

Meeting Minutes: CEJSC Meeting

Date: January 28, 2025

Commissioners in Attendance: Camille Burke, Dr. Renee Carr, Subha Chandar, Crystal Faison, Kellie Gaither, Tracy Garrett, Paulette Hammond, Andrew Miller, Voncia Molock, John Papagni, Rebecca Rehr, Aneca Atkinson, David Simon

Other Attendees:

Veronika Carella, Noble Smith

1. Welcome and Introductions

The speaker opened the meeting by welcoming attendees and expressing gratitude for their commitment and presence.

2. Goals for the Year

The speaker outlined the following goals for the year:

- * Discuss legislative priorities during the current session.
- * Plan a retreat, which has not been held since COVID. Commissioner Faison was thanked for previously hosting Prince George's County.
- * Establish an events calendar to keep the public and members informed of upcoming activities.
- * Be more intentional about scheduling the joint meeting with sister commission CPAC.
- * Discuss outreach efforts.

3. Vacant Commission Seats

It was announced that two commissioners, Paula Tim and David Simon, have retired, leaving three open seats: a business leader position, an affected communities seat, and a senate seat. Noble was asked to send out names for potential new members.

4. Legislative Priorities

- **"Cherish Our Communities Act"**: Rebecca discussed this community-driven environmental justice and cumulative impacts bill, similar to last year's HB 24. It aims to address a gap in the Maryland Department of the Environment's (MDE) authority to make permitting decisions based on environmental justice and cumulative impacts. The bill, still in drafting, was written by community-based organizations like the South Baltimore Community Land Trust. It focuses on specific types of permits in areas with an environmental justice (EJ) score of 75 or above, or within a 1-1.5 mile radius of such an area. An existing burden report would inform MDE's permitting decisions, potentially leading to automatic denials or mitigation efforts with community involvement. New

Jersey, New York, and Minnesota have similar laws. The bill's sponsors are Delegate Jazz Lewis and Senator Clarence Lamb. The speaker requested the CEJSC consider submitting a letter of support or information for this bill.

- **"Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act"**: Mariah Davis, Environmental Justice Officer with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), presented this bill, drafted by DNR and planned for personal introduction by the governor. A key part of the bill is to define "regenerative agriculture" in statute, acknowledging its indigenous and African origins. DNR manages 100,000 acres of agricultural land, primarily through state parks, but only six acres are currently managed by an African and biracial farmer practicing regenerative farming. The bill seeks to honor the origins of these practices, often associated with Dr. George Washington Carver, and promote smaller-scale farming, crop variety, composting, organic farming, and low-to-no till practices, which benefit soil health, climate change, biodiversity, and food quality. The bill extends the definition to include "regenerative practices and traditions," drawing on "African indigenous and original land stewards." It also aims to create economic opportunities for underrepresented farmers. The bill is a partnership with the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA), which provides technical assistance through its Healthy Soils Program. The Senate bill is SB 428, and the House bill is HB 506. The Senate bill hearing is scheduled for February 11, with testimony due by February 7. Mariah encouraged support for the bill and offered to share more information.
- **Maryland Department of Planning Bill**: Joe mentioned House Bill 286 (SB 266), which updates the 12 planning visions to eight planning principles. While not specifically addressing environmental justice, it adds an equity principle, which will have a significant environmental justice component in its implementation guide.

5. Discussion on Federal Changes and Environmental Justice

Tracy asked about the impact of the current administration's efforts to eliminate environmental justice programming. Anika (Secretary Atkinson) and Rebecca responded that while there is uncertainty regarding funding and federal programs, Maryland's state laws, regulations, and policies on environmental justice remain in effect. They emphasized that the EJ Commission is created by state law and advises the governor and legislature on environmental justice and sustainable communities. They expressed confidence in continued work due to existing state frameworks and data backups.

6. House Bill 386 - Pesticides PFAS Chemical Prohibitions: Veronica discussed this bill, requesting the EJ Commission's support due to its relevance to safe drinking water. She stated that about 1,000 of the 14,000 pesticides registered annually list PFAS chemicals as active ingredients, with product labels warning of groundwater and well contamination. She cited a case study in Howard County where PFAS was found in the wells of Bushy Park Elementary and Glenwood Middle schools for the first time, necessitating bottled water. The bill proposes prohibiting the registration of pesticides that openly list PFAS chemicals and warn of well contamination.

7. Coal Cleanup and Asthma Mitigation Act: Dave Arndt mentioned a bill, yet to be numbered, introduced by Delegate Stein. It would place a fee on coal transported through Maryland, directing 40% of the revenue to overburdened and underserved communities affected by coal transport, and allocating \$5 million annually for asthma treatment.

8. Retreat Planning

The speaker sought input on potential dates (March, April, or May are preferred to avoid summer outreach months) and locations for a retreat, emphasizing the need to be mindful of transportation for commissioners across the state. Mariah suggested utilizing free space in state parks, which was well received.

9. Events Calendar

Noble and the speaker plan to create a Google Calendar template for commissioners to add meeting dates, events, and other germane activities. Rebecca shared an invitation to the League of Conservation Voters Environmental Climate Justice Reception on February 5.

10. Joint Meeting

The joint meeting with CPAC is typically held in November or December. Dates will be shared, and suggestions for topics are welcome.

11. Outreach Visits

The speaker encouraged commissioners to suggest locations for future outreach visits, similar to the successful one in Curtis Bay. Two visits are possible if needed.

12. Public Comment and Announcements

- Veronica noted that the meeting agenda was not emailed or posted on the website prior to the meeting and requested that interested parties be included in future communications.
- The speaker announced her transition to Assistant Commissioner of Health Promotion and Education within the health department, affirming her continued dedication to the commission's work.
- Tracy asked Mariah about her familiarity with the Professional Agriculture Workers Conference and DNR's outreach efforts in African-American communities regarding farming opportunities. Mariah stated she was not familiar with the conference but would welcome more information. She confirmed that the bill's language was developed with input from Black farmers, and a recent briefing was held with Black and Indigenous farmers to discuss the bill text.

13. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made and accepted. Commissioners were reminded to monitor emails for potential decisions on support letters due to legislative deadlines, and to consider potential new members for the three vacant commission seats. Noble and the speaker remained available for further questions after the official adjournment. Tracy and the speaker confirmed a pre-meeting on Friday at the Dunkin' Donuts at the Shops at Wayson in Lothian (5408 Southern Maryland Boulevard).

Sources:

- [CEJSC Meeting - 2025/01/28 09:51 EST - Recording](#)