

DRAFT.



DEIJA COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes

DATE: Thursday, February 29, 2024

TIME: 6 - 7:30pm

LOCATION: Georgetown Public Library, Meeting Room A1 (located on second floor)
123 West Pine Street, Georgetown, DE 19947

Remote via Zoom:

By computer: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83871927116>

By phone: (301) 715-8592

Meeting ID: 838 7192 7116 #

MEETING CALLED BY: Dr. Marlene Saunders, Chair

Attendees: *Chris Brosch, Anna Fagan, Bonnie Hall, Russ Huxtable, Michelle Koenig, Bry Lisiewski, Lisa Locke, Marissa McClenton, Meghan Noe Fellows, Asua Oforu, Angela Padeletti, María Payán, Michael Payán, Nivette Pérez-Pérez, Ragghi Rain, Flavia Rutkosky, Aimee Thorne-Thomsen, Christophe Tulou, Chanta Howard Wilkinson*

Welcome / Call to Order

6:02pm

M. Saunders

M. Saunders welcomed everyone to the meeting. Attendees introduced themselves.

Meeting Agenda Review

M. Saunders

Group Agreements

N. Pérez-Pérez

N. Pérez-Pérez reviewed the Group Agreements identified at the inaugural meeting in December and asked attendees if there were any they'd like to add or discuss further. Michael Payán inquired about the 17 principles of environmental justices. The group agreed it would be good to incorporate these somehow. Other attendees shared which Agreements resonated with them. Of note were "Listen to understand, not to respond or judge," "Let two others speak before commenting again," "Be empathetic," and "Walk a mile in others' moccasins."

Review Committee Goals and Objectives

A. Fagan

The group viewed a video on Environmental Justice identified by L. Locke.

A. Fagan reviewed the Committee Goals and Objectives as identified by the smaller steering committee that has worked to get the full committee up and running. She stated that these goals and objectives may shift as membership increases and priorities become clearer.

A. Fagan also reviewed communities of focus for the Committee, which include Georgetown, Long Neck, Millsboro, Oak Orchard and Selbyville within the Inland Bays watershed, and Bridgeville, Seaford, Milford, Gumboro, Laurel in greater Sussex County.

Finally, A. Fagan reviewed the Center's mission and activities that it undertakes to provide context for the ways in which the Center can be of assistance to these communities.

Watershed Communities' Challenges and Opportunities

All

Open discussion began on opportunities and challenges in communities, including:

- ❖ *Empowering communities to advocate for themselves on important issues, particularly in Sussex County. Political leanings and the deeply rooted history of southern Delaware often prevent maximum efforts. Fear of retaliation is often a major concern when it comes to environmental pollution or labor concerns, as the people being negatively impacted are employed by the offenders.*
- ❖ *Lack of trust in organizations and decisionmakers. Many communities experience "fly-ins," quick visits for public relations purposes, but not meaningful engagement or true allyship from those that can help. Those that are allies must have the courage to speak up on behalf of communities that aren't equipped to do so.*
- ❖ *Air and water pollution caused by the poultry industry, as well as workplace safety and labor law. Additional monitoring is needed to collect data that can validate community concerns when they speak with legislators. The need for a monitoring station at Possum Point on Indian River was raised.*
- ❖ *Lack of education on how to effectively make public comment when proposed activities will affect a neighborhood or community. Lack of transparency and combative attitudes during permitting processes, leading to an us vs. them mentality, which is an obstacle for reaching true understanding. This is an area where the Center can lead by example.*
- ❖ *Importance of youth engagement in all of these discussions. One idea is to engage youth in an oral history of Sussex County through an Environmental Justice lens. Another was to showcase Delaware Interfaith Power and Light's RENEW essay contest winners.*
- ❖ *The question was raised, can the Center speak out against industry for environmental wrongdoing? The answer was yes, they can, and have done so in the past.*
- ❖ *B. Lisiewski briefly spoke on the Center's forthcoming Habitat Plan and sought feedback on species of social and cultural significance. Members of the committee invited her to reach out for further discussion.*

Commitments / Next Steps

All

- ❖ *M. Saunders asked attendees to commit themselves as official members of the Committee. Bonnie Hall, María Payán, Michael Payán, and Flavia Rutkosky agreed. Marissa McClenton is tentative.*
- ❖ *The Center will follow up with María Payán and Michael Payán and the Sussex Health & Environmental Network to learn more about their work, including their role with the Environmental Protection Agency's Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers Program, and identify possible opportunities to support.*
- ❖ *The next meeting of the committee is on April 11 at 6pm at a location TBD.*

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Open Forum

- ❖ *C. Wilkinson informed the Committee of the Moving Delaware Forward: From Equity Awareness To Action conference taking place April 18-19 in Wilmington. She asked that Committee leadership circulate information to members and interested parties. The Committee suggested that the group create a poster to display.*

Adjourn

7:47pm

M. Saunders