

Minutes of the Fifty-First Meeting of the
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TASK FORCE

DATE: July 20, 2021
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 Wisconsin Deputy State Director for the Elderly,
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
Ella Dunbar Program Services Manager, Social Development Commission, Milwaukee
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, IndependenceFirst
N. Lynnette McNeely Legal Redress Chair, Waukesha County NAACP
Ernest J. Ni'A President, Racine African American Roundtable of Leaders
Andrea Mendez Barrutia Director of Community Engagement, Hispanic Collaborative
Sandra Rubin Equal Opportunity Specialist (retired), Milwaukee HUD
Field Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity

Liaison to Advisory Committee on Regional Transportation Planning

Donna Brown-Martin Commissioner, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission;
Director, Milwaukee County Department of Transportation

Guests and Staff Present

Dennis Grzezinski Law Office of Dennis Grzezinski
Ryan Hoel Deputy Chief Transportation Engineer, SEWRPC
Andrew Levy Systems Planning Supervisor, Wisconsin Department of Transportation
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
Nakeisha Payne Public Involvement and Outreach Manager, SEWRPC
Karyn Rotker Senior Staff Attorney, ACLU of Wisconsin
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., welcomed those in attendance, and asked Mr. Muhs to assist with the introduction of new EJTF members. Mr. Muhs introduced Ms. Green-Harris, a new representative for the City of Milwaukee, who currently serves as Director of the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health Center for Community Engagement and Health Partnerships in Milwaukee where she works with underserved populations. Ms. Green-Harris is also the Director for the Life Course for Healthy Families and the

Wisconsin Alzheimer's Institute, and is recipient of numerous honors and awards, including the Alzheimer's Association of Southeast Wisconsin's Investigator of the Year Award. Mr. Muhs also welcomed Pastor Ernest J. Ni'A and indicated that his full bio was presented at the March meeting, but noted that he represents the City of Racine, is Pastor of Wayman AME Church in Racine, and is President of the Racine African American Roundtable of Leaders. Pastor Ni'A remarked that he was honored and humbled to join the distinguished group. Mr. Muhs indicated that Mr. Rolando De León, a new EJTF member representing the City of Waukesha, is excused from this meeting and will be introduced when he is able to attend.

APPROVAL OF THE MARCH 9, 2021, MEETING MINUTES

Mr. Nelson asked if there were any questions or comments on the March 9, 2021, meeting minutes. Ms. Dunbar asked Commission staff to review if she was in attendance at the March meeting. Mr. Lynde indicated that Commission staff will double check if Ms. Dunbar was in attendance. Mr. Nelson then asked for a motion to approve the meeting minutes. Ms. Adams moved, and Ms. McNeely seconded the approval of the March 9, 2021, meeting minutes. The motion was approved unanimously.

[Secretary's Note: Commission staff reviewed the recording and attendance list from the March 9, 2021, EJTF meeting and confirmed that Ms. Dunbar was not in attendance.]

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Nelson asked if there were any public comments. Mr. Wiggins indicated that the Regional Food System Plan is off to a good start and that it is progressing well. In response to Mr. Wiggins' comments, Mr. Nelson invited Mr. McKay to present an update on the Regional Food System Plan. Mr. McKay noted that the first Advisory Committee meeting was held a month ago, where members reviewed the introductory chapter and discussed issues to consider in the remainder of the plan. Mr. McKay indicated that a virtual public outreach event is planned for the end of August and that Miranda Page, who is a Fellow through Lead For America, has been conducting in-person site visits.

Mr. Nelson expressed appreciation for Mr. McKay's recent presentation about the Commission's work to the Southeastern Wisconsin Minority Veterans Advisory Board and indicated that the discussion helped share information about the Commission's work.

PRESENTATION ON TRANSPORTATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

At Mr. Nelson's request, Mr. Muhs introduced Karyn Rotker, Senior Staff Attorney of ACLU Wisconsin, and Dennis Grzezinski, Attorney at Law, who provided a presentation entitled, "Equity, Planning & Prioritization" (available [here](#)). Mr. Muhs indicated that this presentation is a follow-up to previous conversations the EJTF has had regarding transportation funding and how it is allocated in Southeastern Wisconsin. As background, he noted that the Commission is a federally designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO), which includes serving in an advisory capacity for issues related to transportation planning and funding and that there are State Statutes and Federal requirements regarding how funding is allocated within the Region. Mr. Muhs stated that the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STP) provides funding for capital projects, such as purchasing equipment or vehicles or constructing a road or path, and that the Milwaukee area has historically allocated a majority of the STP funds to streets and highways with some exceptions. The following discussion was generated from the presentation:

1. Ms. McNeely asked if there are funding repercussions related to Title VI if disparate impacts of funding distributions on minority and low-income communities are not addressed. Ms. Rotker responded that federal agencies, including the Offices of Civil Rights within the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), have the authority to withdraw funding if Title VI is violated. Ms. Rotker referenced a case in Ohio where a community did not want to allow a bus stop in their area and the federal government threatened to withdraw funding unless the community allowed the bus stop to be added. Mr. Grzezinski referenced a case in Houston, Texas, where the FHWA Office of Civil Rights directed the State of Texas to pause work on an \$8 billion highway expansion project due to Title VI concerns. Ms. Rotker and Mr. Grzezinski indicated that it appears issues of equity and civil rights are getting serious attention at the federal level.
2. Ms. McNeely asked if the State of Wisconsin determines the transportation projects that get funded from federal sources. Ms. Rotker responded that the State does so for many projects but the Commission has more opportunity to provide input on STP funding and to an extent on Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Improvement funding.
3. Ms. McNeely asked how large the area is for STP-Milwaukee (STP-M) funding. Mr. Grzezinski responded that the area includes Milwaukee, Waukesha, Ozaukee, and Washington Counties.
4. Mr. Nelson thanked Ms. Rotker and Mr. Grzezinski and indicated he, as a Commissioner, would be considering issues of equity more critically in reviewing the regional transportation improvement program and other transportation project funding proposals presented to the Commission for approval. Ms. Rotker offered to provide any additional information as needed. Mr. Grzezinski indicated that Commission research and planning have improved significantly and lay out very clearly what is needed in the Region and why it is needed. He noted, however, that implementation has not occurred and that there are opportunities for the Commission to allocate more discretionary funding to transit and to be more outspoken about the downsides of the imbalance between funding for highways and transit.
5. Ms. Brown-Martin thanked Ms. Rotker and Mr. Grzezinski and indicated that STP funding is an opportunity for the State to provide additional funding for transit. She stated that the State Legislature has the ability to increase or decrease transit funding during the biennial State budget process and expressed frustration that the State Legislature recently reduced funding to the Milwaukee County Transit System during the COVID-19 pandemic. She also noted that it could be powerful for members of the Commission's Advisory Committees on Transportation System Planning and Programming (TIP Committees) to point out when there is a disparate effect. Mr. Muhs noted that Ms. Brown-Martin is the liaison between the EJTF and the TIP Committee for the Milwaukee Urbanized Area. That Committee determines, consistent with federal restrictions, how to spend STP-M funding. He added that Commission staff works with the Committee to identify any desired changes to the STP-M project selection process every two years.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND OUTREACH DIVISION OUTREACH UPDATE

At Mr. Nelson's request, Ms. Payne gave a presentation that provided an update on outreach being conducted by the Commission's Public Involvement and Outreach Division (available [here](#)).

OVERVIEW OF PRESIDENT BIDEN'S INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

Mr. Nelson asked Mr. Muhs to provide an overview of President Biden's Infrastructure Plan. Mr. Muhs indicated this agenda item was requested by Ms. Adams. He explained that President Biden had proposed an infrastructure package and negotiated with the U.S. Senate, resulting in bipartisan agreement on specific dollar amounts for different types of infrastructure expenditures, which included about \$600 billion in additional spending over the next five to eight years. He noted that an infrastructure bill had not yet been introduced in the Senate and that an official bipartisan infrastructure package may be introduced in the Senate in the next week or so. He further noted that the U.S. House of Representatives is separately preparing a transportation reauthorization bill and once the Senate passes an infrastructure bill, the House and Senate will need to agree on how to address any conflicts between the two bills before it can be signed into law.

REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TASK FORCE ACTION ITEM LIST

Ms. Sarnecki indicated the action item list was linked within the agenda (available [here](#)) and, for the sake of time, asked EJTF members to contact staff if they have any questions or concerns.

OVERVIEW OF COMPOSITION OF APPLICANTS FOR RECENTLY FILLED COMMISSION POSITIONS

Mr. Muhs provided an overview on the composition of applicants for Commission positions filled since that last update at the October 7, 2020, meeting. He stated that the Commission had filled four positions during that time period. Applicants for the two Land Use positions filled were overwhelmingly white and the Commission hired one white male as a planner and one black male as a research analyst. Applicants were also overwhelmingly white for a summer research aide position filled in the Environmental Division, but the Commission hired a Hispanic male. Applicants for the fourth position filled, which was in the Transportation Division, were mostly International and the Commission hired an Asian female. Mr. Nelson complimented Commission staff on their efforts to build a diverse staff and credited Mr. Muhs with his leadership in those efforts.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND CORRESPONDENCE

Mr. Lynde provided a brief update on the 2021-2025 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for Southeastern Wisconsin. He stated that Commission staff had revised the draft CEDS that had been presented for public comment earlier in the year, indicating that the most notable feedback was to improve the equity component of the CEDS and that staff had made significant improvements to address that feedback. He indicated that staff is currently presenting the CEDS to each of the seven county boards to request county adoption. Following all seven counties' consideration, the Commission would consider adoption and submit the adopted CEDS to the U.S. Economic Development Administration for approval.

Mr. Lynde indicated that Commission staff is working to enhance its youth engagement efforts with a focus on increasing diversity in the planning profession, which is a statewide and national issue. He asked EJTF members to contact Commission staff with any ideas, agencies, organizations, or initiatives that staff should consider through this effort. Mr. Nelson mentioned that he had sent a resume for a bright, young African American student at Marquette University and encouraged staff to reach out to him.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

NEXT MEETING DATES

Mr. Muhs indicated the next meeting is anticipated to occur in September and that Commission staff will contact EJTF members to identify the specific meeting date.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Nelson requested a motion to adjourn. Mr. Holz moved, and Ms. McNeely seconded the motion to adjourn. The motion was approved unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Eric D. Lynde
Recording Secretary
