

Minutes of the Sixty-Sixth Meeting of the
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TASK FORCE

DATE: March 11, 2025

TIME: 5:00 p.m.

PLACE: Virtual Meeting

Members Present

Aloysius Nelson, Chair Sigma Pi Phi (the Boulé)
Yolanda Adams Board of Education Member, Kenosha Unified School District
Huda Alkaff Founder & Director, Wisconsin Green Muslims
Donna Brown-Martin Commissioner, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission;
Director, Milwaukee County Department of Transportation;
Liaison to Advisory Committee on Regional Transportation Planning
Brad Holz Board Member, Independence First
Keith Martin Construction Representative Senior, Wisconsin Department of Administration
Kermiath McClendon Impact Investment Manager, Greater Milwaukee Foundation
N. Lynnette McNeely Legal Redress Chair, Waukesha County NAACP
Andrea Mendez Barrutia Director of Milwaukee Chapter of Techqueria
GeorgeAnn Stinson President, African American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Racine

Members Excused

Annabell Bustillos Bilingual Outreach Advocate, BeLeaf Survivors
Gina Sanchez Juarez Director of Financial Stability, La Casa de Esperanza
Jackie Schellinger Indian Community Representative, Retired Judge

Guests Present

Karyn Rotker Legal Action of Wisconsin

Commission Staff Present

Eric Lynde Chief Special Projects Planner
Benjamin McKay Deputy Director
Nakeisha Payne Chief Community Engagement Specialist
Jennifer Sarnecki Deputy Chief Transportation Planner
Dana Shinnars Transportation Planner

CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

Mr. McKay called the meeting of the Environmental Justice Task Force (EJTF) to order at 5:05 p.m. and welcomed those in attendance. He noted that Mr. Nelson was having technical difficulties joining the meeting and that he would chair the meeting until Mr. Nelson arrived. Mr. Nelson arrived and shared that Ms. Terry Schuerman and Ms. Ella Dunbar have resigned from the Task Force. He thanked them for their service. Mr. Nelson welcomed Mr. McClendon to the Task Force as a new member.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS ON DECEMBER 10, 2024

Mr. Nelson asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the December 10, 2024, meeting ([link](#)). Mr. Holz moved, and Ms. McNeely seconded the approval of the meeting minutes. The motion was approved unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

COMMISSION STAFF UPDATE ON COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES AND PLAN

At the request of Mr. Nelson, Ms. Payne provided an update of the Commission's community engagement activities (presentation available [here](#)). The following discussion occurred after the presentation:

1. Ms. Brown-Martin asked the Community Engagement staff to look at opportunities to connect with WNOV Radio as a tool to reach out to the Milwaukee Community. She stated that it would be a good platform to introduce the Commission and bring information about the EJTF. Ms. Payne said that she agreed and is considering the best timing to reach out to the station.
2. Ms. Alkaff asked what grades are engaged for the Commission's school outreach activities. Ms. Payne responded that activities are typically tailored to elementary, middle, and high schools.

Mr. Lynde provided an update on the Community Engagement Plan, which was shared at the previous Task Force meeting. He said staff are working on some updates based on internal feedback, including adding more graphics. The next step would be to send the draft to United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) for review and then to release the plan to the public for a 45-day comment period. Following the comment period, Commission staff would consider public comments, finalize the plan, and provide it to the Commission to review and approve. Mr. Lynde said that there has not been guidance from USDOT on Executive Orders involving Environmental Justice, which is referenced in multiple places in the plan. He stated that Commission staff are in contact with federal agencies and continue to connect with peer MPOs to understand what other agencies are doing. He invited Task Force members to share their opinions and the following discussion occurred:

1. Mr. Nelson asked for clarification that there has been no guidance from USDOT. Mr. Lynde confirmed this was correct, but that Executive Order (E.O.) 14173, "Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity," signed by President Trump on January 21, 2025, revokes E.O. 12898, "Federal Actions To Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations." Mr. McKay added that federal agencies, including USDOT, have told Commission staff that guidance is not available at this time.
2. Ms. McNeely asked what this means for the Commission and EJTF. Mr. McKay shared that staff has engaged in internal discussions about potential impacts to the Commission's work. He noted that potential changes to the EJTF could be to rename the Task Force and/or reframe its focus areas.
3. Ms. Mendez Barrutia noted that it would be beneficial to wait for more guidance before making changes. She offered that some other groups seem to be changing terminology but keeping the same or similar focuses. Ms. Mendez Barrutia noted that 'diverse' and 'disability' may also be terms impacted by federal agendas. Mr. McKay noted that any change in the EJTF focus would require discussion with the Executive Committee or full Commission.

4. Ms. Brown-Martin shared that Milwaukee County, under County Executive Crowley and former County Executive Abele, has identified racism as a public health issue and it is integrated into a strategic plan with a mission, vision, and values associated with Environmental Justice. She noted that there has not been concrete information from the federal government on what should be done and therefore there is not a need to make adjustments at this time.
5. Ms. McNeely agreed with Ms. Brown-Martin. She asked if the Executive Orders affect the Commission's work. Mr. McKay shared that some websites to draw down federal grants are open, and that federal transportation planning funding is available through the end of the year. Mr. Hiebert said that Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) staff have indicated the Commission can continue work as usual until there is further guidance. He explained that the Commission has MPO duties through a congressional mandate and that the Commission was created by the State.
6. Ms. Rotker shared that E.O. 14151, "Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing." and E.O. 14173, "Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity." have been blocked by federal courts. She reminded members that the EJTF was not formed solely because of E.O. 12898, but also for communities in Southeastern Wisconsin that felt they were being underrepresented. She noted that EJ is grounded in Title VI, which still stands. Mr. McKay added that the EJTF was formed in 2006 following the 2004 federal certification review of the regional transportation planning process, which identified a need to better reach out to all populations within Southeastern Wisconsin. Mr. McKay added that Commission plans are built on sound planning principle regardless of terminology used.
7. Mr. Nelson reflected that people have been affected in the Kenosha community, including at the VA. He said that the EJTF's responsibilities should include representing all residents in the Region.
8. Ms. McNeely asked that the Community Engagement Plan include proper statutory citations to the Civil Rights Act.

BIENNIAL REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TASK FORCE GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

At Mr. Nelson's request, Mr. Lynde shared the EJTF Guidance Document ([link](#)). The following discussion occurred during the review:

1. Ms. Brown-Martin asked that that Title VI and 49 CFR Part 21 "Nondiscrimination in Federally-Assisted Programs of the Department of Transportation - Effectuation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964" be referenced in the Guidance Document as federal laws. She added that EJTF members and Commission staff should be aware of the activity "Increase staff diversity," but no action should be taken at this time.
2. Mr. Nelson asked how the federal changes would impact the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and funding coming to the State. Mr. Lynde explained that the CEDS was prepared in coordination with The Milwaukee 7 Regional Economic Partnership (M7) and allows counties and local governments with economically distressed census tracts to apply for funding from certain EDA grant programs. He noted that VISION 2050 also includes recommendations related to economic development and that the CEDS and VISION 2050 will be updated in parallel over the next couple years. He also stated that Commission staff are in the process of applying to EDA to create an Economic Development District opening up additional funding avenues. However, the impact of changes at the federal level on that application is

unknown at this point. Mr. McKay emphasized that the CEDS provides an opportunity for county and local governments to apply for funds, but the plan does bring in a specified amount of money for the region. He added that the Commission is pursuing a short-term planning grant to help fund a CEDS update and that new federal priorities have already been identified for the application.

3. Ms. Mendez Barrutia said that there is an E.O. on English as the official language. She shared that she hoped this would not impact existing activities by Community Engagement staff to reach people through their preferred language.

REVIEW OF EJTF ACTION ITEM LIST

At Mr. Nelson's request, Ms. Sarnecki reviewed the action item list (available [here](#)). Ms. Sarnecki highlighted that the Guidance Document includes a reference to the action item list. She reminded the Task Force that some resolved items were discussed and removed following the December 2024 meeting. There was no discussion on the topic.

OVERVIEW OF COMPOSITION OF APPLICANTS FOR RECENTLY FILLED COMMISSION POSITIONS

At Mr. Nelson's request, Mr. McKay shared that the Commission recently filled three positions. The Community Engagement Specialist position had 45 applicants and of those who reported race/ethnicity there were six white applicants and two people of color. The position was filled by a white female. The part-time Administrative Assistant role had 28 applicants; including three applicants that provided race/ethnicity identified as white. A black female was hired. Finally, the Transportation Planner position received 26 applicants, four of whom reported being white. A white male was hired for the role.

Ms. McNeely asked for the current number of people of color on staff at the Commission. Mr. McKay said that he will update this information soon, but typically staff includes approximately eight or nine people of color.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND CORRESPONDENCE

Ms. Brown-Martin welcomed Mr. McClendon. Mr. McClendon thanked the Task Force for the opportunity to join.

Ms. Rotker shared that she appreciated the Task Force members and the support from Commission staff in the conversation at today's meeting.

Ms. Payne shared that Community Engagement staff have a lot of events coming up, including new events in Washington County and Ozaukee County.

NEXT MEETING DATES

Mr. Nelson indicated that the next meeting is scheduled for June 10, 2025, as a hybrid meeting.

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ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Nelson adjourned the meeting at 6:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dana Shinnars
Recording Secretary
