms. Carter asked what is being done for renters, particularly residents of Wilmington living in public housing.

Mr. Castro responded that this is one of the key elements we are trying to address with the Action Plan for tropical storm Fred.

Mr. Velazquez mentioned that there is LEP information available the NCORR website, but is any of this information available face-to-face?

Mr. Castro responded COVID paused some of those efforts, but NCORR does some Spanish language radio broadcasts. Prior to COVID, NCORR had some rebuild centers that provided face-to-face communication. NCORR is hoping to have more face-to-face in the future.

Ms. Fonseca Jimenez asked does NCORR handle staff trainings for Spanish and/or other language speaking with communities?

Mr. Castro responded that NCORR relies on county and municipality partnerships to provide resources.

Chairman Dr. Johnson asked if extreme heat events are classified as a disaster.

Mr. Castro responded since NCORR funding is predicated on presidentially declared disasters and there hasn't been a heat-related presidentially declared disaster in NC, heat is not included yet. NCORR is constantly looking at impacts of extreme heat during hurricane rebuilding.

Chairman Dr. Johnson asked if there are any equity considerations within the disaster recovery supply chains and supporting NC's local businesses.

Mr. Castro responded that he can't speak directly to the supply chain piece; but can try and find out that information. Additionally, NCORR does attempt to use local businesses and contractors.

Chairman Dr. Johnson asked whether NCORR knows the percentages of disaster recovery funding going to Historically Underutilized Businesses.

Mr. Castro responded don't know percentages but can check. As a HUD grantee, NCORR is being held accountable to make those commitments to community members.

Ms. Marsh-Robinson asked how impacted communities can provide feedback on processes.

Mr. Castro said the formal mechanism is through the Action Plans and public comment with the Action Plan. When any programmatic changes occur, NCORR must do an Action Plan with a 30-day comment period.

Ms. White-Williamson remarked that 30 days is not long enough and recommends NCORR to consider a 60-day or longer public comment period.

Mr. Castro replied that NCORR could extend to 60 days if needed.

III. Water Infrastructure funding updates, Shadi Eskaf, DWI Director, DEQ (30 min)

Mr. Eskaf provided an update on Spring 2022 water/wastewater funding round and plans for the next funding round.

Mr. Velazquez asked why the community of Haliwa-Saponi in Halifax County didn't receive funding.

Mr. Eskaf responded that this community will be working with DEQ, EPA, and USDA in the pilot program. Additionally, staff are trying to find out why some communities in need of funding did not apply during the Spring funding round.

Vice-Chair Dr. Johnson-Thompson asked about DWI's engagement with university partners.

Mr. Eskaf responded that they are in the planning stages for engagement with university partners. DWI is working with the Environmental Finance Center at UNC's School of Government and with UNC's

North Carolina Policy Collaboratory. Both staff and students will be doing case studies but not sure who exactly will doing the projects.

Ms. Marsh-Robinson encouraged DWI to continue doing intentional outreach in the future and possibly share throughout the department so divisions can learn from DWI.

Mr. Eskaf agreed that DWI plans to keep doing more intentional outreach regarding DWI and other divisions.

Ms. White-Williamson asked about the anticipated new Infrastructure Bill and how it this will affect North Carolina.

Mr. Eskaf responded that the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will allow additional funding for the State Revolving Fund and additional subsidies while adding prioritization to disadvantaged communities. Provides low interest loans with additional subsidies and expects to see more applications from disadvantaged communities come in.

Chairman Dr. Johnson suggested that DEQ looks at what happens to these communities after receiving new infrastructure, as far as becoming targets for gentrification.

Mr. Eskaf responded looking at the impacts is a high priority.

Ms. Carter commented that many of these small communities if they are incorporated do not have large staff and if they are unincorporated are at the mercy of county staff.

IV. EJ in other states, Sherri White-Williamson, EJE Board Member (30 min)

Ms. White-Williamson presented on innovative efforts to address environmental justice issues in other states.

Vice-Chair Dr. Johnson-Thompson asked the controversy behind the CEJST.

Ms. White-Williamson responded that race initially was a factor in the tool but was removed for legal reasons. There have been extensive comments submitted for adding race back into the tool. CEJST is still in beta form so we will see what happens when the final version in released.

Ms. Fonseca Jimenez suggested that possibly North Carolina's environmental justice and equity leads for every cabinet agency could be used similarly to New Jersey's EJ Interagency Council.

Ms. White-Williamson responded that the EJ Interagency Councils have two staff members, one senior level and one staff level, versus NC's EJE leads is one staff member, sometimes senior level and sometimes staff level. Not having senior level staff involved could slow down the processes.

Vice-Chair Dr. Johnson-Thompson asked who oversees possibly North Carolina's environmental justice and equity leads for every cabinet agency.

Ms. Kramer responded that the Governor's Office oversees North Carolina's environmental justice and equity leads.

V. Follow up discussion for EJ and economic development (20 mins)

Chairman Dr. Johnson asked members of the board ways to incorporate environmental justice within NC's economic development based on the information provided at the last quarterly meeting.

Mr. Velazquez commented that as more people move to North Carolina, it provides us with a unique opportunity to understand other customs and cultures which is important when addressing climate change.

Vice-Chair Dr. Johnson-Thompson commented on the need to focus on human health during NC's progress in economic development.

Ms. White-Williamson made a comment referring to the Department of Commerce's presentation and the questions raised about transparency. Ms. White-Williamson recommended a need for more and earlier transparency from companies entering communities.

Chairman Dr. Johnson recommended the need for a balanced view of equity; incorporating more equity in the supply side, as well as the demand side of economic development.

Ms. Marsh-Robinson added this is especially important when companies are receiving grants and public funds.

Ms. Carter commented that she agrees with the comments about transparency but also participation in the process. The federal governments definition of environmental justice involves public participation and agreement in the process. Speaking or sending comments during public comment period is not enough. The safety of the public should be the main concern government at all levels.

Vice-Chair Dr. Johnson-Thompson requested to members of the board to have a special meeting on wood pellets.

Chairman Dr. Johnson and Vice-Chair Dr. Johnson-Thompson said they would get responses from the board members and provide recommendations to DEQ.

At 4:51 pm, Chairman Dr. Jim Johnson adjourned the meeting.