Environmental Justice Council (EJC)

Meeting #25

Thursday, April 9, 2026

Location: Fisher Hill Elementary School, 59 Dexter Street, Orange, MA
6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

Meeting location: In-person

Meeting documents: Agenda, Slides

Council members:

- María Belén Power, EEA Undersecretary of EJ & Equity - in person
- Marcos Luna- in person
- Cheryll Holley– in person
- Sofia Owen – in person

- Harleen Marwah – virtual
- Lydia Lowe – virtual
- Jen Salinetti – virtual
- Paula Garcia– virtual
- Melissa Harding Ferretti – virtual
- Patricia Spence – virtual
- Madeline Fraser Cook – virtual

- Miles Gresham – absent
- Kalila Barnett – absent
- Caroline Hon- absent
- Peter Maathey – absent

1. **Welcome and Overview of Meeting Logistics**
   María Belén Power welcomed all attendees.

   Sophia Spungin provided an overview of the meeting logistics, including the use of the question and answer (Q&A) box and the availability of interpreters.

2. **Agenda Overview**

   María Belén reviewed the meeting agenda.

3. **Roll Call/Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes**

María Belén introduced **Harleen Marwah** as a new member of the Environmental Justice Council.

María Belén conducted a roll call of the EJC members. At the start of the meeting, the following council members were present: Marcos Luna, Cheryll Holley, Sofia Owen, Harleen Marwah, Lydie Lowe, Jen Salinetti, Paula Garcia, Melissa Harding-Ferretti, Madeline Fraser Cook, and Patricia Spence.

The following council members were not present: Miles Gresham, Kalila Barnett, Caroline Hon, and Peter Maathey.

María Belén opened the floor for a motion to approve the minutes from the February 12, 2026 EJC Meeting #24. **Cheryll Holley** motioned to approve. **Lydia Lowe** seconded the motion. All present council members accepted the minutes.

4. **First Public Question and Answer Session**

Virtual public participants provided comments and inquiries:

- A participant from Westfield provided comments on the EJ population petition process. The participant expressed concern over the five-year petition process which has yet to be resolved in reinstating Westfield as an environmental justice community.
- A participant from Taunton expressed concern over the lack of protection from environmental harms, a concrete plant, despite being designated as an environmental justice community.

Comments from the Q&A are listed below

#	Question	Asker Name	Answer
1	Thank you for addressing the mechanism by which neighborhoods can petition for EJ status. Would you please also include information in your talk about what will happen for communities that have already submitted a petition prior to tonight? Thank you. From Westfield, MA	Kristen Mello	U/S Power said that she will follow up with Kristen on her question.
2	The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Falmouth's Social & Environmental Action Committee supports designation of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe as an EJ Population. The Sierra Club Cape Cod Group supports treating the Tribe as a separate entity with treaty rights.	David Dow	Not answered.

3	The UUC Falmouth SEAC works on climate change challenges with the Faith Community Environmental Network on Cape Cod (60 communities of faith).	David Dow	Not answered.
4	Does Heritage Residents Association in Westfield need to reapply? Their petition was submitted in Feb 2025.	Kristen Mello	There is no clear answer currently on whether you will have to reapply. However, we would to try ensure that they don't have to reapply.

5. **Presentation on the EJ Population and Petition Process**

   Speaker **Caroline Lemoine, Deputy Director of Environmental Justice,** introduced co-presenters **Eugene Benson, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions, Commissioner Staci Rubin,** and **Andrea Nyamekye, leader and program strategist of Community Labor United**.

   Speaker **Eugene Benson** provided an overview of the history surrounding the EJ population definition in Massachusetts.

   Speaker **Staci Rubin** provided an overview of the evolution of the EJ population definition, and the continuing updates that are being made every 10 years.

   Speaker **Andrea Nyamekye** provided an overview of the revised 2021 definition and the current status of the EJ population definition.

   Speaker **Caroline Lemoine** provided an overview of the draft proposal for a new petition process which allows a pathway for residents to petition the Secretary for the designation of a neighborhood or areas as an EJ population. **Caroline** provided further information on the standard criterion a community should meet, though it does not exclude them from the process.

   Council members inquired about the rationale behind identifying a five-mile radius of an EJ community, the determination of federally identified census units, the criterion which designates an EJ community, and the process of updating census data.

6. **Presentation on the Grant Management System**

Speaker **Bill Hinkley, Director of Grants Administration at the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs,** provided an overview of the new grant management system at EEA. **Bill** highlighted key features, what it means for teams and partners, explained the portal system, and reviewed how to apply for and manage grant applications.

Council members inquired about accessibility limitations, language access, the ability to work on the grant outside of the portal, enabling of notifications, and the additional features of the new grant management portal.

7. **Second Public Question and Answer Session**
    - A virtual participant encouraged that Heritage Residents Association should not have to reapply via the EJ Population Petition Process.

Comments from the Q&A are listed below

#	Question	Asker Name	Answer
1	EJ Populations in the Waquiot Bay Watershed on Cape Cod face environmental stressors climate change; nutrient pollution from septic systems; toxic chemicals (methyl mercury; PFAS; micro and nano-plastics; etc.); overfishing; EJ, and lack of affordable/attainable housing for service workers; etc.	David Dow	Not answered.
2	Some of these stressors are addressed in the Headquarters Waquoit Bay Watershed Ecological Risk Assessment report released in 2004.	David Dow	Not answered.
3	I submitted personal comments to the US Army Corps of Engineers on their Cape Cod Canal Master Plan requesting input from Massa. EFC and Sierra Club Cape Cod Group comments in Bourne and Sagamore Bridge replacement and natural gas pipe expansion which will increases housing on currently natural landscape. UUC SEAC	David Dow	Not answered.

	will have a series of Zoom webinars on May on this challenge.		
4	Will you entertain grant applications focused on ultrafine particles and transportation related noise? Thanks - Wig	Wig Zamore	Depends on the grant opportunity and scope available part of that grant application. Bill talked about a few grant applications that are live now. I would encourage you to go to the grant management system and see opportunities that are open.

8. **Next Steps and Adjourn**

María Belén announced to council members that the Office of EJ and Equity will be leading a process with the Climate Team to develop frameworks and models for microgrids and quantifying community benefits.

María Belén reminded council members of the next meeting on **June 11 in Amherst.**

María Belén requested a motion to adjourn the meeting. **Patricia Spence** motioned to adjourn. **Melissa Harding-Ferretti** seconded. Sophia Spungin conducted roll call and all present council members approved. The meeting adjourned at **8:02 pm**.