

Highlights from May 2, 2024 Community Meeting in Toppenish

Preliminary Environmental Justice Council Staff Summary
May 3, 2024 EJ Council Meeting

Overview and Next Steps

Community members, EJ Council members, Council staff, and HEAL agency staff met from noon to 8pm yesterday at Heritage University in Toppenish.

Community members shared environmental justice issues, concerns, ideas, solutions, and victories.

We want to thank everyone who was there yesterday. We are so grateful for your time, expertise, insights, and guidance.

Overview and Next Steps

The Council is committed to being accountable to communities, and asked staff to provide a preliminary summary today of what communities shared, along with staff recommendations on actions the Council can take to be responsive to what we heard in yesterday's meetings.

Overview and Next Steps

One night is not enough time to do a **comprehensive** analysis of the information and wisdom community members shared yesterday. We could not do justice to the gifts and data that community brought in our 8 hours of dialogue overnight. So today, staff are going to share some **highlights** from yesterday's meeting, along with examples of actions the Council can take to be responsive. Today's presentation will not be a comprehensive analysis of the knowledge and wisdom shared yesterday.

Overview and Next Steps

Following today's meeting, our team will do a thorough analysis of all the information provided by community members yesterday and provide a comprehensive document to the Council outlining the information shared and actions that the Council can take to be responsive. Our goal is to provide this to the Council at their July 25, 2024 meeting.

Overview and Next Steps

We will also follow-up and continue to report out to the community members who provided their contact information yesterday as we work with the data they provided, so the action steps the Council will take are concrete and made with continued guidance from the community.

Types of **Actions** the Council Can Take

As an advisory body, the Council influences state agencies, the Governor, and the Legislature through guidance and recommendations.

The Council can direct staff to:

- Conduct research
- Gather more information
- Follow-up with community members
- Request legal analysis
- Amplify community concerns, ideas, and solutions to state agencies, the Governor and/or the Legislature
- Refer an issue to the appropriate state agency for action and track actions for accountability

Types of Recommendations the Council Can Make

- Budget recommendations to the Governor and Legislature
- Recommendations/guidance to state agencies
- Recommendations on state policy changes needed to promote environmental justice

EJ Council Staff Recommended Council Actions

Type of action the Council can take

Adopt recommendations on state policy changes needed to promote environmental justice

Summary of comments provided yesterday

The Department of Labor and Industries is not included in the HEAL Act and has not opted-in despite the significant environmental justice impacts they have on the entire workforce. Labor and Industries should comply with the HEAL Act.

Staff recommended Council actions

Direct staff to connect with partners and policy-makers to gather information for the Council to consider a possible policy recommendation to the Legislature and Governor to add Labor and Industries to the HEAL Act

EJ Council Staff Recommended Council Actions

Type of action the Council can take

Adopt recommendations on state policy changes needed to promote environmental justice

Summary of comments provided yesterday

The definition of “environmental justice” currently in the HEAL Act does not mention gender.

Staff recommended Council actions

Direct staff to connect with partners and policy-makers to gather information for the Council to consider a possible policy recommendation to the Legislature and Governor on changes needed to the definition of environmental justice in the HEAL Act.

EJ Council Staff Recommended Council Actions

Type of action the Council can take

Adopt budget recommendations to the Governor and Legislature

Summary of comments provided yesterday

One-time grant funding is often harmful to communities. It creates timelines for communities to do the work that are not feasible, puts community-based organizations in a situation where they can't answer questions from community members about when or if there will be additional funding which can damage their relationships and jeopardize the community's trust in their organization. Furthermore, the investment is often not sufficient to lead to change.

Staff recommended Council actions

Direct staff to bring this issue to the Council's Budget Committee this month so they can discuss possibly proposing budget recommendations to the full Council about continuing funding for grant programs funded as one-time this biennium.

EJ Council Staff Recommended Council Actions

Type of action the Council can take

Adopt budget recommendations to the Governor and Legislature

Summary of comments provided yesterday

A strong desire to purchase land that is not being used for farmworker communities to come together in co-ownership. This can mitigate problems of corporate agriculture, provide food security, create local food production, and foster state resilience in times of crisis. The Council should adopt a budget recommendation to fund the creation of farmworker land-cooperatives in Washington.

Staff recommended Council actions

Direct staff to bring this issue to the Council's Budget Committee this month so they can discuss possibly proposing this as a budget recommendation to the full Council.

EJ Council Staff Recommended Council Actions

Type of action the Council can take

Adopt budget recommendations to the Governor and Legislature

Summary of comments provided yesterday

State grant programs don't provide pre-payment to organizations and will only reimburse community-based organizations. Many organizations, particularly small organizations, don't have the resources to pay costs up front and be reimbursed. This is an equity issue.

Staff recommended Council actions

Direct staff to bring this issue to the Council's Budget Committee this month so they can discuss possibly proposing a budget recommendations to the full Council to create a state revolving fund which would cover up-front costs for organizations who receive grants that do not have the resources to wait for reimbursement. This account could generate interest.

EJ Council Staff Recommended Council Actions

Type of action the Council can take

Refer an issue to the appropriate state agency for action and track actions for accountability

Summary of comments provided yesterday

Community members outlined extensive barriers to accessing grant funds including, but not limited to: reimbursement only options; high barrier applications and reporting requirements; slow payments from agencies that often mean organizations can't pay staff and may lose staff; grant stipulations that don't allow the funds to be used for staff salaries and benefits, for providing food or childcare at community events, for interest payments on loans required to cover up-front costs needed because of the reimbursement only system, or other costs essential to do the work.

Staff recommended Council actions

Direct staff to research and draft language for the Council's consideration referring this issue to the HEAL agencies and requesting a report-back from HEAL agencies on 1) how they will make internal changes to address these barriers where they have control and 2) provide information to the Council about specific state and federal policy barriers that prevent agencies from making the needed changes. Including learning from Commerce, which received funding to review grant processes.

EJ Council Staff Recommended Council Actions

Type of action the Council can take

Recommendations/guidance to state agencies

Summary of comments provided yesterday

State agencies such as Department of Agriculture and Department of Ecology are not enforcing existing environmental protection laws, which is costing Yakima county residents their lives.

Staff recommended Council actions

Recommendation 1: Direct staff to research/explore possible guidance to state agencies for the Council to consider to add “agency inaction in enforcement of environmental violations” as a significant agency action that would require an Environmental Justice Assessment. Note: The Council discussed this at their 5/3/24 meeting and recommended various alternative language/approaches for consideration. You can watch this conversation here (at 1:23:30): [EJ Council Meeting - Zoom](#)

Recommendation 2: Direct staff to work with the Attorney General’s Office (AGO) to learn and report back to the Council and communities on how communities can get a better understanding about what would constitute violations to existing laws. Not asking the AGO to give legal advice, but to explore where violations are happening and where agencies do not enforce existing laws.

EJ Council Staff Recommended Council Actions

Type of action the Council can take

Recommendations/guidance to state agencies

Summary of comments provided yesterday

We need to map the food systems in Washington State looking at the network of workforce, food production, food transportation, etc.

Staff recommended Council actions

Direct staff to research and work with community members who generated this idea to further detail this idea for the Council to consider possible guidance to the various agencies involved in Washington food systems to map out the systems (and to come together to develop a decision-package if agencies cannot complete this work with existing resources).

Overview and Next Steps

Today we just provided a few points from yesterday's meeting. Staff will provide a more comprehensive analysis and continue to follow up with community members and the Council

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