

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

DATE: October 13, 2021

TIME: 4:30 p.m.

PLACE: Virtual Meeting

Members Present

Aloysius NelsonCommissioner, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission;
Chair
Director, Division of Veterans Services, Kenosha County
Yolanda Adams Board of Education Member, Kenosha Unified School District
Huda Alkaff Founder and Director, Wisconsin Green Muslims
Ella Dunbar Program Services Manager, Social Development Commission, Milwaukee
Brad HolzBoard Member, IndependenceFirst
Fabi Maldonado Racine County Supervisor, District 2
Keith Martin..... Engineering Specialist - Advanced 2, Wisconsin Department of Transportation,
Southeast Region
N. Lynnette McNeely.....Legal Redress Chair, Waukesha County NAACP
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
Jacqueline Schellinger Indian Community Representative, Retired Judge
Theresa Schuerman..... Walworth County Bilingual Migrant Worker Outreach

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

Timothy Anheuser Vice President at Kapur & Associates, Inc.
Mitch Batuzich..... Transportation Planner, Federal Highway Administration
Deborah Blanks..... Partner, Kairo Communications
Brian Bliesner Project Development Chief, Wisconsin Department of Transportation
Dennis Grzezinski..... Law Office of Dennis Grzezinski
Joshua LeVeque Project Manager, Wisconsin Department of Transportation
Andrew Levy Systems Planning Supervisor, Wisconsin Department of Transportation
Eric Lynde.....Chief Special Projects Planner, SEWRPC
Benjamin McKay Deputy Director, SEWRPC
Kevin Muhs..... Executive Director, SEWRPC
Miranda Page Fellow, SEWRPC
Nakeisha Payne..... Public Involvement and Outreach Manager, SEWRPC
Karyn Rotker..... Senior Staff Attorney, ACLU of Wisconsin
Jennifer Sarnecki..... Principal Transportation Planner, SEWRPC
Jessica Thompson 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. Lynde to assist with roll call.

APPROVAL OF THE JULY 20, 2021, MEETING MINUTES

Mr. Nelson asked if there were any questions or comments on the July 20, 2021, meeting minutes. Mr. Nelson then asked for a motion to approve the meeting minutes. Ms. Schellinger moved, and Ms. Adams seconded the approval of the July 20, 2021, meeting minutes. The motion was approved unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

PRESENTATION BY WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION ON PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PLAN FOR I-94 EAST-WEST PROJECT

At Mr. Nelson's request, Mr. Muhs introduced the agenda item and noted that the presentation is a continuation of previous discussions at EJTF meetings regarding the I-94 East-West project. Mr. Muhs indicated that the agenda item would include the public engagement plan for the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the I-94 East-West project, which includes the segment of the interstate between 16th Street and 70th Street, or approximately between the Zoo Interchange and the Marquette Interchange. Mr. Muhs introduced Mr. Bliesner, Southeast Freeway Project Development Chief from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) and Mr. LeVeque, WisDOT's Project Manager for the I-94 East-West project. Mr. Bliesner noted that I-94 is an important corridor for WisDOT because it serves as a gateway to Milwaukee; however, the corridor has significant traffic, congestion, and safety issues. Mr. Bliesner stated that WisDOT, at the urging of the Governor, restarted the project in July 2020 and conducted initial public outreach. Last spring, WisDOT determined that more formalized outreach was needed and subsequently announced that they would expand the review of the project by conducting a Supplemental EIS. At the conclusion of these introductory statements, Mr. Bliesner indicated that Mr. LeVeque would review the presentation (available [here](#)). The following discussion occurred during Mr. LeVeque's presentation:

1. Mr. Maldonado asked for additional information regarding the outreach process, including when canvassing would occur, if the canvassing process will include speaking to individuals at their residences or only providing literature, what WisDOT will be asking during the outreach process, what the target areas will be, and when the focused outreach is scheduled to occur. Mr. LeVeque indicated that WisDOT intends to survey individuals who are adjacent to the I-94 East-West project corridor. Mr. Anheuser noted that WisDOT plans to work with the Community Advisory Committee, which was scheduled to meet the next day and is comprised of the community organizations listed on slide 13 of the presentation, to develop a plan to generate meaningful feedback. Specifically, Mr. Anheuser stated that organizations including Near West Side Partners, VIA, and United Community Center, will be asked for their guidance on the best methods to generate input from individuals in their communities. Mr. Anheuser indicated that one local example to gather feedback on local initiatives is "Brats for Thoughts," conducted by the Near Westside Partners. Mr. Anheuser stated that questions may include asking how community members use the freeway, if they have input on the travel experience along I-94, and if there are

transportation strategies that could improve their quality of life. Mr. Bliesner noted that gathering feedback and ideas regarding bicycle and pedestrian connectivity and safety near the corridor is also an important topic that has been discussed with community groups and will be explored further in future outreach efforts.

2. Ms. Schellinger asked if WisDOT has contacted the Potawatomi Tribe since the property owned by the Forest County Potawatomi Community, could be impacted by the project given its proximity to the I-94 East-West corridor. Mr. LeVeque indicated that the project team met with representatives from the Potawatomi Hotel and Casino earlier in the project development phase and WisDOT is planning to meet with their representatives soon, as there has been a change in Potawatomi's leadership. Mr. LeVeque noted that formal tribal coordination will take place as part of the environmental review process. Mr. Bliesner stated that Potawatomi Hotel and Casino is a member of the Menomonee Valley Partners Board and that there have been conversations with their representatives through the Board meetings where WisDOT staff received feedback on project impacts to their operations at the hotel and casino. Mr. Bliesner indicated that WisDOT could have additional discussions with the Potawatomi Tribe in consideration of their property. Mr. Anheuser indicated that they are happy to add individuals to the outreach process. Ms. Schellinger indicated that she feels strongly that Native American People should be contacted due to the potential impacts of the I-94 East-West project to the property. Ms. Schellinger noted that the Potawatomi Tribe should be included in the process as a partner, beyond gathering input from an individual who is a member of a larger board.
3. Ms. Schellinger asked if additional funding is anticipated for the I-94 East-West project based on the proposed infrastructure bill being considered in Congress. Mr. Bliesner indicated that WisDOT is considering various financial scenarios, including one which may include a ten percent increase in the amount of Federal funds available for the project, which is significant. Mr. Bliesner noted that until final funding levels are made available, it is difficult to specify the potential financial impact.
4. Ms. Rotker asked if there will be an opportunity to provide input on the size and design of interchanges, and if there will be a broader visioning component that could inform or change some of the plans for the I-94 East-West project. Mr. Bliesner indicated WisDOT is open to all forms of feedback and noted that the current process is supplementing previous designs, which have documented the locations and types of interchanges planned. Mr. Bliesner stated that a future public meeting will provide participants options to provide feedback, but other types of input are welcome and will be considered as part of the development of the EIS. Mr. Bliesner noted that WisDOT is implementing the vision that was approved by the Legislature to address the existing conditions on the I-94 East-West corridor. Mr. Muhs indicated that there may also be an opportunity to incorporate some of the broader feedback on the I-94 East-West project into WisDOT's Connect 2050 process that is currently underway.
5. Mr. Nelson asked for more details about the off-alignment alternative. Mr. LeVeque indicated that the off-alignment alternative referred to an option previously considered, but noted that WisDOT now plans to match the existing alignment to reduce overall impacts.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION RELATED TO REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM PLAN

At Mr. Nelson's request, Mr. McKay reviewed the agenda item and introduced Ms. Page. Ms. Page gave a presentation (available [here](#)) that summarized the proposed Regional Food System Plan contents, provided an overview of Chapter 1, and reviewed input from recent outreach efforts. The following discussion occurred during Ms. Page's presentation:

1. Ms. Schellinger asked how the Regional Food System Plan will connect to local planning processes to communicate the benefits of regional planning. Mr. McKay indicated that the Regional Food System Plan is recommended by VISION 2050 and that the long-range land use planning recommendations are integrated into this effort. He noted that the Regional Food System Plan will describe the benefits of a compact urban development pattern on farmland preservation and food production. He also noted that the Regional Food System Plan Advisory Committee includes representatives from each county in the Region, which provides an opportunity to communicate the benefits of the compact land use pattern recommended in VISION 2050. Commission staff also assists counties and communities throughout the Region with various types of local plans upon request, which provides an additional opportunity for staff to communicate regional plan recommendations.
2. Ms. McNeely asked if Commission staff are involved in M7's Build Back Better grant application through the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). Mr. Muhs indicated that the Commission is a coalition partner and that the initiative recognizes the Regional Food System Plan as a regional planning asset. Ms. Brown-Martin requested a presentation from M7 regarding the Build Back Better grant proposal. Mr. Muhs noted that due to the very short timeline for submitting the grant application, there was not adequate time for extensive outreach and public discussion. Mr. Muhs specified that EDA's Build Back Better grant program is split into two phases, with the first phase providing up to \$500,000 for technical work to refine projects, and the second phase providing between \$25 million and \$100 million to implement specific projects if awarded. If the first phase of the project is awarded funding, Mr. Muhs indicated there will be a presentation to the EJTF and other partner organizations. Ms. McNeely agreed that Ms. Brown-Martin's request for a presentation to the EJTF is necessary given the equity and inclusion emphasis of the Build Back Better grant program.
3. Ms. McNeely asked how the public outreach process captured the range of technologies available for food delivery, such as smartphone apps, and how or if they impacted access to food. Mr. McKay indicated that the project team will consider how technologies have or could impact food availability from a grocery store or restaurants. Mr. McKay noted that once the data and information are compiled, Commission staff will conduct another public outreach phase at which time staff can ask which technologies people are using to access food and how these technologies might relate to the more traditional methods of accessing food.
4. Ms. Brown-Martin asked if the Regional Food System Plan will consider both larger farming practices and small community urban farming. Mr. McKay indicated that the planning process has included a review of regional commodity production and urban agriculture, including asset mapping of food production locations in the Region. Ms. Brown-Martin inquired if the plan would address opportunities to conduct youth education, including working with cultural groups, associated with urban farming, as this is an important component of addressing food deserts within an urban center. Ms. Page noted that the plan will include educational aspects related to urban agriculture in Chapter 2 and that Chapter 3 will discuss food education and food literacy. Ms.

Dunbar noted that there are two specific urban agriculture initiatives with an educational focus and that their representatives could provide input to the plan. The two initiatives include Walnut Way, encompassing a two-block radius around North Avenue and 17th Street, and the urban farming facility formerly owned by Will Allen at 55th Street and Silver Spring Drive. Mr. McKay noted that Walnut Way has a representative on the Advisory Committee, and they have provided helpful input during the planning process. Regarding the urban farming collaborative formerly owned by Will Allen, Mr. McKay indicated that Commission staff contacted the new owners inviting them to participate in the planning process.

5. Ms. McNeely asked if the Regional Food System Plan is considering hydroponics. Ms. Page indicated that the plan would discuss alternative agriculture practices, such as hydroponics and aquaponics, and document their current and future methods, including how these processes could influence food production in the future.

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 that the latest infrastructure bill, entitled the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), was passed by the Senate and is currently under consideration by the House of Representatives, and noted that the current IIJA is tied to the reconciliation bill, which is generating high levels of attention. Mr. Muhs stated that the current infrastructure bill includes \$1.2 trillion, with \$550 billion above previous funding for transportation and infrastructure. In addition to transportation, the bill includes \$67 billion for revolving funds related to clean water and drinking water, including funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, \$64 billion for broadband improvements, and \$63 billion for energy programs that reduce reliance on fossil fuels. Mr. Muhs noted that there will be \$100 billion in competitive grants through the U.S. Department of Transportation, which is a larger amount than previously received. Mr. Muhs stated that there are funding increases to programs that Commission staff help distribute, including the Surface Transportation Program and the Congestion Mitigation Air Quality program. The following comments occurred after the summary by Mr. Muhs:

1. Mr. Batuzich indicated that during a virtual meeting with the Wisconsin Division staff, Tom Everett, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Executive Director, stated that due to the increases in General Operating Expenses (GOE), there are funds to hire 200 additional FHWA staff nationally, indicating an anticipated increase in staff hours needed to implement the programs in the IIJA.
2. Ms. Brown-Martin noted that there are approximately five programs that allow funding to be received directly by a local municipality or county, rather than being distributed by state departments of transportation. Mr. Batuzich added that there is the anticipation that many recipients will take advantage of this option, increasing the amount of FHWA staff hours, which are covered by the increased GOE funds.

[Secretary's Note: On November 15, 2021, President Biden signed the IIJA, which includes \$351 billion for highways with \$307 billion provided through formula programs to states. Initial estimates released by the Governor's Office indicate that Wisconsin could receive an estimated \$5.2 billion for federal-aid highway apportioned programs based on formula funding under the IIJA over five years. The IIJA includes \$106.9 billion for transit, \$23 billion

for the Capital Investment Grants program, and \$5.25 billion for the Low-No Emissions vehicle program.]

REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TASK FORCE ACTION ITEM LIST

Mr. Nelson indicated that the action item list was linked within the agenda for review (available [here](#)) and, in the interest 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 of the composition of applicants for Commission positions filled since the last update at the July 20, 2021, meeting. He stated that the Commission recently filled an administrative assistant/graphic designer position, and that of the 57 applicants, one-third completed the affirmative action information. Of the applicants that submitted information, there were four Hispanic applicants and one Black applicant, and the position was filled by a female Hispanic. Ms. McNeely stated that the job opening information and details regarding the composition of applicants for recently filled positions is appreciated.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND CORRESPONDENCE

Mr. Muhs announced that Commission staff have been working with professors at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) to implement an approximately \$1 million grant that will pilot a last-mile transportation service to connect individuals on the north side of Milwaukee to jobs in the Villages of Menomonee Falls and Butler. Mr. Muhs noted that there are additional ongoing efforts to expand access to suburban business parks for individuals without access to a car.

Mr. Muhs indicated that the Commission is in the process of updating its website and EJTF members will receive a survey to gather input on the current website and areas for improvement. In addition to the online survey, Mr. Muhs invited EJTF members to contact Commission staff with comments on the website.

Ms. Brown-Martin announced that the Social Development Commission is hosting the Summit on Poverty from October 19 through 21, in coordination with Marquette University and several other sponsors. Mr. Nelson requested that Commission staff share information related to the Summit on Poverty with the EJTF, which was provided after the meeting. Ms. Dunbar shared the link in the meeting chat (available [here](#)).

Mr. Nelson announced that Kenosha County opened their first Veterans Memorial Park, which is comprised of 330 acres and a 35-acre lake. Mr. Nelson noted the involvement of the Wisconsin Department of National Resources and the Commission, who helped during the two-year process, and indicated that more information will be shared in the future as additional phases are implemented in 2022 and 2023.

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 December and that Commission staff will contact EJTF members to identify the specific meeting date.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer B. Sarnecki
Recording Secretary
