

Adopted Minutes of the Environmental Justice Council

April 10, 2026

Virtual ZOOM Platform

Due to limited staff capacity, Environmental Justice Council (Council) staff are working to streamline the Council meeting notes. The notes now include only very high-level points and the final decisions made along with voting records. The full meeting recordings can be found on the Council's website: [Environmental Justice Council Meetings | WaPortal.org](https://www.waportal.org/EnvironmentalJusticeCouncilMeetings). However, it is important that meeting notes are useful to the Council Members and the public. Please share feedback with Council staff on how we can make these notes most useful to you by emailing envjustice@ejc.wa.gov or by calling 360-584-4398.

Council Members present:

- Tatiana Brown (Co-Chair)
- Cristina González Torres (joined at 1:20pm)
- David Mendoza (present from 1pm-2pm and from 2:35pm-4:00pm)
- Esther Min (joined at 1:15pm)
- Faaluaina Pritchard

Council Members absent:

- Nichole Banegas
- Maria Batayola
- The Honorable Jarred-Michael Erickson (Co-Chair)
- Todd Mitchell
- Running-Grass
- The Honorable JJ Wilbur

Agency Ex Officio Liaisons present:

- Jennifer Grove, Department of Commerce
- Lauren Jenks, Department of Health
- Nicole Johnson, Department of Agriculture
- Jerry Rivero, Department of Natural Resources
- Emilie Litsinger, Puget Sound Partnership
- Ahmer Nizam, Department of Transportation
- Millie Piazza, Department of Ecology

Council staff:

- Jonathan Chen
- Angie Ellis
- Christy Curwick Hoff
- Dana Myers
- Sierra Red Bow
- Sierra Rotakhina

Guests and other participants:

- Dana Myers, HEAL Interagency Workgroup

I. Welcome and Roll Call for Quorum

Tatiana Brown, Council Co-Chair, called the meeting to order. She recognized the Environmental Justice (EJ) Council's 4-year anniversary of its first meeting, saying it was a great time to reflect on the work and plan for the future. She said Council Member Maria Blancas' term has ended and thanked her for her contributions. She said the Council now has 5 vacant seats and encouraged Tribal and community members to apply.

Christy Curwick Hoff, Council Staff, facilitated roll call. At the time of the initial roll call, there were 3 voting members present, not meeting quorum (see table).

11 Members / 5 Vacancies / 0 Leaves of Absence / Current Quorum = 6		
Nichole Banegas	Business Representative	Absent
Maria Batayola	Community Representative	Absent
Tatiana Brown (Co-Chair)	Community Representative	Present
The Honorable Jarred-Michael Erickson (Co-Chair)	Tribal Representative	Absent
Cristina González Torres	Community Representative	Absent
David Mendoza	Representative At Large	Present
Esther Min	EJ Practitioner	Absent
Todd Mitchell	Union Representative	Absent

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Faaluaina Pritchard	Community Representative	Present
Running-Grass	EJ Practitioner	Absent
The Honorable JJ Wilbur	Tribal Representative	Absent
Vacant	Community Representative	Vacant
Vacant	Community Representative	Vacant
Vacant	Community Representative	Vacant
Vacant	Tribal Representative	Vacant
Vacant	Tribal Representative	Vacant

II. Approval of Agenda by Council

The Council did not have a quorum, so they did not approve the agenda.

III. Approval of January 29, 2026 Meeting Notes by Council

The Council did not have a quorum, so they did not take action on the meeting notes.

IV. Public Comment

David Mendoza, Council Member, opened the public comment period.

Shakila Kajaby, New American's Alliance for Policy and Research, shared information about the refugee and migrant community. They said these communities face disproportionate environmental hazards and health impacts, compounded by poor social determinants of health. Many are housed in older substandard buildings. These conditions are worsened by the trauma of war, persecution, and displacement that they face. These communities also face language barriers and restricted access to essential services. The Alliance is working to address the inequities that require targeted environmental justice strategies including tracking, language access, and inclusive policy making. They said they hope to work with the EJ Council to ensure the health of immigrant and refugee communities is addressed.

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Member Mendoza said that the Council has adopted past budget recommendations to invest in communities, such as reducing environmental exposure to lead in schools. He said he appreciated the comments. Co-Chair Brown asked what areas they work in, and Shakila said they serve King County. Co-Chair Brown asked Shakila to share contact information so she could follow up.

V. 2026 Legislative Session Recap

Christy Curwick Hoff referred members to the memo on page 18 of the meeting materials. She shared information about SHB 2496, which the Council supported, and which specifies requirements for the Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council when it conducts Government-to-Government consultation. She shared Council activities related to the budget and highlighted that there were no cuts to HEAL implementation funding in the adopted supplemental budget. She said the passage of E2SHB 2251 made changes to the Climate Commitment Act (CCA) Accounts and said the Council and the Budget Workgroup may want to have strategic conversations about what the changes mean for future Council budget recommendations. Member Mendoza stressed that these changes will result in less operating funds going to HEAL implementation and generally less CCA revenue in the operating budget. He said programs funded in the past by CCA revenue will now have to compete for General Fund dollars. He said this is a big concern as we move into 2027 legislative session and it fundamentally shifts the ways the EJ Council has been developing its budget recommendations.

Christy also shared information about a HEAL work session and possible implications for the HEAL Act in future sessions. Jerry Rivero, Ex Officio Liaison for the Department of Natural Resources, said they had been working on process improvements for Environmental Justice Assessments (EJAs) and the work session was a signal to reflect on how to improve the EJAs moving forward. He also stressed that the HEAL Act is still very young. Member Mendoza said

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there is some amount of confusion on whether the HEAL Act applies to boards and commissions connected with HEAL agencies. Millie Piazza, Ex Officio from the Department of Ecology, said the definition of overburdened communities and EJ communities was also raised in the work session and she would welcome that conversation. She said they want to identify the most vulnerable and the most at risk. Co-Chair Brown said the Council has some work to do to make sure folks understand environmental justice, the origins of the work, and the need to have communities represented.

Co-Chair Brown asked for clarity about the changes to the revenue available in the Air Quality and Health Disparities Improvement Account (AQHDIA). Member Mendoza said that previously there was \$20 million distributed to AQHDIA each biennium and that the Air Quality Grants Program was funded by AQHDIA funds. He stressed his concern with AQHDIA being the only defunded account.

Sierra Rotakhina, Council Staff, referred Council Members to the written public comments in their meeting packets. She said there were comments about the proposed biogas digester in Sunnyside. She said that the supplemental materials included a letter from Front and Centered urging the Council to take time to work on CCA issues when the Council discusses its workplan.

Theo Moment

A moment to share how you have affected change, witnessed good, or overall done something light and beautiful in the name of environmental justice.

Cristina González Torres, Council Member, said considering all the detentions that have been taking place across the state, she began a clothing and food bank where affected families can receive clothes and other donated items. They have received toys, diapers, formula, clothes, coats, and nonperishable food items. They will be kicking the program off next month.

Co-Chair Brown said that on April 18 the Social Justice Film Festival is hosting a screening of the documentary, *The Price of Plenty—Voices of the Yakima Valley*, produced by ELLA, which covers environmental justice issues from agriculture and dairies in the Lower Yakima Valley.

VI. Council Workgroup Updates

Co-Chair Brown shared background on the Council's current workplan and its 4 workgroups. She said she hoped the workgroup updates would lead to a good discussion about needed workplan adjustments and the Council's future meeting schedule.

Jonathan Chen, Council Staff, shared information about the Community and Tribal Engagement Workgroup, which prioritized the creation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department of Health. He explained that this workgroup has taken on the MOU as a project because many of the areas that would benefit from the EJ Council having its own decision-making autonomy are related to community and Tribal engagement.

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Sierra Rotakhina shared information about the Budget Workgroup's past work on the Council's budget values and principles and letter of concern regarding the Governor's original proposal to use Climate Commitment Act revenue to support the Working Families Tax Credit. Christy Hoff said as the workgroup thinks ahead to budget recommendations for the 27-29 biennial budget, it might want to have a strategic conversation about the challenges with the steep declines in CCA revenue projections for the operating budget. She said current spending in the operating budget funded by CCA revenue is about \$288 million and the projected revenue for the 27-29 biennium is about \$136 million. Jennifer Grove, Ex Officio from the Department of Commerce asked about projections for the Capital budget. Christy the Capital budget would have an estimated \$120.8 million for fiscal year 2028, dropping to \$29.6 million in fiscal year 2029. The Transportation budget would have an estimated \$359 million in fiscal year 2028 and \$300 million for fiscal year 2029.

Jonathan gave an update on the Environmental Justice Assessment (EJA) Workgroup, which is developing guidance to help agencies implement EJA's consistently. The group is currently focused on EJA community engagement.

Sierra Rotakhina said she and Angie Ellis, Council staff, have been supporting the Urgent and Emerging Issues Workgroup, which is developing a process for fielding concerns that are raised by communities, Tribes, and agencies. The Workgroup is reviewing and building on the previous work of the Community Engagement Committee. They are discussing piloting a process on a specific issue that has been brought to the Council. They are interested in pulling in more members, especially ex officio members. Co-Chair Brown said they want to respond to public comments and longstanding EJ issues in the state. She asked Members to read the letter about the biodigester and dairy farms in the Lower Yakima Valley. Member González Torres urged Council members to share any thoughts after they have a chance to read the letter.

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VII. Discussion and Possible Adoption of 2026-2027 Meeting Schedule

Sierra Rotakhina said the goal of this discussion is to talk about the Council's 2026-2027 workplan and meeting schedule. She encouraged members to reflect on the conversations around the HEAL Act and the changes to the Climate Commitment Act (CCA) revenue and think about whether the Council should be holding some capacity to respond to those opportunities. She asked Members to start by sharing what brought them to the Council, what their goals are, and how their passions can drive the Council's future work.

Ex Officio Member Piazza said she has made it her life's mission and challenge to understand and work toward EJ and has learned that it requires people working together and the Council is what brings folks together. She said the goal for the Council is to clarify and crystalize the problems in the state that we need to solve. She wants to contribute to making just systems to find problems and demonstrate how we're solving them.

Lua Pritchard, Council Member, said her main goal is to share information with the Asian Pacific Islander (API) community, because the community is typically forgotten and uninvolved. She said there are language barriers and cultural fears, and few individuals who are already in leadership roles can access spaces such as Council to receive the information. She said she is one of those few API people who do that. She wants to make sure the API community is informed of environmental issues because many live in areas with environmental justice concerns.

Ahmer Nizam, Ex Officio for the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), said that what drives his agency's work in EJ comes from understanding the history of transportation planning and the disproportionate impacts that highways have had on communities of color. More recently, impacts are not so overt but there is still underinvestment in communities where people rely on transit and where those needs are now inadequate and unreliable. WSDOT is

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resolved to incorporate EJ into its mission. He wants to see everyone working together to fully institutionalize EJ into state government so it continues long past all of their involvement.

Cristina González Torres said the need to bridge the language barrier is what brought her to the Council. She spoke about an event with 300 people in her community aimed at bridging and helping to guide her community into leadership. That continues to be her goal. She wants to share more info about the EJ Council so communities know about it.

Member Mendoza said every past job he has had has been related to EJ. He said HEAL come about in order to establish structure and accountability in the state. He said he wants to see this vision succeed and he sees his role is to support work on budget recommendations and CCA implementation.

Ex Officio Member Grove said there is opportunity to increase benefit and reduce harm with clean energy in every action they take and she wants to influence and shape those decisions. The energy division and state energy office at the Department of Commerce think about EJ benefits and harms in all their work. She said this is especially important with agency leadership changes. She worries about having to be in a defense posture with HEAL and the funding to support the law and would love the Council to have a strategy around it that agencies can support. She emphasized the importance of showing impact and accountability back to community, for example with EJAs.

Ex Officio Member Rivero said he grew up in an overburdened community and has been working with community and policy makers to promote EJ his whole life. Every day he thinks of his community and all the communities that they serve. He said he is encouraged by the discussion about emerging issues and wants to see how the Council can better support communities through being an important connector.

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Emilie Litsinger, Ex Officio Member for the Puget Sound Partnership, said her agency is working to have more community priorities show up and be integrated into their action plans that shape policies and channel funding. She said she is learning from her fellow Ex Officios and the Council's guidance and is focused on implementation. She hopes to gain connections to other communities that her agency can engage with so EJ is centered in their work.

Sierra shared written comments provided before the meeting by Nicole Johnson, Ex Officio Member from the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA). Ex Officio Member Johnson said her primary goal is to facilitate communication, collaboration, and knowledge exchange between the council and her agency and she wants to increase awareness of WSDA programs. She is committed to supporting equity driven solutions. Her focus is on building partnerships and shared objectives. She is committed to leveraging her understanding of government to reduce barriers for communities and is driven to support work at WSDA to reduce harms to the environment and health. She is interested in measurable outcomes.

Esther Min, Council Member, shared her story of her journey to the US while in high school. She said the Council is a unique space with agencies, communities, advocates, practitioners, and researchers. She said the Council is not limited by history to how it could function. She said it is always going to be about collaboration and about caring for the world.

Lauren Jenks, Ex Officio from the Department of Health (DOH), said she is motivated by a sense of fairness and a value for health. When access to health is unfairly distributed, that motivates her to try to fix it. She believes that agencies are generally acting in good faith with the information they have but the information is not always grounded. She is excited to get more of the critical knowledge about community needs that is not always easily accessed by state agencies. She said this means that community problems don't always get the resources they need. Her role is to

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learn about the needs for Tribes and communities and translate that back to DOH so the agency can make decisions and apply resources where they can do the most good.

Sierra Rotakhina said she grew up in a rural area experiencing and witnessing health disparities unique to rural communities that impacted her community and that is what drives her passion. The role of the Council is to transform government by being authentically responsive to Tribes and communities.

Jonathan Chen shared that in a previous role, he helped elder Asian immigrants grow food in the International District. He shared his frustration about how those with power didn't understand that food insecurity was a cycle they wouldn't be able to leave. This led him to seek a job working in policy. He shared that he had cancer when he was 21 and said it is devastating that communities of color and low-income communities have these disproportionate health impacts. He said he doesn't want anyone to experience that.

Christy Hoff said the Council is charged with serving as a public forum and she believes that role is the one in which the Council is uniquely positioned to fill.

Sierra Red Bow shared a word that she said extends to people, places, animals, rocks, etc. She said she approaches her work from a place of kinship. She said there is nothing more amazing than to spend time in community. She shared an example of a hearing she attended and said it was incredible to witness the community members who came to speak. She said organizing can be a palpable power for community to push back against industry that has created harm. She said working with the Council was a unique opportunity because it is led by communities and Tribes. She said the focus on the HEAL Act convinced her to be a part of state government.

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Angie Ellis shared her background working in public health and a medical office that accepted state Medicaid for adults. Seeing people in a vulnerable state and the injustice of people having to make decisions between getting health care or paying rent fueled her desire to help people.

Dana Myers said most of her life, she has worked with one person at a time and gave examples. She spoke about getting one person at a time through the systems and discussed the barriers. She said when she learned about the HEAL Act that became her mission.

Co-Chair Brown said the Council is trying to create opportunities where communities can express their voice, where we can choose what the future looks like, and how we can use our resources to make sure all community members are taken care of. She said we need to fight for a vision for the future where we can still exist in a relationship with the planet. She said she wants the Council to have a clear path where community informs changes in the government. She said collaborative governance is something we need to figure out.

Sierra Rotakhina referred members to the draft meeting schedule options in the meeting materials. Members discussed some barriers to participation and engagement. Co-Chair Brown asked all Members to share their preferred ranking of the proposed schedule options.

Council Member	1 st Choice	2 nd Choice	3 rd Choice
Esther Min	B	A	-
David Mendoza	A	B	-
Tatiana Brown	B	C	A
Jennifer Grove	A	B	C
Lauren Jenks	B	A	C
Emilie Litsinger	B	A	C
Lua Pritchard	B	A	C
Millie Piazza	A	B	C

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Member Mendoza said his concern with Option B is that the Council is currently not working on all of its mandates and is worried that Option B could expand the work beyond the Council's capacity. Ex Officio Member Grove said she may have to have substitutes for Option C.

VIII. Public Comment

No public comments were provided during this period.

XI. Appreciation and Adjournment

Co-Chair Brown adjourned the meeting.