

**Commission on Environmental Justice & Sustainable Communities (CEJSC)  
Commissioner's Retreat  
Tuesday, July 22, 2014  
University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC)**

**USGS Building, A&B Conference Rooms  
5522 Research Park Drive, Baltimore, MD 21228  
9:15 am to 3:30 pm**

**MINUTES**

**In Attendance:**

*Commissioners:* Andrew Fellows, Arabia Davis, Calvin Ball, John Quinn, Rev. Meredith Moise, Stephan Levitsky, Vernice Miller-Travis, Larissa Johnson, Lisa Nissley, Dick Fairbanks, Caroline Varney-Alvarado, Benoy Thomas

*Guests:* Scot Spencer, Benjamin Campbell, Cheryl Jamison, Dr. Christopher Swan, Dr. Matthew Baker, Megan Micco, Megan Ulrich, Nick White, Vanessa Barksdale, Kathy Kinsey, Darlene Mitchell, Heather Barthel, Angelo Bianca, Dinah Winnick

**Introductions:**

Calvin Ball started the meeting by welcoming everyone and inviting everyone to introduce themselves. All persons in attendance introduced themselves with their names and their relevant professional positions. Calvin then thanked everyone for introducing themselves and briefly explained what the meeting would be focused on.

**Presentations on EJ-related work at UMBC:**

Dr. Matthew Baker, associate professor in the Geography and Environmental Systems Department, began his presentation on urban sustainability research being done at UMBC. Matthew first explained satellite data and the use of percent impervious cover in an area as a useful indicator of urbanization. He presented several charts that explained the relationship between benthic organisms and the change in water quality. These charts noted that negative changes in taxa and benthic organisms indicate that impervious cover and urbanization are much worse than expected. The next topic Matthew introduced was the work he has been involved with in Montgomery County regarding impervious surfaces and stormwater runoff. Several more graphs showed changes in terrain due to development. Matthew then explained that these manmade terrain changes impact how water flows in the county and how stormwater runoff and water quality are affected. Finally, Matthew discussed the studies that UMBC has been running on over 40 watersheds, all of different urbanization levels, for over 30 years, and any resulting conclusions from those studies. The corresponding graphs showed the effect of pollutants on these watersheds. At the conclusion of the presentation, Calvin opened the floor for questions. Andrew Fellows, Stephan Levitsky, Dick Fairbanks, Vernice Miller-Travis, and Calvin presented questions to Matthew.

Dr. Christopher Swan, another associate professor with the UMBC Department of Geography and Environmental Systems, began his ecological presentation on plant work and “greening” vacant land in Baltimore City. Harlem Park is a specific location in Baltimore City where work is being done. Christopher and his graduate students have adopted 25 vacant lots and have coordinated with the communities surrounding the lots to decide what plants should be planted and how the lot should look. Inmates from local prisons assist in this project by doing research and collecting data on the vacant lots. Dr. Swan noted that the work being done on the lots is directly translational, meaning citizens pay taxes that fund the sustainable work which is ultimately beneficial to the citizens. The project has three outcomes: providing local communities and citizens with more sustainable areas, creating environmental amenities, and offering an opportunity for inmates to give back to local communities. Dr. Swan then concluded his presentation and welcomed questions from the group. Andrew, Vernice, Caroline Varney-Alvarado, Robin Underwood, Larissa Johnson, and Dick Fairbanks presented questions to Dr. Swan.

### **Update on MDE’s Cumulative Impact Workgroup:**

Calvin formally recognized that Rev. Meredith Moise is a new member of the Commission and welcomed her.

Lisa started by stating that MDE has been examining the issue of cumulative impacts (CI). She then said that a Cumulative Impact Workgroup has been formed to try to gain understanding on the issue for the next legislative session. She listed some of the people involved in the Workgroup, some of whom are members of the CEJSC. She then discussed what took place at the first Workgroup meeting and the proposed focus of the second Workgroup meeting. She mentioned that a third and fourth meeting will take place after the summer and that members of the CEJSC are welcome to come to all Workgroup meetings. Vernice asked if there is space for more members on the Workgroup. Lisa said that there is probably not any more room for members, but everyone is welcome to come to the meetings. Vernice then recommended Dr. Devon Payne Sturges be contacted as a resource for the workgroup. John Quinn stated that it was nice how the last workgroup meeting went over the specific CI actions taken by other states.

Calvin then introduced Nick White and Cheryl Jamison from the Maryland Mediation and Conflict Resolution Office (MACRO).

### **An internal look at the CEJSC:**

Cheryl introduced herself and started describing MACRO. She stated that MACRO typically works with many groups to teach appropriate mediation and conflict resolution techniques. She said that Maryland has come a long way in the field of mediation and conflict resolution. She then turned the presentation over to Nick White.

Nick introduced himself and said that he spoke to a few of the CEJSC members before the retreat. Commissioners expressed that there is potential in the CEJSC, but there are also some challenges that need to be overcome.

Nick then moved on to the first activity. He revealed three large posters with timelines for “personal,” “environmental issues,” and “Commission.” He stated that he wants the Commission members to think carefully about what they would write on each timeline. Cheryl and Nick then invited everyone to start writing on the posters. Everyone in attendance began writing on and putting sticky-notes on the posters. When the activity was completed, Nick asked for volunteers to read what everyone had posted.

Scot Spencer and Larissa started reading off the “personal” timeline. Once Scot and Larissa were finished going over the poster Nick asked what patterns everyone saw in that poster. Many attendees stated that there was a shared passion for environmental issues. Everyone was very supportive of each other’s backgrounds. Nick then asked how these personal timelines might influence other things and what other thoughts everyone had about the poster. Lisa commented that what people are willing to share on the poster is probably a reflection of their personalities and different styles of communicating. Scot mentioned that most things people wrote on the “personal” poster are important milestones in their lives.

Vanessa and Caroline read the various postings on the “environmental issues” poster. Nick then posed the same questions as he did with the previous poster. Many attendees stated that there is a wealth of information present among the attendees. Scot then made a point that if a person does not have a good understanding of some environmental policies, then they are usually not in the conversation, which has huge implications for environmental justice. Dick stated that the 1970s were an important period for environmentalism and bipartisan support is what created innovation in the field of environmental policy. Megan noted that even though there was a lot of information about environmental issues on the poster, some important milestones were left off, such as Title VI of the of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Robin and Stephan presented the “Commission” poster. Nick posed the same questions as he did for the two previous posters. Nick said that one thing he had seen in the poster was positivism and optimism with regards to the Commission. Scot mentioned that there is a lot of new blood in the Commission. Lisa stated that many people took new jobs and left the Commission within the past year, so there has been a fair amount of turnover. Cheryl made a comment on the turnover rate of the Commission, stating that there are surely new ideas flowing through the Commission. Lisa stated that new members typically learn a lot, but it takes people a little while to feel comfortable before they start working on Commission initiatives. Several members thought of additional successful events/projects that had not added to the timeline.

Cheryl announced that it was time to break for lunch and briefly went over what her and Nick would be going over after the lunch break.

## **Lunch**

### **An internal look at the CEJSC cont.:**

Cheryl was asked by Kathy Kinsey to recap what was discussed in the morning session. Cheryl explained the timeline exercise. Vernice and Robin also commented on what happened in the

morning session. The group reviewed the conclusions that were drawn from each of the timelines, such as the fact that there is a great deal of expertise and knowledge in the Commission, and expanded more on those conclusions.

Cheryl said that the aim of the afternoon session is to look ahead at future CEJSC goals. Nick and Cheryl presented a summary of the CEJSC charge and left it up on the projector screen to help guide the direction of the afternoon session. Stephan suggested that better communication with other state agencies, in the form of quarterly newsletters/reports or a similar publication, would be helpful in keeping agencies engaged, updated, and aware of their responsibilities regarding environmental justice. Calvin mentioned that many people are unaware of what environmental justice (EJ) really is. Cheryl built on this idea by suggesting that publicizing EJ would be helpful for communication. Andrew Fellows mentioned that some agencies and organizations do not refer to environmental justice as EJ, but use different terms so it is important to recognize and possibly acknowledge these other terms in order to have more effective communication. Rev. Moise mentioned that building a community network would be beneficial because there are individuals in the community doing some of this work already; Lisa agreed and recalled that building community networks was a goal generated at a past CEJSC retreat. Vernice mentioned that the definition of EJ is sometimes restrained, but that the Commission is interested in looking at EJ in every sphere of an individual's life. Lisa acknowledged that the Commission has a lot of big picture goals, and it can be disappointing when not every goal is accomplished. However, the Commission has had a lot of smaller successes. Calvin acknowledged that a challenge to the Commission is balancing being inspirational and successful. Vernice pointed out that a major frustration for her is the lack of tangible results for constituents, despite other accomplishments. She identified a goal for the Commission of finding the missing pieces needed to better people's lives.

Cheryl and Nick took note of the goals that the Commission members discussed. Cheryl read a list of 12 goals for 2014/2015 that were gleaned from the morning session:

1. Friendly interaction
2. Make suggestions to state government that acknowledges resources
3. Evolve conversation
4. Want to set actionable goals
5. Help the new governor understand EJ issues
6. Create specific goals on how to move CEJSC forward (5-10 point plan)
7. Allow CEJSC to continue to engage state and local organizations on EJ
8. Implementation
9. A 2015 community forum on local EJ issues
10. Work with UMBC on urban core redevelopment
11. Continue to grow CEJSC membership
12. Partnership of vacant-to-values initiative with prison inmates green initiative

Andy mentioned that Lieutenant Governor Anthony Brown, a candidate for Governor, is one of the first candidates to address EJ on the campaign trail, which could be a major benefit to the Commission. Dick pointed out that there needs to be more of a "person-to-person," case-based effort, rather than an Annapolis effort, however he acknowledged that his idea would take a lot of time. He also said that he would like to respond to the actual needs of communities with a

more action-based approach. Scot shared an anecdote about his work with the Annie E. Casey Foundation and his experience with direct results. Cheryl suggested building more of a community network that Rev. Moise mentioned earlier and allowing them to work more hands-on to achieve those direct results. Stephan noted that there could be more action taken, but that the Commission's job is to influence policy as well as to educate other agencies and the Governor. Vernice mentioned again that she measures personal and Commission effectiveness by making a difference in the lives of citizens. Calvin pointed out that at last year's retreat there was a great deal of talk about the change of state government and the Commission realized that it would be hard to move initiatives forward because of elections. However, the Commission began seeking to educate more and sent monthly updates on the Commission's work to a point of contact in the Governor's Office. Rev. Moise also suggested partnering with the Maryland Legislative Black Caucus because many of the legislators in the Caucus represent impacted communities. Calvin stated that the Commission hosted a reception at the Legislative Black Caucus Conference in November of 2013. Calvin identified this as a major accomplishment and mentioned that this will surely help future goals because many legislators are now educated on EJ.

Cheryl then turned the discussion to what was going to be done this year. Vernice identified the recently established Cumulative Impact Workgroup as something that will be progressive and as something the Commission can stay connected with. Kathy Kinsey said that the work the Commission does is extremely important and will continue to be important. She suggested that the Commission identify two or three goals, develop some project ideas, and create a plan for the next year. She said she believed this would help the Commission achieve more tangible goals. Kathy also said she liked the idea of hands-on, action-based approaches to EJ.

### **Goals and Priorities for 2014-2015:**

Cheryl and Nick created a separate list of general goals:

1. Educating and staying in contact with government officials, members of the legal community, judicial officials, and communities
2. Growing the Commission by attracting members of impacted communities
3. Impacting legislation
4. Identify data sets that are relevant to the Commission's goals
5. Focus on a champion (legislator, politician, etc.) who can aid the Commission
6. Form partnerships
7. Tackle specific issues (sea level rise/land subsidence, vacant lots, etc.)

Rev. Moise suggested partnering with Morgan State University. Calvin noted that a Commission member was a faculty member of Morgan State.

Cheryl and Nick then went over a final list of future goals for the Commission:

1. Maryland Legislative Black Caucus reception and recognition for Delegate Bobo
2. Joint hearing with the General Assembly to discuss the definition of EJ
3. Commission interaction with and support for the Cumulative Impact Workgroup
4. Identify relevant EJ data sets and achieve direct connection with the Attorney General's Office.
5. EJ and the rising sea level project on the Eastern Shore

## 6. Vacant lots

Lisa noted that sometimes when the list of goals grows, the level of success diminishes. The Commission has the most success when it tackles specific manageable goals. Stephan suggested establishing committees and assigning people to each committee so they are accountable for getting things done. Arabia suggested focusing on EJ and sea level rise on the Eastern Shore as a specific goal. Calvin suggested that advocates for the project dealing with EJ and sea level rise should make a presentation on the topic for the Commission. Dick expressed concern for the sea level project because of the lack of structure and representation by members of the eastern shore communities. Arabia responded by stating that the communities have been the ones who have spearheaded the projects thus far and have shown remarkable organization and willpower. Scot mentioned the idea of supporting implementation of an environmental curriculum into Maryland public education K-12. Larissa suggested that the Commission communicate with state agencies and understand where those agencies are in terms of EJ. Robin mentioned that she would be interested in educating middle school students about non-discrimination in EJ. Dick inquired about a past goal of aligning with other organizations and agencies such as the Maryland Association of Counties.

Cheryl and Nick then polled the Commission members, asking who would like to lead or support the goals that were previously outlined. They then made a poster that detailed the following:

1. Black Caucus Reception:
  - a. *Leading:* Vernice, Larissa
  - b. *Supporting:* Rev. Moise
2. Joint Hearing:
  - a. *Leading:* Lisa
3. Cumulative Impact Workgroup
  - a. *Leading:* John
4. Identify Relevant Data Sets and an Environmental Champion
  - a. *Leading:* Scot, Calvin, Stephan
5. ~~Vacant Lots~~
6. Sea Level Rise
  - a. *Leading:* Arabia
  - b. *Supporting:* Dick

No Commission member was interested in leading on the issue of vacant lots, so it was dropped from the list of upcoming issues/goals.

**Adjourned at 3:30 pm**