

Minutes of the First Meeting of the

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TASK FORCE

DATE: August 7, 2007
TIME: 4:00 p.m.
PLACE: HeartLove Place, Inc.
3229 N. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Members Present

Adelene Greene..... Director, Division of Workforce Development,
Chair Kenosha County
Yolanda Santos Adams Director, League of United Latin American Citizens
Nancy Holmlund President, Racine Interfaith Coalition
N. Lynnette McNeely..... Attorney, Law Offices of Thomas J. Awen
Larry Moore..... Community Partnership Coordinator,
Housing Authority, City of Milwaukee
Brian Peters Housing Program Coordinator, Independence First
Theresa Schuerman Employment Specialist/Migrant Worker Outreach,
Walworth County Job Center

Guests and Staff Present

Crystal DuPont..... Program & Planning Analyst,
Wisconsin Department of Transportation, Southeast Region
Jennifer Epps..... Organizer,
Good Jobs & Livable Neighborhoods Coalition
Philip C. Evenson..... Executive Director, SEWRPC
David M. Jolicoeur..... Senior Engineer, SEWRPC
Gary K. Korb Regional Planning Educator, UW-Extension/SEWRPC
Dwight McComb Planning and Program Development Engineer,
U.S. Department of Transportation,
Federal Highway Administration
Joel Rast Assistant Professor, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Karyn Rotker..... Attorney, ACLU of Wisconsin
Jim Rowen Citizen
Kori A. Schneider Program Manager, Community & Economic Development,
Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council
Gretchen Schuldt..... Citizens Allied for Sane Highways
William T. Stark..... Civil Rights Program Manager,
U.S. Department of Transportation,
Federal Highway Administration
Kenneth R. Yunker Deputy Director, SEWRPC

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Ms. Greene called the meeting of the Environmental Justice Task Force to order at 4:10 p.m. She thanked the Task Force members in attendance for volunteering their time and energy to serve on this Task Force over the next two years. Attendance was taken by circulating a sign-in sheet for signature. Ms. Greene, noting that she had been appointed to the SEWRPC in 2004 by Governor Jim Doyle as a representative of Kenosha County and that, as Kenosha County's Director of Workforce Development, she interacts daily with members of minority and low-income groups, then asked the other Task Force members, staff, and guests present to briefly introduce themselves.

OVERVIEW OF SEWRPC ORGANIZATION AND WORK PROGRAM

Ms. Greene asked Mr. Evenson to provide an overview of the SEWRPC organization and work program. Mr. Evenson welcomed the members of the Task Force to the first meeting. He noted that he had to leave shortly to staff a public hearing in Walworth County, and apologized to the Task Force for not being able to participate in the entire meeting. Mr. Evenson stated that the Task Force's work is very important to the Commission and that the Task Force and its work had the full attention of the Commission's Executive staff. Mr. Evenson then introduced SEWRPC Deputy Director, Kenneth R. Yunker, and asked Mr. Yunker to proceed with a presentation of the overview of the SEWRPC organization and work program (see Attachment A to these minutes).

There were no questions or comments during Mr. Yunker's presentation.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF TASK FORCE FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Ms. Greene noted that the next item on the agenda was the presentation and discussion of Task Force functions and responsibilities. She stated that this would begin with a presentation by Mr. Korb, providing a review of the Federal Environmental Justice and Title VI requirements, and Commission efforts to meet these requirements. She then asked Mr. Korb to proceed with his presentation (see Attachment B to the minutes).

There were no questions or comments during Mr. Korb's presentation.

Ms. Greene noted that the Task Force would next hear from Ms. Rotker regarding the ACLU of Wisconsin perspective, and asked Ms. Rotker to proceed with her presentation. Ms. Rotker stated that the ACLU of Wisconsin did not agree with a number of the Commission's transportation recommendations and efforts to meet Federal Environmental Justice responsibilities, and would be willing to discuss this with any Task Force member one-on-one. She stated that she wanted to use her time before the Task Force to brainstorm about the concerns and issues of minority and low-income populations that the Task Force could address. During this discussion, members of the Task Force identified the following concerns and issues that could possibly be addressed: the need for environmental justice to address the undocumented population, the under-counting by the U.S. Census of minority and undocumented populations, affordable and accessible housing, job creation and economic development in the Region's central cities, a diversified approach to transportation, and the provision of public transit service across county lines.

Ms. Rotker then discussed what she referred to as “P.I.E.,” participation-information-effect. She stated that this Task Force was a great start to ensuring participation of minority and low-income populations in the regional planning process. She was critical of SEWRPC advisory committee membership, noting that the advisory committee leading the water supply planning effort included 33 members, of which 32 were white and one was Latino. Ms. Rotker also stated that the advisory committee membership leading telecommunication planning efforts was all white.

Ms. Rotker stated that through the shared knowledge of this Task Force, she was hopeful that the Commission’s public participation process would be enhanced, especially for engaging minority and low-income populations. In response to Mr. Korb’s presentation, she added that creating four-page brochures translated into Spanish was great; but a staffed table at local grocery stores for people who do not have the time to read the brochure would be a better approach.

Ms. Rotker then discussed the need for the Commission to enhance the information it develops during transportation planning efforts. She stated that the ACLU of Wisconsin had asked during the conduct of the regional transportation plan for information regarding whether minority populations commute outside their county of residence, as this could establish whether improved freeways were of benefit to minority populations.

She stated that the Black Health Coalition of Wisconsin was concerned about low-income populations living near freeways that would have greater impacts as they have higher asthma rates and would be less likely to have air conditioning. Ms. Rotker also stated that it will be important for this Task Force to help direct what is studied by the Commission. She stated that the Commission has not conducted a housing study since 1975, yet they have the budget to prepare a fifty-year history of the Commission and to consider the development of a new logo.

Lastly, Ms. Rotker discussed effects, noting that the Commission does not have the authority to ensure that its plans are implemented. Ms. Rotker stated that this Task Force could find ways for the recommendations that benefit minority and low-income populations to be implemented, and that minority and low-income populations get their fair share. She concluded by stating that the regional transportation plan contained good recommendations with respect to public transit, but that the ACLU of Wisconsin had asked that the Commission recommend the transit element of the plan be implemented prior to implementation of any arterial street and highway improvements.

Ms. Greene stated that the last two speakers under this agenda item were from the Federal Highway Administration and that Mr. McComb and Mr. Stark were to speak to the Federal oversight of SEWRPC Environmental Justice activities. Mr. McComb thanked Ms. Greene and the Task Force members for the opportunity to speak to them, and noted Mr. Stark would first provide his remarks to the Task Force.

Mr. Stark thanked Ms. Rotker for her presentation, and thanked the Commission for the development of the Environmental Justice Task Force, noting that this effort goes beyond what is Federally required of SEWRPC as the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for transportation planning. He stated that he would expect the process this Task Force will go through will involve conversations, discussion, and debate. Mr. Stark stated that to be successful, Task Force members will have to be clear on what they like, what they do not like; and when they do not understand something, they have to make sure to request additional explanation until they do fully understand. Mr. Stark stated that Environmental Justice is a complicated area and the Task Force can help SEWRPC by offering new and different ideas in

the conduct of public participation. He stated that the Task Force was off to a good start with this meeting.

Mr. McComb then stated that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is responsible for certifying that the SEWRPC is meeting Federal laws, regulations, and requirements, including Title VI and environmental justice. He stated that the FHWA last conducted this certification in 2004. Mr. McComb noted that during the certification review, FHWA received substantial public input, much of it questioning freeway recommendations, environmental justice, and public participation. Mr. McComb stated that FHWA concluded that SEWRPC was fundamentally compliant in meeting Federal requirements including environmental justice. He added that FHWA challenged SEWRPC and those that provided public comment to meet and attempt to address the issues raised in the public comment, and enhance SEWRPC's fundamentally compliant planning process. He thanked guests in attendance for meeting with Commission staff—and noted that he was able to attend most of these meetings—and working over an extended period to lay the groundwork for the Task Force. He was pleased that by convening this Task Force, that challenge was being answered.

TASK FORCE QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

Ms. Greene asked if members of the Task Force had any questions or comments. Task Force members offered the following comments and questions:

1. Mr. Peters asked if the Task Force members could get a copy of the issues raised during the Commission's 2004 certification. Mr. Yunker responded that the Commission staff would provide to Task Force members copies of the Commission's 2004 Certification Report and the public comments received.
2. Mr. Peters asked about the term of his appointment to the Task Force. Ms. Greene responded that when Task Force members agreed to serve, they had committed themselves to a two-year term. She added that at the end of two years, the Task Force and the Commission would evaluate its work, estimate the amount of work to be completed, and estimate a time frame to complete that work. Ms. Greene added that at the end of two years, it would be up to each individual Task Force member to assess their desire to continue to serve on the Task Force.
3. Mr. Moore asked about the membership of the Advisory Committees leading SEWRPC planning studies, noting comments about lack of diversity. Mr. Yunker suggested that the agenda for the next meeting of the Task Force include a review of the Commission's Advisory Committees, including discussion of how Committees are appointed, considerations in making those appointments, and examples of current Advisory Committees, such as regional transportation planning.
4. Ms. Santos Adams asked about the membership of this Task Force, noting that there did not appear to be a member representing the youth or young adult population. Mr. Yunker responded that it was a difficult process for the Commission to appoint members to the 15-member Task Force and represent every possible interest, while including membership from each of the counties in the Region and the largest municipalities in the Region, and ensuring representation from each minority group in the Region.

5. Ms. McNeely asked about the appointment of the SEWRPC Commissioners and of members to SEWRPC Advisory Committees. Mr. Yunker responded that as prescribed by State Law, the Commission consists of 21 members, three from each of the seven member counties. One Commissioner from each county is appointed by the county executive/board, and is usually an elected county board supervisor. The remaining two from each county are appointed by the Governor, one of which is from a list submitted by the county. Ms. Greene noted that three of 21 Commissioners are African-American and one is Hispanic. Mr. Yunker stated that the Commission then appoints members to its various Advisory Committees. The exception is when the Commission prepares for a local government a local plan at their request. For example, currently the Commission staff is working with Milwaukee County and the Milwaukee County Transit System to prepare a short-range transit development plan, and since it is Milwaukee County's plan, Milwaukee County makes the appointments to the Advisory Committee leading that study.
6. Ms. Schuerman asked if the membership of SEWRPC Advisory Committees was listed on the Commission website. Mr. Yunker responded that the Advisory Committee membership for planning efforts in progress or recently completed are typically provided on the website. He added that Advisory Committees have been suggested to be an item on the agenda for the next Task Force meeting.

There were no further questions or comments from Task Force members.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Greene asked if any members of the audience would like to address the Task Force. Members of the public offered the following comments:

1. Mr. Rast stated that SEWRPC should be congratulated for establishing this Task Force. He noted that establishing such a Task Force was very unusual among the MPOs around the country. He stated that in order for the Task Force to function well and be effective that there will need to be some tension, because if tension does not exist, then the Task Force members are not pushing hard enough.
2. Ms. Schneider thanked the Task Force members for their willingness to serve and stated that the establishment of the Task Force is a step towards achieving more equity in the Region.
3. Ms. Epps stated that formal meetings are not a good way to engage minority and low-income communities. She also stated that to achieve greater plan implementation will require greater community support. She suggested that SEWRPC hire consultants who have experience in community organization and door-to-door campaigns.
4. Mr. Moore stated that he has worked with SEWRPC over the years, and that he has found it to be an organization of integrity. He suggested that the Commission will need to continue its efforts to diversify, and achieving diversification in staff conducting public involvement will assist in engaging minority populations.

5. Ms. Epps again stated that consideration should be given to utilizing consultants with expertise in engaging the community, including door-to-door campaigns. Ms. Epps also stated that if the Task Force felt strong about having a youth representative, they should ask the Commission to consider an additional Task Force member.

There were no further comments from the public.

DISCUSSION RELATIVE TO TASK FORCE ACTIVITIES

Ms. Greene stated that the discussions taking place during the meeting were very important, but just the beginning. She asked for suggestions from Task Force members regarding items to be discussed at the next meeting, noting that SEWRPC Advisory Committees will be an item on the meeting agenda. Ms. Santos Adams asked if the Commission staff could help in providing information regarding the I-94 North/South Project and the KRM Commuter Rail Project. She noted people often think the two projects are the same. Mr. Yunker stated that the Commission could prepare a summary of the two projects to clarify that they are two separate projects, and this could be distributed and discussed at the next meeting (see Attachment C to these minutes).

Mr. Moore stated that it is important to engage citizens in the work of the Commission. He stated that he hoped Task Force will address this before it is finished with its duties. Mr. Yunker suggested that at the next meeting the Commission staff present its public involvement and outreach activities, and get suggestions from the Task Force members on changes and enhancements.

Mr. Peters stated that he was not clear on how the Task Force will have an impact on the SEWRPC Commissioners and how Task Force recommendations will be received. Ms. Greene responded that the Commission staff will document the Task Force recommendations for Commission consideration. Mr. Yunker added that since Ms. Greene is one of the 21 SEWRPC Commissioners, the Commission will not only hear from staff, but also from one of the Commissioners.

Ms. McNeely noted Mr. Rast's comment about tension, and asked what tension the staff was expecting. Mr. Yunker responded that he was not sure what that comment was directed at, and indicated that the Commission staff hopes to work with the Task Force without tension or conflict. He did note that the Commission did have budget concerns, as the Commission budget has not increased over the last few years.

Ms. Santos Adams asked if this Task Force was previously known under a different name. Mr. Yunker responded that it has only been known as the Environmental Justice Task Force.

DETERMINATION OF NEXT MEETING DATE, TIME, AND PLACE

Ms. Greene noted that the Task Force will meet at least quarterly and asked about a date for the next meeting. After some discussion of alternate dates in late October and early November and meeting time and place, Mr. Yunker suggested that the Commission staff survey the Task Force members on a specific meeting date. Ms. Greene and the Task Force agreed. Ms. Green noted that there was consensus that the next Task Force meeting will be held at 4:00 p.m. at HeartLove Place, Inc., with future meetings to be rotated around the Region. She added that Task Force meetings will go no longer than two hours.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Task Force, Ms. Greene adjourned the meeting at 6:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth R. Yunker
Recording Secretary

#130048
KRY/DMJ/dmj/mlh/lgh
11/27/07 - revised