

Meeting Minutes: CEJSC Meeting

Date: March 31, 2026

Commissioners in Attendance: John Papagni, Rebecca Rehr, Tyler Brice, Andrew Miller, Joseph Griffiths, Lemir Teron, Rebecca Rehr, Joseph Griffiths, Lemir Teron, Robin Bailey, Asha Smith, Cat Goughnour, Chanese Matthews, Subha Chandar, Aneca Atkinson, Dr. Renee Carr

Other Attendance:

Dean Costales, Jon Mueller, Madison Coates, Ashley Prescott, Kylan Simpson, Mackenzie R Smith, Nomsa Dlamini, Sean Lynch, Anaiah M Coates, Tim Lanore, Veronika Carella, Aneca Atkinson, Nevan Edwards, Kaitlin Walker, Alex Lima, Zachary Schafer, Dorothy Morrison, Deb, Marcia Jones, Asha Brundage-Moore

1. Welcome and Introductions

- Nevan Edwards initiated the meeting, which was recorded, for the Commission on Environmental Justice, Sustainable Communities. Attendees were asked to add their name and organization to the chat for attendance, and if that was not possible due to complications, participants were asked to email Nevan Edwards. This tracking is particularly important for commission seat holders but is also used for public attendees to track future communications and collaborations

2. Pleasant Chase Presentation

- The agenda included presentations, starting with one from the Pleasant Chase community in Maryland, who had previously given a brief introduction at the last meeting. Nevan Edwards welcomed the speakers—Camille Edwards, Tim, Aiden Gregg, and Dean Costales—to formally introduce themselves and discuss the history of Pleasant Chase as it relates to environmental justice. Aiden Gregg thanked the commission and the Maryland Department of Environmental Justice (MDEJ) team for hearing them out and offering to investigate the case further.
- In 1994, Chase Land signed an agreement with residents to address opposition, which included maintaining a \$25,000 rotating fund for home damages due to blasting and providing an independent arbitrator for claims. Chase Land also promised that after its proposed 25 years of operation, the quarry would become a lake and be placed into an environmental easement. In 1996, the Howard County Board of Appeals approved a special zoning exception for the quarry, provided the company adhered to 24 protective requirements, with compliance review required every five years.
- Aiden Gregg noted that Savage Stone has been in continuous violation of four of the 24 required conditions, including Condition 13 (investigating/reporting vibration damage), Condition 17 (controlling dust emissions), and Condition 18 (limiting blasting duration). Despite operations beginning in 2005, the company never honored its binding promise to use the rotating fund for repairs, often claiming damages were due to homes settling. A 2019 agreement with Howard County, which involved the county purchasing some land for Guilford Park High School, extended the conditional use for another 25 years, and the quarry's attorney suggested they would pursue another 25-year extension after that.

- Dean Costalas summarized that residents recently reached out to MDE and Howard County departments seeking a thorough investigation and resolution, but the MDE mining sector responded with "relative hostility". The Howard County Hearing Examiner found in 2024 that Chase Land operated in bad faith and violated conditions 13, 17, 18, and 24, including causing unreasonable interference with residents' property use and violating state mining law. The appeals court affirmed the decision based on the preemption issue, ruling that the state mining permit preempted the county's five-year reapplication requirement.
- Dean Costalas stated that the current appeal decision neglects the Pleasant Chase residents and severely limits the ability of counties to respond to environmental justice communities. The Environmental Law Clinic is submitting a complaint to the Howard County Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ), but the community remains doubtful of a successful resolution given years of frustration. The community seeks the commission's help, asking them to use their contacts and recommendations to spur investigations or enforcement of existing permits, and specifically to recommend that the mining division thoroughly investigate the quarry.
- Camille Edwards, representing Pleasant Chase residents, detailed the constant disruption from the quarry's operations over the last 21 years, noting that the repeated ground movement has caused cracks in drywalls, damage to foundations, and sinkholes. They urged the commission to use their power to shut down the quarry, which is too close to residential and commercial properties, and to make the company fulfill its promise to convert the quarry into a park. Camille Edwards further reported that dust from the crushing operations is pervasive, leading them to stop using their deck and causing them to wear gloves due to skin irritation, and they believe the dust is causing their daughter's frequent headaches.
- Joseph Griffiths asked for a quick review of the current status of the quarry's local approval, and Aiden Gregg confirmed that the quarry is in operation and will likely remain so as the conditional use challenge was unsuccessful due to preemption by state mining permits. The county Board of Appeals refused to hear any evidence on the violations and focused only on the preemption issue, maintaining that the state permit supersedes the county's ability to negotiate terms. The current conditional use permit expires in 2028, but due to a Development Rights and Responsibilities Agreement (DRRA), it is extended for 25 years after that, with reapplication likely occurring in 2028.
- Jon Mueller, Director of the Environmental Law Clinic, expressed frustration with MDE, stating that violations of the Clean Water Act permit were turned over to the Minerals and Mining division, resulting in only a "slap on the wrist" with no fines. Dean Costalas noted that the Board of Appeals process has been "completely ineffectual" due to internal organizational issues and their decision to ignore all hearing testimony in favor of focusing on preemption. They refused to hear evidence regarding the quarry's violation of legally binding terms, which was particularly confusing since the board was the body that enforced the conditions initially.
- Veronika Carella, a Howard County resident and children's advocate, suggested the community file a complaint with the Howard County code of ordinances, specifically the health code covering nuisances and air pollution, as this is separate from the regulations previously contested. Rebecca Rehr recommended that the commission have an internal discussion, possibly via email, to decide on an opportunity to weigh in, proposing that they determine what action the commission can take, such as a letter or a visit, and stating they would make a formal motion after determining the appropriate course of

action.

4. PFAS Legislation

- Nevan Edwards transitioned the meeting to Zachary Schafer from MDE for an update on PFAS legislation from the legislative session. Zachary Schafer mentioned that the House and Senate chambers requested comprehensive briefings on PFAS this year, which was largely influenced by the commission's interest and outreach to legislators (00:35:23). The two main areas of legislative focus were a product phase-out bill for PFAS in consumer goods and a bill addressing PFAS in biosolids, which are byproducts of wastewater treatment used as fertilizer.
- Maryland has already phased out PFAS in several products, including aqueous film forming foam, food packaging, rugs, carpets, and playground equipment. The product phase-out bill this session, which targeted cookware and cleaning products, was withdrawn due to open questions but may return next year. The bio-solids bill (SB719) addresses PFAS in wastewater by establishing a tiered approach and has passed both the House and Senate chambers with minor differences to be resolved.

5. Bio-Solid and Regional Impact

- The bio-solids bill would establish a limit of 25 parts per billion for PFOA and PFOS combined in land-applied biosolids, effective in 2028, and water systems exceeding this limit must implement a mitigation plan within five years. The bill also prohibits land application of biosolids with more than 50 parts per billion in effluent. Zachary Schafer noted that Virginia's legislature has a nearly identical bill, which is crucial for a regional approach since biosolids often cross state lines.

6. MDE Public Participation Guide

- Alex Lima from MDE presented a summary of the public participation guide, which provides guidance on public participation, community engagement, and legal requirements for environmental permit applications. The public comment period for the 14-page guide is set for April 3rd, but an extension will be granted if requested in writing. The guidance emphasizes that applicants should build relationships in the community before submitting an application, and notices must be clear, avoiding legal jargon.
- The guide emphasizes ensuring equitable access for all Marylanders by providing communications in multiple languages and conducting hybrid meetings that comply with ADA standards. Andrew Miller expressed concern, referencing the Pleasant Chase case, about how to ensure enforcement of commitments even with improved processes, to which Alex Lima encouraged submitting a comment to include more enforcement language in the guidance. Alex Lima stated that their office receives concerns and works with compliance teams in the appropriate administrations, emphasizing that increased communication between the public and the department is key.

7. DHCD Just Communities Update

- The DJC supports the state of Maryland in counteracting policy decisions by government agencies that have negatively impacted underserved, overburdened communities over multiple generations. This work includes collaborating with missionally aligned institutions, such as the sustainable growth subcommittee and the Governor's Children's Cabinet, to ensure they are responsive to residents' needs for equitable racial, economic, and health outcomes. The DHCD sponsored the Just Communities Act and collaborates internally and externally with marginalized communities to ensure they benefit from public investments.
- The Just Communities Act was signed into law in April 2024, requiring the DHCD to use data to identify communities disproportionately impacted by harmful government actions

like redlining, environmental hazard sighting, and mass incarceration. On June 19, 2025, the governor designated 419 census tracts as the inaugural group of Just Communities, which will be in effect until 2030. The DHCD is implementing this through incentives like bonus or basis boost points for applications from or benefiting underserved and overburdened people in these areas.

- Proposals for state funds for projects within designated Just Communities receive bonus points or special consideration, increasing their likelihood of being funded if they meet threshold requirements. Current pilot programs tailored to these communities are listed on the Just Communities website and include programs in statewide broadband, neighborhood revitalization, community development administration, and homeless solutions. This legislation is noted as the first of its kind in the nation, using a policy-based structural transformation approach to deliver reparative and restorative justice.
- The legislation enabled the creation of a new geographic data layer—the Just Community data layer—to target state investment proactively and reverse decades of disinvestment and exclusionary policies. The Just Communities Act outlined 14 different criteria, and the DJC used nine federal datasets that were aligned with the legislation's intent. Criteria that lacked actual data sets include racially restrictive covenants, imminent domain urban renewal, and demolition of communities using state or federal funds.
- The current trends available in the Just Communities viewer include home ownership, property values, commercial and residential vacancy, history of redlining, exclusionary zoning, high imprisonment rates, environmental hazards, and poor public health outcomes such as asthma rates and lead paint exposure. The state is seeking to rely on more state-level data because some federal datasets are no longer available, which may complicate the evaluation of census tracts for re-designation in 2030. The work is aligned with the governor's goal of being an aggressive effort in Maryland's history to address inequality.
- State policies must deliberately counteract historical policies such as redlining and destructive urban highway programs. The goal is to recover resources for families who were deprived of wealth building through home ownership and intentional neighborhood disinvestment. The Maryland Department of Housing Community Development (DHCD) has developed a statewide geographic data layer to identify census tracts that have borne the brunt of Maryland's legacy inequalities, aiming to evaluate racial, economic, and health equity.
- The DJC is currently updating its viewer and creating a story map to explain its use, the factors identified, and their relation to the legislation. The DJC is collaborating with the Department of Environment, Department of Health, and Department of Planning to establish a statewide, equity-centered evaluation method to measure outcomes for priority populations in these geographies. The goal is to use social justice frameworks, program evaluations, and cumulative impact analyses to evaluate what is happening in designated communities.
- Recommended guidance for systemic transformation includes using the Just Communities map to prioritize geographies for state funding and pairing it with tools like the MD Enviro screen to better understand demographic and vulnerability scores. Another key recommendation is to name the population being served in selection criteria and scoring processes, ensuring that resources rectify environmental, economic, social, and public health factors. The DHCD seeks to develop a standardized method for

incentivizing programs, such as the 10 bonus points currently offered for competitive funding through the state revitalization program.

- A concern was raised regarding ensuring that funding follows historically affected residents and generational descendants rather than areas where demographics have changed. The DHCD plans to conduct community involvement and use qualitative and quantitative methods to understand who has been displaced and who remains to solve for socioeconomic inequality. One potential method to prioritize multigenerationally impacted community members, based on a model in Oregon, is using a preference policy based on zip codes.
- The DJC is frequently asked about a process for communities to petition for Just Community designation, but they are maintaining the current geography until 2030 because they are in the inaugural year. The DJC is working with the MDE to integrate the Just Communities viewer into the MDE Enviro screen tool, which is expected to overlap with underserved areas and assist in the guidance for applications and community engagement requests. The goal is to find additional state-level data and explore other kinds of geographies that could be enabled under Just Communities, specifically for rural or small-city patterns.

8. Public Comment

- A public comment highlighted the urgency for the EJ commission and the MDE to take action to stop the flow of groundwater contamination from known sources of PFAS and other hazardous pesticides in western Howard County. Concerns were raised about the lack of enforcement of EPA product labels, which are federal law, especially regarding use around wells. The speaker requested that the agenda include steps the EJ commission, MDE, MDA, and Department of Natural Resources can take to ensure the EPA product label is fully enforced to protect public health and address the data gap in pesticide application transparency.

9. CHERISH Update

- A commissioner informed the group that the Cherish Act, which the commission had supported, is not moving forward this year due to opposition that appeared before crossover. The commissioner noted that a legislative update is expected closer to the end of the session.

10. Introduction to the Collaborative Clinic for Nonprofit Viability

- Asha Brundage-Moore introduced the Collaborative Clinic for Nonprofit Viability, a project stemming from the Yale Center for Environmental Justice that partners with Howard University and the Lawyers for Good Government. The clinic was formed in response to environmental justice and environmental-related groups raising concerns about targeted attacks and threats to nonprofit organizational viability. The clinic aims to address concerns like fund clawbacks, the closing of environmental justice offices, and allegations of improper DEI programming.
- The clinic operates on two levels: conducting a "health check" to help individual organizations identify risks, compliance gaps, and vulnerabilities that could endanger their 501(c)(3) status or operations. This health check involves a series of questions covering lobbying limits, reporting requirements, financial controls, and tax concerns. The clinic connects organizations needing assistance to vetted pro bono legal services, as the clinic itself does not provide legal advice.
- The second major part of the clinic's work is supporting the environmental justice nonprofit sector as a whole by developing resources, webinars, and links to vetted

materials created by partners. The goal is to help nonprofits cut through the overwhelming and rapidly changing regulatory information, especially concerning new state and federal directives. Nonprofits are invited to reach out for health checks or to suggest needed webinars and resources.

10. Adjournment

- A motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting. The meeting facilitator announced that all presentations would be collected and sent out to the commissioners. Commissioners were asked to email the facilitator if they had any motions or items they would like added to the agenda for the next meeting. There will also be follow-up news regarding Camille Burke's resignation and the status of the chairs.