

2023

**PHILADELPHIA
ENVIRONMENTAL
JUSTICE
ADVISORY
COMMISSION**

**ANNUAL
REPORT**

PREPARED BY :

The Philadelphia Environmental Justice
Advisory Commission (PEJAC)
with support from the Office of Sustainability

PRESENTED TO :

Mayor Cherelle Parker
Council President Kenyatta
Johnson


ejac@phila.gov 

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Executive Summary

II. Reflections and Prospects

III. Structure and Work

Commission Structure

Committees and Working Groups

Support for Grants

IV. Initial Recommendations

Comprehensive Plan

Water Insecurity

V. Future Work

EJ Priorities

Asset Mapping & Organizing

Plan Research / Alignment Work

Engaging City Departments

VI. Appendices

A. Commissioner Bios

B. Community Dialogue Series Report

C. Community Resilience and Environmental Justice (CREJ) Fund Recipient Announcements

D. Water Insecurity



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Philadelphia Environmental Justice Advisory Commission (PEJAC), established by Executive Order 2-23, is made up of residents from across the city bringing their experience and expertise to advise the Mayor and City Council to foster a clean and sustainable Philadelphia. PEJAC envisions a Philadelphia in which equity, civil rights, environmental justice, and climate justice collectively inform City policymaking and sustainability practices, and where City government, stakeholders, and communities work collaboratively to eliminate environmental racism, and improve and ensure the health, well-being, and prosperity of Philadelphians. It is our mission to empower and resource Philadelphia communities experiencing significant and inequitable environmental burdens, especially poor, working class, and communities of color. PEJAC advocates for effective environmental policies, programs, projects, and resources that remediate past and current environmental harms and build resilience against future injustices and shocks.

PEJAC, with the support of Philadelphia’s Office of Sustainability (OOS), has developed several working groups that have informed our engagement with communities across the city. Most notably, with support from the William Penn Foundation, PEJAC and OOS launched the Community Resilience & Environmental Justice (CREJ) Fund. This Fund supports community groups working to ensure that all Philadelphia residents have a livable community, free of environmental toxins and hazards.

The future work of the PEJAC will focus on Environmental Justice (EJ) priorities as informed by our work in the community dialogues to build community capacity to address EJ issues, provide support to organizations by way of our positionality vis-a-vis City government, and to shape our agenda and priorities. These agenda and priorities, as shaped by community engagements, will direct the Commission’s interactions with the City departments and government partners moving forward.



II. REFLECTIONS AND PROSPECTS

PEJAC was created as a citizen-led group in recognition of prior failures by the City and others to protect all Philadelphians from environmental threats to health, justice, and prosperity. Accordingly, Commissioners were chosen from a broad swath of lived experiences, especially those within frontline environmental justice communities, and given significant latitude to design a governing structure and strategic vision that would allow the Commission to address the city's many pressing environmental justice issues.

This process yielded a Commission committed to the realization of environmental justice in Philadelphia but divided on how to achieve it. The question of how to function as an entity created by the Government but accountable to the citizens proved particularly complex. To what degree would the Commission accommodate direction or input from outside organizations, including the City? With so many lives affected by urgent environmental justice issues, how would we set our priorities? As a brand-new entity, we faced enviable but onerous demand for our attention.

While it required unexpected time and trials, the establishment of a system of self-governance that will allow the Commission to move forward with purpose was worth the investment. We want to be proactive rather than reactive, nimble rather than halting; we have learned that a commission of many beliefs and philosophies needs to be flexible to function. As we set our vision, we sought to be a group of leaders, empowered to take initiative and seek consent, rather than consensus. Above all, we have returned to the primacy of building strong relationships—a challenge for a group that was formed in the midst of social-distancing and virtual meetings—with City agencies, community groups, and each other. In doing this, we are recentering the communities for whom environmental justice is an everyday issue. We are reminded that we were brought to our privileged positions to be citizens, fighting for citizens.



III. STRUCTURE AND WORK

A significant amount of time was spent during PEJAC's first year determining our mission, vision, organizational structure, and processes, which we outlined in bylaws. Operationally, PEJAC settled on a dual structure of committees and working groups. Committees are those subsets of commissioners who take care of internal operations, while working groups act as ad hoc formations intended to address a specific and usually time-limited scope of work. Due to capacity demands, PEJAC did not officially convene any committees, and the bulk of our work over the past two years was taken up by working groups, in response to specific requests from OOS.

Commission Structure

The Commission consists of a general membership of all commissioners, and Commission appointed committees and working groups. Committees are standing groups, consisting of a smaller group of commissioners, whose business is essential to the operation of the Commission. Working groups are ad hoc committees that convene to perform a particular function or attend to a particular task, after which they dissolve.

Dialogue Series Working Group

The PEJAC Dialogue Series Working Group supported OOS in using data from the Climate and Economic Justice Screening [Tool](#) from the White House's Council on Environmental Quality to screen Philadelphia neighborhoods to assess the cumulative burden of environmental justice impacts, selecting Grays Ferry and Strawberry Mansion for a first round of community dialogue sessions.

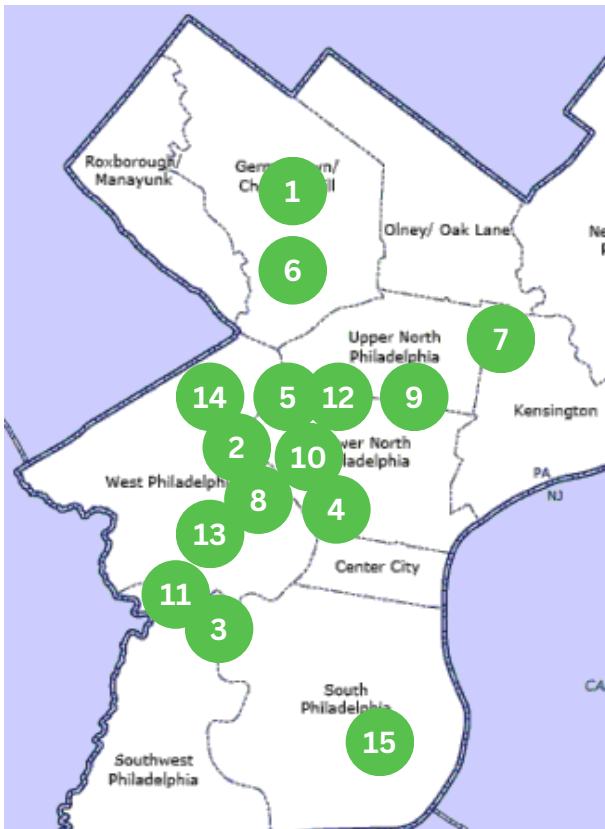
In collaboration with PEJAC, OOS, the Office of Councilwoman Katherine Gilmore Richardson, and the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, and joined by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 3 and Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, Office of Environmental Justice, consulting group Social Contract LLC facilitated in-person and virtual dialogue sessions in Grays Ferry and Strawberry Mansion focused on Listening, Visioning, and Resourcing.

Social Contract LLC composed a Summary Report with conclusions in preparation of further Action Planning (see Appendix B)

III. STRUCTURE AND WORK

Grant Fund Working Group

Fifteen (15) community organizations were awarded \$10,000 each, for a total of \$150,000 distributed in the initial round of the Community Resilience & Environmental Justice (CREJ) Grant Fund. The response to this request for proposal was tremendous with 73 applications submitted. This response reflects the need across the city to support communities' environmental issues. This Fund will provide 12-month grants to organizations and projects working towards long-term environmental justice in Philadelphia. The organizations are:



1. **Center in the Park**
2. **Cloud 9 Community Farms**
3. **Cobbs Creek Community Environmental Education Center**
4. **Fair Amount Food Forest**
5. **Future Visions**
6. **Germantown Residents for Economic Alternatives Together**
7. **Hunting Park Green**
8. **Jubilee School**
9. **Norris Community Resident Council, Inc.**
10. **Strawberry Mansion CDC**
11. **The Common Place**
12. **The U School Inc.**
13. **UC Green**
14. **Urban Tree Connection *Now Neighborhood Land Power Project**
15. **VietLead**

Support for Grants

The full Commission has supported the following projects and programs for federal funding in 2023:

- \$1.8 million planning grant award from the US Department of Transportation for the Reconnecting Our Chinatown: Reclaiming Philadelphia's Vine Street Expressway (I-676) project;
- \$1 million award to advance the OOS's and partner organization Eastwick United's work from the Environmental Protection Agency's Environmental Justice Government to Government Program; and
- \$12 million award to advance implementation of the Philly Tree Plan from the US Department of Agriculture's Urban and Community Forestry Program.



IV. INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

PEJAC recommends that the next phase of comprehensive planning for the City of Philadelphia include a focus on environmental justice and climate change, address disproportionate environmental effects and inequities experienced by communities, and meaningfully engage residents for input towards the plan itself.

WATER INSECURITY

PEJAC recommends that the City of Philadelphia maintain the moratorium on residential shutoffs that was in place from March 2020 to July 2022 and maintain proactive protection for households with children, elderly, or those with disabilities, and provide these households (if not already identified via City databases) a clear and accessible method to opt-in to these protections.

See background information on Water Insecurity in Philadelphia in Appendix D.



V. FUTURE WORK

The summaries below share feedback from an initial round of community engagement on their environmental injustice concerns. This is a first example of community engagement supported by the Commission to identify environmental justice priorities that inform the Commission’s advocacy and OOS’s work moving forward.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE (EJ) PRIORITIES (as informed by Community Dialogue Series Engagements in Grays Ferry and Strawberry Mansion)

In **Grays Ferry**, many EJ issues were identified, with particular attention paid to industrial pollution impacts from the former Philadelphia Energy Solutions (PES) refinery; other issues included inadequate public/green spaces and healthy food resources, insufficient public transportation options, litter and waste from illegal dumping, and need for improvements to houses and schools.

- Investment is needed in remediating past and current sources of pollution (including the refinery site, dumping areas, CSX railway, and adjacent highways), expanding safety and availability of public/green spaces and healthy food resources such as community gardens, and repairing/strengthening infrastructure in roads (including bicycle lanes), schools, and affordable housing, particularly for seniors and others with limited financial resources.

In **Strawberry Mansion**, similar EJ issues were identified, although issues with housing and “nuisance businesses” were highlighted over legacy sources of industrial pollution.

- Investment is needed in cleaning of litter and illegally dumped materials, improving roads and housing, and expanding access to and safety of public parks, with additional recreational or social opportunities therein; policy action is also needed to address underlying issues, including tangled titles, neglect or gentrification of existing buildings, and the prevalence of “nuisance businesses” (e.g. illicit drug sales) at the expense of other economic activity.

V. FUTURE WORK

ASSET MAPPING & ORGANIZING

PEJAC seeks to understand the environmental justice landscape in Philly, specifically what organizations exist, their priorities, current campaigns and work areas, and their analysis/understanding of environmental justice as it applies to their area of concern and the city more broadly. Through the asset mapping process we aim to better understand environmental justice communities' and organizations' expectations of the commission and how our positionality vis-a-vis City government can best be leveraged to support their work. We also hope to synthesize a shared analysis and co-develop with organizations a strategy for advancing environmental justice objectives. The asset mapping may also facilitate the convening of an environmental justice coalition to take an all-hands approach to addressing injustice throughout the city.

PLAN RESEARCH / ALIGNMENT WORK

Track the details and status of plans (e.g. [Green City Clean Waters](#), [Greenworks](#), [Drexel CRRA](#), [Green Living PHL](#)), purported to bring about environmental and/or climate justice; correlate overlapping objectives between plans, identify any conflicts or contradictions, as well as any gaps. The purpose of this project is to identify big themes and address misalignment between City-identified priorities and plans and the needs expressed by EJ organizations and communities and to identify a course toward true environmental justice. This work would require a working group involving collaborators outside the commission – to be found through the External Asset Mapping Process. PEJAC's involvement in this work is only part of a larger picture, involving other organizations such as the [Philadelphia Food Policy Advisory Council](#) (FPAC).

The purpose of this project is to identify big themes and address misalignment between City-identified priorities and plans and the needs expressed by EJ organizations and communities and to identify a course toward true environmental justice.

ENGAGING CITY DEPARTMENTS

Engaging City departments, consistent with Executive Order 2-23, to provide review of existing and proposed government programs, policies, activities, and processes to identify environmental justice concerns and propose alternative solutions.



VI. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. COMMISSIONER BIOGRAPHIES

John Armstead was born and raised in West Philadelphia. He is a graduate of West Philadelphia High School '72, holds a Bachelor degree from Lincoln University '76, and holds a Master of Public Administration from Temple University '90. John has over 45 years of environmental management and policy experience at the State and Federal level. He is an Adjunct Professor at Villanova University in the Department of Geology and Environment. John is a board member of the EPA Alumni Association where he has led program outreach on sustainability and minority serving institute engagement.

Nahdir Austin is a native of Philadelphia. He is a Chemical Engineering graduate from Drexel University. Currently, Nahdir works in Vaccine Manufacturing for Merck. He previously served on the board of the Cobbs Creek Community Environmental Education Center (CCCEEC) for two years, where he supported organizing programs, local community, and mentoring summer camp students and supported the organization's West Philadelphia Environmental Youth Justice Council.

Radika Bhaskar is an Assistant Professor in Engineering at Thomas Jefferson University. Combining her training in plant ecology and environmental engineering, she researches nature-based solutions to urban sustainability challenges. Her students have ongoing research projects evaluating how trees within green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) could mitigate elevated surface temperatures and urban heat islands, as well as developing bio-based alternatives to reduce plastic waste. She is committed to creating educational and training opportunities for young people, particularly those from marginalized groups, to participate in solving environmental problems. Bhaskar is a graduate of MIT (B.S., Engineering), and Stanford University (PhD, Biology).

Paul Devine Bottone was born in Southeast Massachusetts and attended University of Pennsylvania undergrad. His medical school and pediatric training was in Chicago, where he was also active in the political arm of the Illinois Sierra Club. Paul moved back to Philadelphia in 2020 for training in Adolescent Medicine at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. He is interested in overlaps of ecosystem and population health, especially potential psychosocial benefits of expanding green spaces, improving ecosystem resilience, and engaging youth in conservation.

Carlos Claussell is a 2022 Climate Justice Design Fellow from Harvard University. For the last 10 years he's been focused on implementing equity-driven, community-centered processes and supporting community-based organizations, non-profits, government and philanthropic entities to advance climate equity strategies at the local, regional and national level. Carlos currently serves as the Climate and Environmental Justice Manager for WWF focusing on advancing equitable strategies for climate mitigation. Prior to joining WWF, he worked as a Senior Program Officer at the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC), as the Urban Conservation Project Manager for The Nature Conservancy (TNC) North America's Cities Network and Pennsylvania/Delaware Chapter, and as the Urbanism & Infrastructure Project Manager for the Caño Martin Peña ENLACE Project Corporation, an internationally renowned community-led initiative and winner of the 2016 United Nations World Habitat Award.

COMMISSIONER BIOGRAPHIES (CONT.)

Mariel (Elle) Diana Featherstone is the Program Coordinator for the Neuroscience Graduate Group at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Medicine where she focuses on student wellness, success, and support. Her current research centers on how gentrification driven by the expansion of the University of Pennsylvania impacts the health of West Philadelphia residents. In addition to researching topics related to health geography, Mariel also serves as a lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania where she focuses on environmental health, environmental justice, and how climate change and geography impacts health. She is currently enrolled in the Certificate in Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and Spatial Analysis program at the University of Pennsylvania Stuart Weitzman School of Design. Mariel is a graduate of Spelman College (B.S., Biology), the University of Pennsylvania (MPH), and Temple University School of Podiatric Medicine (DPM).

Ebony H. Griffin-Guerrier (she/her) is an environmental justice attorney focused on eradicating environmental health disparities in black and brown communities. Originally from a low-income community in North Alabama, Ebony moved to Philadelphia in 2017 to join the Public Interest Law Center as its environmental justice attorney. Ebony currently works at Earthjustice as Senior Legislative Counsel focused on Cumulative Impacts. Ebony has extensive experience in the field of environmental law. In law school she worked as a summer law clerk for the White House Council on Environmental Quality and also spent five months clerking for the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance at the Environmental Protection Agency. Ebony spent several years working as an environmental and safety regulatory associate in Washington DC. Ebony is a graduate of Howard University School of Law and received her Bachelor of the Arts degree in Spanish from the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Joyce Lee, FAIA, LEED Fellow, WELL AP, is President of IndigoJLD providing green health, design, benchmarking and ESG planning services for exemplary projects and communities. Joyce is also a Senior Advisor at Philadelphia based EConsult Solutions. Since 2014, she became one of 300 LEED Fellows worldwide with a focus on resilience. After 2020, she has chaired the American Alliance of Museums Environment and Climate Network. Joyce was a Fellow at the National Leadership Academy for Public Health after working at NYC's award winning sustainability and health programs. She was the Chief Architect at the NYC OMB under Mayor Bloomberg. The Active Design Guidelines, a publication she co-authored, had won recognition from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, EPA Smart Growth as well as the Sustainable Building Industry Council. Most recently, she has been appointed as an advisor to the federal General Services Administration (GSA) Green Building Advisory Committee and as a judge for the RE100 for leadership in renewable energy. She is an immigrant and received her education at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Su Ly was born in Cambodia, and moved to Philadelphia at age 4. He grew up in North Philadelphia near Temple University, and is currently residing closer to Fairmount Park. He graduated from GW Carver HSES in 2017, University of Pennsylvania in 2021 with a degree in Earth Science. More recently, Su graduated with a Master in Law and Master in Environmental Studies concentrating in environmental policy at the University of Pennsylvania. Right now, he is pursuing a JD degree at Temple University Beasley School of Law. His previous professional experiences include air quality, grants, and conservation work. Interested in urban green spaces and agriculture, Su seeks to expand equitable access to green spaces and food, and climate resiliency.

Carolyn Moseley is a graduate of Cheyney State University with a BA in Urban Affairs. Her experience includes twenty-six years with the City of Philadelphia's Housing Development Corporation as Sr. Development Specialist managing major affordable housing projects throughout the City of Philadelphia and the City's Department of Housing and Community Development in Policy and Planning. Additionally, Carolyn worked as a fair housing advocate for the Fair Housing Rights Center of Southeastern Pennsylvania to ensure that housing providers are compliant with the federal Fair Housing Rights Act. She currently serves as the Executive Director of the Eastwick United CDC where she is responsible for the design and implementation of strategic measures to achieve restorative justice for residents of Eastwick.

COMMISSIONER BIOGRAPHIES (CONT.)

Kermit O is a 4th generation Philadelphian, writer, dreamer, and abolitionist. A former science teacher, he left the profession as he came to realize how schools reproduce the inequalities and oppressive power dynamics inherent to settler coloniality and racial capitalism in the United States. He has since turned to organizing with communities at the intersection of land, food, and environmental justice, where he seeks to collaborate with people across professional, academic, cultural, and issue-based silos. He is currently a PhD student in Geography and Urban Studies, researching the potential of resilience networks – placing control of material resources (e.g. land, food, water, and energy) in the hands of the people – toward the goals of autonomy, self-determination, and ultimately to build thriving communities in Philadelphia. He serves on the commission in hopes of using it as a vehicle for more direct democracy, building community power, and coordinating environmental justice efforts citywide.

Gabriella Paez is a community organizer and activist who has dedicated her professional life to encouraging individuals in underserved communities to be changemakers. Gabriella, originally from the Dominican Republic, has called Philadelphia her home for the last 15 years. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in biology from Eastern University and a Master's in non-profit leadership from the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy and Practice. Gabriella served as the Education and Community Development Coordinator at Esperanza, a local non-profit, for six years. In her role at Esperanza, she developed and led programs aimed at the revitalization of Hunting Park in North Philadelphia, with a special focus on protecting and enhancing open spaces and the environment.

Syreeta Thomas was born and raised in Philadelphia. She holds an Associate degree in Elementary Education from Community College of Philadelphia, Bachelor's Degree in Middle Grades Education from Temple University, Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Walden University. Syreeta has been a middle school science teacher with the School District of Philadelphia for eight years. She is committed to environmental education and supporting community revitalization.

APPENDIX B. COMMUNITY DIALOGUE SERIES REPORT

[Community Dialogue Series Report \(PDF\)](#)

APPENDIX C. 2023 CREJ GRANT FUND RECIPIENTS

[Announcing the 2023 Grantees of the Community Resilience and Environmental Justice Fund \(Blog Post\)](#)

VI. APPENDICES

APPENDIX D. WATER INSECURITY

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) announcement of reconnecting 15,000+ households at the beginning of the pandemic (City Press Release).
- City announcement of 2022 protections (City Webpage).
 - Media coverage (Online Article).
 - More info on the data matching (Online Report).
- City overview of additional 2023 protections, including "Raise Your Hand" for households with children, seniors, and people with disabilities (City Webpage).
 - Media Coverage (Online Article).

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

- Letter from Hispanic Clergy to new Administration (Online Article).
- UPenn 2022 report on Costs of Water Insecurity in Philadelphia (PDF).
 - Op-ed by report authors (Online Article).

CITY WATER RESOURCES

- City info on avoiding water shutoffs (City Webpage).
- Portal to apply for water assistance (City Webpage).