

**ILLINOIS COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**Wednesday, March 13, 2024 (1:00 pm – 3:00 pm)**

**I. Welcome**

- *Host/Facilitator:* Paulina Lopez-Santos, Environmental Justice Policy Administrator, Office of Environmental Justice, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) – welcomed Commissioners and meeting attendees and briefly went over meeting agenda.
  - *Reminder:* These Commission meetings are open to the public and are recorded. Meeting minutes and recordings are posted on the Illinois EPA Commission on EJ webpage.

**II. Introductions/Roll Call**

*Ex-officio Members, State Agency Directors or Designees*

- Jose Burgos – Chief External Affairs Officer, Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR)
- Chris Pressnall – Manager, Office of Environmental Justice, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA)
- Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) – Not present
- Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) – Not present
- Illinois Department of Human Services, Housing office (IDHS) – Not present
- Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (IDCEO) – Not present

*Elected Officials*

- Representative Kimberly DuBuclet – State Representative 5<sup>th</sup> District

*Governor Appointed Commissioners*

- Andrew Armstrong – Illinois Attorney General’s Office (AGO), Chief of Springfield Environmental Bureau
- Marcus Jordan – Diversity, Equity, Inclusion for Operating Engineers Local 150 and Indiana, Illinois, Iowa Foundation for Fair Contracting
- Dulce Ortiz – Clean Power Lake County
- Victoria Wilson – President & CEO, Naturally Urban Environmental Inc.

**III. Topics**

Brief Overview of Commission Duties & Tasks

- Paulina covered the Commission’s duties and tasks
  - Advise State entities on environmental justice and related community issues
  - Review and analyze the impact of current State laws and policies on the issue of environmental justice and sustainable communities
  - Assess the adequacy of State and local laws to address the issue of environmental justice and sustainable communities
  - Develop criteria to assess whether communities in the State may be experiencing environmental justice issues
  - Recommend options to the Governor for addressing issues, concern or problems related to environmental justice that surface after reviewing State laws and policies, including prioritizing areas of the State that need immediate attention.

### Training Requirements

- Paulina provided a brief overview of the various training requirements listed below and mentioned that she would follow-up with Commissioners via email with further information and guidance.
  - Open Meetings Act
  - Ethics & Harassment
  - Diversity, Equity, Inclusion
    - Chris explained that the training will no longer be done online, but via paper copy instead.
    - Kelly Thompson asked about training that was already done.

### U.S. EPA Funding, Grants, & Technical Assistance Opportunities

- Paulina shared an overview of IEPA's recently published (February 2024) webpage for Funding and Grant Opportunities: <https://epa.illinois.gov/topics/environmental-justice/funding-and-grant-opportunities.html>
- The webpage is organized into 3 buckets:
  - U.S. EPA's Community Change Grants (CCG)
    - Track 1 Community-driven Investments for Change – awards between \$10-20 million each
    - Track 2 Meaningful Engagement for Equitable Government – awards between \$1-3 million each
  - U.S. EPA's EJ Thriving Communities Grantmaking Program (Grantmakers)
    - 11 have been selected.
    - Each will receive \$600 million
    - National & Regional
    - Region 5 for Illinois is The Minneapolis Foundation w/various partners
    - Highlighted eligibility requirements for subgrants
  - U.S. EPA EJ Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers (TCTACs)
    - There are two Region 5 TCTACs: Blacks in Green (BIG) and University of Minnesota
    - Website includes useful links and resources to technical assistance opportunities available to communities and events that are open to the public, including information from BIG's TCTAC launch event they hosted in early February
- Paulina wrapped up the Funding & Grant Opportunities overview by opening the floor to everyone for a discussion about these opportunities and sharing this information with respective networks and how that's going
  - IEPA is thinking of expanding this webpage to include other EJ-related funding & grant opportunities (local, state, other federal agencies) – Encouraged Commissioners to share any thoughts related to this

## Q&A/Discussion

- Victoria – Right now it's really important to push the communication to the general public – how to best share this information to the general public
- Paulina also mentioned – other funding opportunities from other levels of government and agencies can be included on this webpage. Paulina encouraged Commissioners to please share any ideas with her/IEPA OEJ for this webpage and for the IEPA EJ Listserv
- Chris – there are a lot of moving parts, but we are hoping for more involvement in the Commission. Experience in East St. Louis, organizations do not need to compete with each other
- Olivia Davidson, U.S. EPA Region 5 EJ Team – U.S. EPA can also be contacted, (Olivia) offers the ability to bring information to community meetings, etc. Feel free to reach out
- Andrew – asked for clarification regarding language for Community Change Grants and whether state government can serve as partners for that
- Olivia – State governments can be as a “collaborating entity”, but not a statutory partner
- Chris – another idea in terms of the Commission is inviting someone from the TCTAC, BIG (Blacks in Green) to talk about what they're doing, how the work is going, how the Commission can elevate that work, and more
- Victoria – Role of TCTACs in helping communities and grass roots organizations and community shareholders get involved, and to help spread information
- Paulina – In a previous Commission meeting, there were also talks about developing listening or information sessions across the state – that this would be a good idea to revisit at some point, although progress on this is on pause currently due to the need for full commission quorum

## Examples of Potential EJ Questions for State Agencies

- Paulina – EJ Questionnaire for State Agencies, past work-product of the Commission – please take a look at these questions for state agencies to help drive conversations and potential work going forward.
- Chris – This was something the Commission worked on a number of years ago. Did not come to fruition. There will be a procedural process of figuring out if Commissioners agree on issues and questions presented in the questionnaire
- Jose – Glad this conversation is happening. Community engagement has been essential to IDNR, and it is important to engage with the people when they attend events. June 15<sup>th</sup> 2024 is the next event, IDNR Nature Event
- Delia Barajas, Member of the Public – Questions: are the Community Change Grants through the U.S. EPA? Do they address issues in regard to climate justice? Illinois EPA does not address flash flooding and urban flooding. What's the connection of these grants if Illinois EPA is not responsible for the type of floodings we had last year?
- Paulina – the IEPA does not oversee those applications, but we encourage community-based organizations (CBOs), local governments etc., to apply. We are not eligible to apply for those grants either, as a state agency. We are able to serve as a collaborating entity and partner with CBOs etc.
- Chris – local governments who do manage and oversee collections systems for water could avail themselves of the grant funding

- Delia – Is the Illinois EPA responsible and accountable for this type of flooding? Who do we talk to?
- Chris – as the regulators we are not responsible. Local entities are responsible for maintaining infrastructure, collection systems. This is a complex problem as reflected by the \$2 billion dollars in funding by U.S. EPA to address problems from different facets that exist.
- Victoria – I was on the last call regarding the state going for additional funding in regard to climate and energy resiliency. Their main goal is to reduce carbon emissions, build resiliency around energy efficiency. It is an infrastructure problem. MWRD specifically would be the agency that would be responsible for water management. State Rep DuBuclet was with MWRD specifically. We had to go to the Alderman when we had issues. With the additional funding, there can be partnership and collaboration to match with MWRD goals.
- Delia – I would like some clarification. Is this Commission aware of any EJ violations? How are you informed about types of violations like Koppers in Cicero?
- Chris – the Commission can decide to work on whatever they would like to work on, but they have not historically worked on a specific facility or sources. We can use the example of Koppers, which you bring up, of illustrating the issues where the Illinois EPA can do a better job to communicate with members of the community where there is interest and concern about a facility.
- Sabrina Bailey, Illinois EPA Office of Community Relations – OCR has the pollution complaint form that comes to me directly, and we forward these to be investigated.
- Delia – I was trying to understand if Commissioners were aware of violations like Koppers and what goes on at the grassroots level.
- Victoria – No Delia, I'm not aware of any violations. The goals of our Commission are not in alignment with compliance. If there can be a tangible transparency tool that we propose and recommend to the Governor for approval.
- Paulina – Thank you Delia, Victoria, Chris, Sabrina. Chris and I can discuss where we go with those potential example questions for state agencies.
- Victoria – my main question is, when sharing this survey, how will it be shared with other agencies. Digital surveys? Will we know who are the people in the departments and divisions? We still need a quorum too.
- Paulina – We still need a quorum. We have new commissioners, and we have reappointments, but we have not yet received confirmation on those reappointments. If and when the time comes, it would be the IEPA that can distribute those questionnaires and collect responses. We can dedicate time at a meeting to discuss responses.
- Chris – we are getting closer, but not as fast as we would like. We have the two recent appointments of Marcus and Andrew. We will continue hoping that the next time we talk we will be across the finish line or close.

#### **IV. Open Discussion/Questions**

- Paulina – Does anyone have any other comments, questions, or thoughts for the group?
- Victoria – Did we ever find out if they started or are still working on the CEJA Commission (Justice 40).
- Chris – I don't think it has convened. We have identified that there were a lot of overlapping duties.

- Paulina – We have not heard about that, but we have talked about collaborating and not duplicate efforts.

**V. Next Meeting Dates and Location**

- We have all our set dates. June 5<sup>th</sup>, August 28<sup>th</sup>, and November 20<sup>th</sup>.
- As we get to quorum, the conversation of subcommittees will be revisited, and we can meet in smaller groups on a regular basis. If no one else has anything else to add, we can adjourn the meeting. Thank you all.

**VI. Adjournment**