

League of Women Voters of Virginia

Environmental Justice Study

Recommendations & Consensus Questions

Study Recommendations

After each recommendation we have listed the government or other entity which has the power to act. “Regional” refers to agencies like the [Soil and Water Conservation Districts](#) and [Planning District Commissions](#). Many of our recommendations do not involve legislation but rather regulatory and permitting bodies that work year around. Thus an additional recommendation is that League members learn about the organization of the executive branch and expect to advocate throughout the year, even when the General Assembly is not in session.

- 1. Acknowledge** that too often environmental burdens have been greatest for those who have received the least benefit, and that this is due, at least in part, to deliberate decisions in the past. Therefore government bodies must study hazard maps, scrutinize historic zoning decisions, examine their procedures and processes, and continually work to end the perpetuation of unequal burdens on environmental justice communities. (Action – State/Regional/Local Agencies, Boards and Commissions)
- 2. Require** and hold accountable state and local permitting agencies for considering *cumulative* and long-term impacts of projects and permits, including downstream impacts, rather than considering each project request only on its own, ignoring what has preceded it. Cumulative impacts can harm health as a result of degradation of air, water, and overall quality of life. Continuing to site projects and issue permits that affect the same place because the land is cheap and the residents lack capacity to oppose the decisions unjustly burdens environmental justice communities. (Action – State/Regional/Local Agencies, Boards and Commissions)
- 3. Require** and hold accountable permitting agencies and boards for considering *all effects* of a project on people living adjacent to it or downstream from it. A healthy environment requires more than avoidance of safety hazards or air, water, and land pollution. Loud noises and vibrations, nighttime lights, strong odors, lack of tree canopy or green spaces, and loss of historic or cultural touchstones are among the factors that can degrade the health of a human environment. (Action – State/Local Agencies and Boards)
- 4. Require** and hold accountable DEQ and other state, regional, and local agencies and boards for communicating early in a project’s inception, not only with state, regional, and/or local regulators, but with *all* other stakeholders “in the community, both organized and individual. DEQ must provide more transparent, accessible, and real-time environmental information to the public, and make significant outreach to local residents who may be unaware or lack the expertise to understand the impacts of the proposed projects. (Action – DEQ, State/Regional/Local Agencies)
- 5. Implement** the recommendations of DEQ’s 2020 [Environmental Justice Study](#) and complete the first phase of actions to develop staff capacity and clear guidance “to effectively support environmental justice and apply environmental justice considerations throughout DEQ programs.” (Action – DEQ and environmental boards)

6. Improve information-sharing and coordination among state, regional, and local agencies responsible for agriculture, climate resilience, comprehensive planning, economic development, emergencies & public safety, environment, housing, health, parks, and transportation when evaluating projects with regard to issues such as rezoning and site location. (Action – State/Regional/Local Agencies and Boards)

7. Provide expertise and capacity building support to help localities with a small tax base to assess and find solutions to environmental justice issues. (Action – General Assembly, State Agencies including Higher Education)

8. Direct and fund independent environmental justice analyses before major permitting decisions to assess the potential for long term costs, harm to health and environmental effects on the population. Too often a project is presented with unsubstantiated claims of benefits by a developer to a local governing board. (Action – General Assembly, stakeholder organizations and coalitions)

Questions for Consensus

1. Should LWV-VA advocate for government bodies to study environmental justice data and change procedures and processes that perpetuate unequal burdens on environmental justice communities?

Yes No No consensus.

Comments:

2. Should LWV-VA advocate for government bodies to be held accountable for considering *cumulative* impacts of projects and permits?

Yes No No consensus.

Comments:

3. Should LWV-VA advocate for government bodies to be held accountable for considering *all effects* that a project might have on people living around it?

Yes No No consensus.

Comments:

4. Should LWV-VA advocate for government bodies to be held accountable for communicating early in a project's inception with all stakeholders in the affected community?

Yes No No consensus.

Comments:

5. Should LWV-VA advocate for implementing the recommendations of DEQ's [Environmental Justice Study](#) report?

Yes No No consensus.

Comments:

6. Should LWV-VA advocate for improved information-sharing and coordination among state, regional, and local agencies and boards?

Yes No No consensus.

Comments:

7. Should LWV-VA advocate for legislation to provide expertise to help localities with a small tax base assess and find solutions in response to environmental justice issues?

Yes No No consensus.

Comments:

8. Should LWV-VA advocate for legislation to fund independent environmental justice analyses before major permitting decisions ?

Yes No No consensus.

Comments: