



**Connecticut Equity and Environmental Justice Advisory Council (CEEJAC)
Land Subcommittee Meeting Minutes
Friday, October 13, 2023 1:00 PM-3:00 PM**

[Link to the recording](#)

This is a public meeting and will be recorded and posted on the [Connecticut Equity and Environmental Justice Advisory Council](#) website.

Disclaimer: Please note this is not a word for word translation

CEEJAC Subcommittee Members:

Name	Position	Affiliation
Yaw Darko	CEEJAC Member & Chair	CT Land Conservation Council
Alex Rodriguez	CEEJAC Member	Climate Advocate for Save the Sound
Terry Adams	CEEJAC Member	Stamford Board of Representatives
Leticia Colon de Mejias	CEEJAC Member	EcoWarriors
Sharon Lewis	CEEJAC Member	Connecticut Economic and Environmental Justice
Cierra Patrick	CEEJAC Member	City of Groton

CEEJAC Members Present (full registrant list below)

- Alex Rodriguez
- Terry Adams
- Yaw Darko

- 1. Welcome**
- 2. Roll Call**
- 3. Overview of Agenda**
- 4. Subcommittee Introductions**
- 5. Goal of Subcommittee**

- a. To identify a public participation process that includes community stakeholders in the development of grant funding programs that are specifically focused on EJ communities.

6. Presentation about Urban Forestry

- a. **Presented by Danica Doroski CT DEEP (Danica.Doroski@ct.gov)**
- b. Historically have come up with grant programs and asked you to apply but would love to get your feedback to develop a program that will meet your needs
- c. Urban Forestry – trees that line our streets, in our backyards, forested cities
- d. Urban and community forests can provide key benefits to communities
 - I. Trees offset urban heat island effect – cities can be 19 degrees hotter than other areas
 - II. Urban trees provide social and health benefits
- e. There is a strong relationship between tree cover and income – less tree cover in low income areas
- f. Public Act 23-206 passed in July 2023
 - I. 5% increase in tree cover in EJ communities or distressed municipality
 - II. We want equitable access to these urban resources
- g. How are we going to do that?
 - I. Provide subgrant programs to pursue community forestry projects
 - II. Plant trees, workforce development, urban wood utilization projects
- h. Examples of projects:
 - I. Urban Resources Initiative in New Haven – planting trees and creating workforce development opportunities for folks returning from incarceration
 - II. Town of Enfield – planted trees and allocated funding to maintain and prune existing trees
 - 1. There is a negative perception with planting trees because they see them come down with storms, so allocating resources for tree maintenance is helpful to address these perspectives.
 - III. Sierra Club – Remington Woods in Bridgeport and Stratford, CT
 - 1. Host town hall meetings in conversations about Remington Woods
- i. The ask for the Subcommittee and Public
 - I. Funding through Inflation Reduction Act: \$1.5 billion to urban forestry
 - 1. CT is receiving \$2.65 million in urban and community forestry program to support subgrants
 - II. How should we roll out this program in an inclusive manner?
 - III. Requirements:
 - 1. Does not require a match for this funding opportunity.
 - 2. Must benefit disadvantaged communities using CEJST (Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool) – [Link to map](#)
 - 3. Private property is eligible – in a lot of cities in CT, private property includes a lot of land

- 4. Hartford, New Haven, Stratford, Norwalk, Stamford – have received direct funding already
 - a. These are often the cities that we often have apply to our grant programs. Hoping to engage other cities like New London, Groton, Danbury.
 - b. How can we make sure that this historic investment is available to everyone in the state?
- j. Current efforts to improve access to grant programs
 - I. Biweekly grant office hours
 - 1. [Link to more information for biweekly grant office hours](#)
 - II. Grant writing webinars

7. Questions & Discussion

- a. Alex Rodriguez – It's important that resources like this be shared with community based organizations. There are many BIPOC groups coming onto environmental scene that would benefit from accessing funds – are there grant writing assistance programs available? A lot of the same organizations get the grants, but how do we reach others.
 - I. Danica – We hoped to get funding for contractor to provide writing assistance, have been advertising through UConn Sea Grant which has a grant writing assistance program. They were supportive of having this program fit within that and it's only limited to coastal cities. We don't have a scoring rubric yet for this program – want different weighting for first time grant writers.
 - 1. <https://seagrant.uconn.edu/2022/11/14/long-island-sound-resilience-grant-writing-assistance-program/>
 - II. Alex - Need anything to close gap to increase participation. Happy to communicate this opportunity to comms team at Save the Sound. We have a community impact fund that we are obligated to promote for next 5 years.
- b. Gustavo Requena Santos – grant writing training puts onus on the community. We should reevaluate how we are evaluating the application. How we can value lived experiences higher than technical skills? We should open up applications in other languages. Add ways to apply through a narrative in a video, not a written application.
- c. Reggy St. Fortcolin – this is very internet heavy, is there a physical portion for the application. A lot of communities are not necessarily focused on email, internet. Could we rent a room at Housatonic and get these applications written?
 - I. Kathy Matula - Meriden Library is available to hold public meetings
- d. Terry Adams - Are people in Stamford, can they apply because the city is already getting the application directly?
 - I. Danica – Yes individuals and organizations can still apply

- e. Reggy – does this do infrastructure? A lot of people that plant trees, but can't water them.
 - I. Danica – limited funds for equipment, but watering and shovels could be covered under this grant. Every application asks for a stewardship plan.
- f. Heather Dionne – We're (City of Hartford, Forestry Division) going to be helping mature maintenance, hazard tree removals, and tree planting. There will be a lot of education. We will be rolling out a program for middle schoolers in Hartford.
- g. Anna Pickett – We're (Urban Resources Institute) recognizing a lot of barriers to success of project. Water is a huge issue and we also need to cut curb space for trees. Interested in private land.
- h. Yaw – Who are the eligible applicants?
 - I. COGs, municipalities, nonprofits, tribes, universities and higher education are eligible. Happy to share the list. Most applicants are from municipal governments and non profit organizations
- i. Yaw – Does this require co-applications?
 - I. Danica – fiscal sponsors are able to apply as well.
- j. Lindsay Suhr – What is the timeframe?
 - I. Danica - Trying to put RFP out in Jan 2024, can we engage public and want to have federal partners have this available in early 2024
- k. Dave Y – Conservation Land Council. There is a heavy reliance on volunteers and there isn't a lot of staff capacity. We're going to need to take care of that.
 - I. Danica – how can we be a resource to you to help with that process. Office hours was to help co-create a project with urban forestry staff. What additional assistance can we provide? Follow up with Danica. Favoring groups that are growing – have to hammer out a solid project.
- l. Yaw – Reimbursement or upfront funding?
 - I. Danica – big barriers reimbursement grant is not sufficient. Have gotten guidance from legal team, some funds can be provided upfront to get the project started.
- m. Kathy Matula, Meriden Parks and Rec – examples of projects would be really great. When you have a big grant, it can be really overwhelming. If there is reimbursement, it's very complicated and not user friendly.
- n. Yaw – Evaluation and how to engage community members

8. Discussion of Proposed Topics for Engagement

- a. Lindsay Suhr, CT DEEP's Land Acquisition and Management Program
 - I. Urban Green and Community Gardens Grant – will talk about our grant programs and talk through some changes that we want to have. These programs are long established and set by statute. focused on distressed areas in CT. When we do a further presentation, we want to delve deeper into this program and it is traditionally undersubscribed. We are not getting applications to this program. We want to make changes to the program,

whether by statute or policy changes to get money on the ground. We'll do a presentation on it in a future meeting.

- II. Open Space program – focused on distressed areas in CT. When we do a further presentation, we want to delve deeper into this program and it is traditionally undersubscribed. We are not getting applications to this program. We want to make changes to the program, whether by statute or policy changes to get money on the ground. We'll do a presentation on it in a future meeting. Gets a lot of applications, but not a lot in EJ communities. It is a tough program to apply to. Need to make policy changes and statute changes. Requires higher level legal help, appraisals. We will talk about that one in future sessions as well.
 - III. Land and Water Conservation Fund – federal grant program. There is regular funding to DEEP as a pass through. Funding can be used for acquisition and infrastructure – playgrounds. We want more staff for that program. Federal government also runs Outdoor Recreation ... Program – we have made recommendations to federal government to change the program. Hartford, Bridgeport, Stamford have gotten grants through this program – hope to expand this program in CT.
- b. Reggy – appreciate that you're working on statute and building capacity in your office.
 - I. Lindsay – what are the barriers and what needs to be changed by statute?
 - c. Dave Y – great session and want to learn more about other sessions
 - d. Reggy – Resilient Bridgeport, want to stop reinventing the wheel. Let's make efficiencies with things that already exist. Plans need to be made more transparent.
 - e. Alex – either at the end of the year or early next year: Long Island Sound Study will release EJ Needs Assessment which includes coverage of disparities and barriers to accessing land, certain waterfronts, and related topics. That can inform the direction of this subcommittee's future focuses. Closing the gap on these streams of funding to really support BIPOC orgs and this to be a channel to help that. Estuary protection focused group – marketing fund as a capacity building fund to support community based initiatives. This funding is available for 5 years.
 - I. <https://estuaries.org/liscif/>
 - f. Gustavo – following up with Reggy's comment – different initiatives are doing their own thing. Can we be a connector and bring them to the conversation here? Maybe we can collaborate and address barriers that we are mentioning – is there scope for subcommittee to do this?
 - I. Six Lakes Park Coalition in the Newhall neighborhood of Hamden
 - II. Dave Y
 - III. Chadwick Schroeder, Bridgeport Sustainability Office
 - IV. Kathy Matula - Meriden Parks & Recreation
 - V. Six Lakes Park Coalition: kczepiel@savethesound.org

- VI. Knox Hartford should be included
- VII. Groundwork Bridgeport
- VIII. New Haven Climate Movement
- g. Yaw – could we engage in a process to provide suggestions on the RFP?
 - I. Danica – will work on RFP and share a draft with committee members for feedback. RFP has to go through state and federal review process
- h. Terry – Can we post what other towns did in their applications? Successful applications.
 - I. Danica

9. Next Steps

- a. Mid-November/end of November to present RFP to get feedback.

Full List of Registrants

Chris Martin
 Halle Lisette Pierce
 Jane Harris
 Kimberly Acosta
 Chris Donnelly
 Leigh Whelpton
 Terry Adams
 Chadwick Schroeder
 Eric Hammerling
 Heather Dionne
 Andrew Hoskins
 Reggy St. Fortcolin
 Lindsay Suhr
 Graham Stevens
 Latha Swamy
 Ashley Benitez
 Kathy Matula
 Dave Y
 Steven Cronkite
 Olivia Bissanti
 Stephanie Barrera
 Michael Moore
 Tammy Reardon
 Dan Smyth-Temple
 Leslie Campolongo
 Ian Blake
 Marybeth Morales -
 Davis
 Mayor Pete Bass
 Jeanette Allan

Kathleen Knight
Andrea Urbano
Sarah Huang
James Albis
Doris Johnson
Yaw Darko
Edith Pestana
Terry Adams
Annie Decker
Danica Doroski