

Minutes of the Fifty-Fourth Meeting of the  
**ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TASK FORCE**

DATE: March 16, 2022

TIME: 4:30 p.m.

PLACE: Virtual Meeting

Members Present

Aloysius Nelson .....Commissioner, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission;  
Chair  
Director, Division of Veterans Services, Kenosha County  
Yolanda Adams ..... Board of Education Member, Kenosha Unified School District  
Ella Dunbar ..... Program Services Manager, Social Development Commission, Milwaukee  
Fabi Maldonado ..... Racine County Supervisor, District 2  
Keith Martin..... Engineering Specialist – Advanced 2, WisDOT  
N. Lynnette McNeely..... Legal Redress Chair, Waukesha County NAACP  
Andrea Mendez Barrutia..... Director of Community Engagement, Hispanic Collaborative  
Pastor Ernest Ni’A ..... President, Racine African American Roundtable of Leaders  
Sandra Rubin..... Equal Opportunity Specialist (retired), Milwaukee HUD  
Field Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity  
Theresa Schuerman..... Walworth County Bilingual Migrant Worker Outreach

Members Excused

Huda Alkaff ..... Founder & Director, Wisconsin Green Muslims  
Gina Green-Harris..... Director, University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health Center for  
Community Engagement and Health Partnerships in Milwaukee  
Brad Holz ..... Board Member, Independence First  
Jackie Schellinger ..... Indian Community Representative, Retired Judge  
Donna Brown-Martin..... Commissioner, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission;  
Director, Milwaukee County Department of Transportation;  
Liaison to Advisory Committee on Regional Transportation Planning

Guests and Staff Present

Dennis Grzezinski ..... Law Office of Dennis Grzezinski  
Eric Lynde..... Chief Special Projects Planner, SEWRPC  
Benjamin McKay ..... Deputy Director, SEWRPC  
Montre Moore ..... Public Involvement and Outreach Specialist, SEWRPC  
Kevin Muhs..... Executive Director, SEWRPC  
Miranda Page ..... Fellow, Lead for America  
Jennifer Sarnecki..... Principal Transportation Planner, SEWRPC  
Bruce Wiggins ..... Member of the Public

**CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Mr. Nelson called the meeting of the Environmental Justice Task Force (EJTF) to order at 4:30 p.m. and welcomed those in attendance.

## **APPROVAL OF THE DECEMBER 16, 2021, MEETING MINUTES**

Mr. Nelson asked if there were any questions or comments on the December 16, 2021, meeting minutes (available [here](#)). Mr. Nelson then asked for a motion to approve the meeting minutes. Ms. Adams moved, and Mr. Maldonado seconded the approval of the December 16, 2021, meeting minutes. The motion was approved unanimously.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Mr. Nelson asked if there were any public comments. There were none.

## **UPDATE ON THE REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM PLAN**

Mr. Nelson asked Mr. McKay to present the update on the Regional Food System Plan. Mr. McKay provided a summary of the project purpose and introduced Miranda Page, who provided an update on information gathered to date regarding the food system and consumers (presentation [here](#)). The following discussion occurred during Ms. Page's presentation:

1. Ms. Adams asked how farmers markets, food trucks, and flea markets are addressed in the Regional Food System Plan and how many farms in the Region are owned by ethnic minorities. Mr. McKay responded that the plan includes information about these topics and added that Chapter 3, Consumers, includes information about access to food from the consumer perspective, including proximity and affordability. Additional details and information will be available for review as specific chapter content is shared with the EJTF at subsequent meetings.

[Secretary's Note: Data included in Chapter 2 indicate that about 2 percent of the agricultural producers in the Region are people of color.]

2. Ms. Dunbar inquired about the role of transportation in accessing food markets. Mr. McKay indicated that Chapter 3 will provide information about how transportation impacts access to food, including transit access to supermarkets and convenience stores. Chapter 2 includes information about freight transportation.
3. Ms. McNeely asked about the costs of hydroponic technology given the need to supply nutrients to the plants grown and how these additional costs might result in higher prices to the consumers, particularly those individuals living in areas considered food deserts. Mr. McKay indicated that the Regional Food System Plan will include details about hydroponic food production and that Commission staff will research the costs associated with food grown with hydroponic technology.
4. Ms. McNeely requested more information regarding the historical trends that created food deserts to understand how to potentially address the situation going forward. Mr. McKay noted that Chapter 3 will discuss the location of food deserts in more detail and that additional research can be conducted to describe the change in development patterns and demographic characteristics over time.
5. Mr. Wiggins, at the approval of Mr. Nelson, provided public comment noting his concern about the food desert term and identification of food desert locations. Mr. Wiggins encouraged Commission staff to research the factors that may result in food insecurity, such as poverty, transportation access, or education. Mr. McKay responded that Commission staff are researching

points of food sale or access, and that staff are also looking at other factors such as transit dependency and household incomes to assess the larger context of food insecurity beyond location. Mr. Wiggins indicated that there are examples of source (food waste) reduction such as education programs, working with cafeterias, and allowing gleaners in farm fields.

6. Ms. Schuerman asked how the Regional Food System Plan will address the types of jobs and wages at food production facilities, such as Lakeside Foods in Ozaukee County and BirdsEye Foods in Walworth County. Ms. Schuerman noted that these companies use migrant labor, and the positions typically do not pay well. Mr. McKay indicated the plan will include information about migrant seasonal workers and revenue by industry. Additional research will be conducted on wage rates for workers in the food industry.
7. Ms. Dunbar indicated that Vincent High School within Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) has a program focused on agriculture and asked if there are similar programs in other parts of the Region. Specifically, Ms. Dunbar noted that the MPS program includes teaching students about animal care, selling products at markets, and encouraging students to enter careers in agriculture. A potential benefit of this program is the diversification of employees entering agricultural careers. Mr. McKay noted that staff will ensure this school program is included in the plan and will expand the list of examples of this type of program in the plan.
8. Ms. Barrutia asked if the Regional Food System Plan will consider how COVID has impacted the food system. Mr. McKay responded that Commission staff are reviewing impacts of COVID on the number of individuals in the labor force and potential supply chain issues. In addition, the plan will consider strategies to address current and future labor force challenges such as impacts on the food system due to the retiring labor force and a shortage of workers to replace them.
9. Ms. Dunbar indicated that the Social Development Commission, in partnership with the Hunger Task Force, established a food pantry near the former Northridge Shopping Center site. Ms. Dunbar noted that this is an area lacking frequent public transit service, creating a food desert. Ms. Dunbar inquired if there are opportunities to enhance the current food pantry to expand food access in the northwest side of Milwaukee, as it is the only one in the immediate area and there are many families in the area that do not have access to a personal vehicle. Mr. McKay noted that the presence of food pantries, such as the food pantry on the northwest side of Milwaukee, will be included in the plan as part of the consumer chapter and Commission staff will consider opportunities to expand access.
10. Mr. Nelson encouraged members to contact Mr. McKay if there are additional questions or comments on the Regional Food System Plan and requested that this topic be included on a future agenda.

#### **UPDATE ON COMMISSION WORKFORCE TRANSPORTATION EFFORTS**

At Mr. Nelson's request, Mr. Lynde gave a presentation that provided an update on workforce transportation efforts (available [here](#)). The following discussion occurred during Mr. Lynde's presentation:

1. Ms. McNeely asked what the next steps are for FlexRide Milwaukee regarding extending and expanding the current program. Mr. Muhs responded that the research to be undertaken by UW-Milwaukee will be helpful to understand the benefits of the service, such as improving individual lives and expanding the labor pool for employers. He noted that the research will also indicate if passengers prefer to travel further for a free trip or pay a fare to pick up the service closer to home.

Mr. Muhs indicated that there are efforts to obtain funding to extend the current FlexRide Milwaukee program beyond the current pilot period and consider opportunities to expand this model to additional areas. Mr. Nelson indicated he is also interested in how this program can be expanded and noted that transportation is a major barrier to employment in low-income areas. Mr. Muhs noted that potential expansion areas could also include connections to employment locations near I-94 in Racine and Kenosha Counties.

2. In response to Ms. Dunbar's question about how FlexRide Milwaukee is funded, Mr. Muhs indicated that the transportation program is funded with a \$1 million grant from the National Science Foundation that was obtained by urban planning professors at UW-Milwaukee in partnership with Commission staff.
3. Ms. McNeely asked how gas prices will impact demand and operations of the service. Mr. Muhs responded that since gas prices were already increasing when the pilot started, it may be difficult to verify how they impacted riders' decisions to use FlexRide. However, this information may be derived from the research, which includes several surveys about travel choices. Mr. Muhs indicated that gas prices have not impacted service operations and it is not expected that gas prices will impact operations during the pilot program.
4. Ms. Barrutia indicated that the Milwaukee Area Technical College is partnering with UWM on an internship program for approximately 100 students and FlexRide may help since the potential participating employers have indicated that transportation is a challenge. Mr. Muhs responded that if the potential participating employers are in the Menomonee Falls or Butler service area, Commission staff can help provide information about the service.
5. Mr. Nelson indicated that companies should contribute to funding FlexRide Milwaukee services since it helps them attract and retain employees. Mr. Lynde indicated that there are about 20 employers actively engaged in the FlexRide pilot and that those employers have indicated the need for reliable and cost-effective transportation. Mr. Lynde noted that a public-private partnership would likely be needed to continue FlexRide and that the team is actively discussing potential cost share formulas and performance metrics.

## **REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TASK FORCE ACTION ITEM LIST**

At Mr. Nelson's request, Ms. Sarnecki reviewed the current action item list, which was linked within the agenda for review (available [here](#)). Mr. Nelson noted that the action item list is appreciated as it highlights the progress of the EJTF.

## **OVERVIEW OF COMPOSITION OF APPLICANTS FOR RECENTLY FILLED COMMISSION POSITIONS**

Mr. Muhs indicated that there were three positions filled since the December 16, 2021, meeting. The applicants that provided their race and ethnicity for these positions indicated they were white and non-Hispanic, largely reflecting the makeup of the applicants for these positions. Mr. Muhs noted that the Commission, with leadership from the EJTF, continues to be committed to diversifying the pool of applicants for these positions. The following comments were made during Mr. Muhs' presentation:

1. Ms. McNeely asked about the Commission's internship program and how Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) would be notified. Mr. Muhs responded that Commission

staff are coordinating recruitment among large entities in the Region, such as the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewage District's RISE program, to seek potential interns and welcomed any contacts with HBCUs to assist with recruitment efforts.

2. Pastor Ni'A asked how Commission staff have connected with HBCUs. Mr. Muhs noted that Ms. Payne is involved with HBCU activities and can share more information in future Public Involvement and Outreach Division updates. Ms. McNeely noted that outreach to high schools can help inspire more students to seek out career paths in planning and engineering. Pastor Ni'A shared examples of internship programs such as police cadettes or explorers where students are mentored by a liaison during high school and through college, and where scholarships are provided for high school students. Mr. Muhs expressed interest in learning more about the police cadette program, welcomed connections to HBCUs, and noted that reaching students in high school or younger can be an effective means to generate interest in the work of the Commission. Mr. Muhs referenced the work Commission staff has done with Tyrone Dumas at MPS and the nine 53206 Initiative schools and indicated that the Commission could explore high school scholarships, particularly internships that provide work experience.
3. Mr. Nelson indicated that his fraternity, Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, also known as the Boulé, offers mentorships to African-American male students between third grade and high school, offers college scholarships, and encourages students to attend HBCUs. Mr. Moore indicated that Commission staff presented to sixth and seventh graders in MPS to encourage interest in careers in environmental sciences and urban planning in coordination with STEM Forward. Mr. Nelson requested that Commission staff expand the action item to encourage college attendance through scholarships. Mr. Muhs noted that the Commission has a tuition reimbursement program for current staff that could help defray the cost of attending college while working, allowing entry-level Commission staff to attend a local college.

[Secretary's Note: Prior to the March 16, 2022, meeting, Mr. Nelson shared links referencing local efforts to support access to Historically Black Colleges and Universities for African American Students, including the following initiatives of the Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity:

Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity and Base 11 Partner to Accelerate 50,000 African American Students and Early Career Professionals on Their Pathways to Success in STEM Careers by 2030: <https://www.base11.com/sigma-pi-phi-base-11/>

The Boulé Focuses its Attention on HBCUs: <https://www.diverseeducation.com/institutions/hbcus/article/15104621/the-boule-focuses-its-attention-on-hbcus>

Frequently Asked Questions about the Parity Project and Next Frontier Initiative: [https://www.base11.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Boule-Fellows-FAQ\\_web.pdf](https://www.base11.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Boule-Fellows-FAQ_web.pdf)

Base 11 and Sigma Pi Phi Announce \$1.5 Million Grant to Support Rocketry at an HBCU: <https://www.24-7pressrelease.com/press-release/454378/base-11-and-sigma-pi-phi-announce-15-million-grant-to-support-rocketry-at-an-hbcu>

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Mr. Nelson asked if there were any public comments. No comments were made.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS AND CORRESPONDENCE**

Ms. Rubin shared information about the May 10-11, 2022, Home for Everyone Conference (information [here](#)) in Milwaukee focused on fair housing and advocacy. Ms. Rubin noted that Commission staff shared information for Wisconsin's Help for Homeowners program (information [here](#)) that helps eligible homeowners with bills such as mortgage payments, property taxes, and utilities.

## **NEXT MEETING DATES**

At Mr. Nelson's request, Mr. Muhs inquired if EJTF members would be interested in holding future meetings in person, with a continued option for joining remotely. Pastor Ni'A noted that he is able to participate in more meetings if they are virtual due to the reduced commute time. Mr. Nelson stated that although it can be more convenient to join meetings remotely, participants do not have the same level of personal contact when meeting virtually. Ms. McNeely observed that participation among EJTF members has increased through virtual meetings. Mr. Muhs noted that Commission staff would endeavor to continue offering an option for remote meeting participation and ensure any future meeting locations have the technical ability to host virtual meetings. In the meeting chat, Mr. Maldonado and Ms. Barrutia indicated that they would be open to meeting in person. Mr. Nelson indicated Commission staff will contact EJTF members to identify the specific meeting date and to gather additional input regarding whether the next meeting should be held virtually or in person.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Mr. Nelson requested a motion to adjourn. Ms. McNeely moved, and Ms. Adams seconded the motion to adjourn. The motion was approved unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer B. Sarnecki  
Recording Secretary

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