

POLICY BRIEFING

Exploring the Role of Environment-Focused Appointed Boards and Commissions

To effectively examine the landscape of environmental justice committees, commissions, and advisory boards across the country, the focus area needed to be expanded to look at environmental bodies more broadly. Initial analysis indicated that there may be fewer examples of bodies focusing solely on environmental justice, so expanding the scope to a broader “environmental focused” lens allows for the consideration of some cities that may merit further examination to determine applicability.

To mitigate any misrepresentation of the boards and commissions reviewed, language was taken directly from municipal publications whenever possible. As a result, there may be more information in certain cases depending on the depth and detail a city had chosen to provide on the role(s) of its appointed bodies.

Environmental bodies with oversight and authority on relevant matters:

1. Jacksonville, FL: Environmental Protection Board

Role: The board develops regulations necessary for administration and enforcement of the city’s environmental laws. It conducts investigations of complaints, takes testimony in matters under its jurisdiction and provides a hearing platform for environmental matters within the city. It also conducts public outreach programs for schools, teachers, civic and private organizations.¹

Committees: To carry out the regulatory functions of the Board, it is organized into two standing committees. The Air Odor & Noise Committee reviews issues concerned with the regulations associated with air quality, odors, and noise. The Water Committee reviews issues concerned with the regulations associated with water quality and hazardous materials.

Composition: The nine members are appointed by the Mayor and City Council: two professional engineers, two members of the medical profession, two members of affected industry, two discreet citizens, and one member of a recognized conservation, wildlife, outdoor recreation, or sports activity.²

2. Boston, MA: Air Pollution Control Commission

Role: The Commission reviews, permits, and regulates activities that relate to air quality, including off-street parking, abrasive blasting and chemical cleaning of buildings, and vehicle idling.³

“The Air Pollution Control Commission shall not be subject to the supervision or control of the Board of Health and Hospitals or of Commissioner of Health and Hospitals except as he acts as a member of the Commission; but unless otherwise ordered by the Mayor, the Commission shall

¹ Jacksonville, FL. [Environmental Protection Board](#).

² City of Jacksonville, FL. [Environmental Protection Board Structure and Members](#).

³ Boston, MA. [Air Pollution Control Commission](#).

not communicate with the Mayor, or make any annual or other report, except through the Board of Health and Hospitals.

The Air Pollution Control Commission shall have full jurisdiction to regulate and control atmospheric pollution as now or hereafter provided in Section 31C of Chapter 111 of the General Laws.

The Air Pollution Control Commission shall have jurisdiction to investigate, control and abate noise from whatever source, and shall also have power, after due notice and a public hearing, to adopt noise level standards and to promulgate regulations, including regulations providing that no activity likely to produce unreasonable noise may be carried on unless a permit therefor is first obtained from the Commission, which may specify in such permit the time or times within which, and the method by which, such activity is to be carried on. The Commission may fix a fee of not less than ten (\$10.00) dollars nor more than one hundred (\$100.00) dollars for each permit issued by it.

The Air Pollution Control Commission shall have power to require the production of records and documents relevant to its work and to compel the attendance and testimony of witnesses before it.”⁴

Composition: Members include the Commissioner of Health and Hospitals, ex officio; the Commissioner of Traffic and Parking, ex officio; the Environment Commissioner, ex officio; and four (4) members appointed by the Mayor.⁵ According to commission staff, the four members appointed by the Mayor are at large from the community and are individuals with relevant expertise.

3. Louisville, KY: Air Pollution Control Board

Role: The board is the regulatory authority for air pollution control in Louisville Metro/Jefferson County. The Board adopts regulations, orders, and resolutions as needed to control air pollution.

Committees: There are two committees of the board, which meet on an as-needed bases: the Policy and the Strategy committees.

Composition: Board members are private citizens appointed by the Mayor and approved by the Metro Council.⁶

4. Chicago, IL: Committee on Environmental Protection and Energy

Role: A City Council committee, it has jurisdiction over all legislation relating to the abatement of air, water, and noise pollution; solid waste collection and disposal; recycling and reuse of wastes; conservation of natural resources; and all other matters not specifically included dealing with the improvement of the quality of the environment and the conservation of energy. It also has jurisdiction

⁴ Boston, MA. [Air Pollution Control Commission Appointment; Powers and Duties.](#)

⁵ Boston, MA. [Air Pollution Control Commission Appointment; Powers and Duties.](#)

⁶ Louisville, KY. [Air Pollution Control Board.](#)

over all ordinances, orders, resolutions, and matters affecting public utilities with the exception of those matters over which jurisdiction is conferred to the Committee on Transportation and Public Way.⁷

5. San Francisco, CA: Commission on the Environment

Role: The [commission](#) is responsible for the development and success of the overall sustainability strategy for the City. It develops environmental policies, strategies, practices, and programs for the Department of the Environment. Consistent with Section 4.118 of their City Charter, it advises other city agencies and works with them to reduce negative impacts on the environment in areas of their jurisdiction and activities and augments their efforts to communicate environmental issues to the general public.

A. Duties and Responsibilities:

“(1)Establish policies and directives for the Environment Department;

(2)Nominate qualified candidates for the position of Director of the Environment Department for appointment by the Mayor and evaluate the performance of the Director at least once a year;

(3)Conduct public education and outreach to the community on environmental issues;

(4)Have the authority to review and make recommendations on any policy proposed for adoption by any City agency regarding conformity with the long-term plans for environmental sustainability, except for those regarding building and land use;

(5)Have the authority to investigate and make recommendations to all City agencies related to operations and functions, such as solid waste management, recycling, energy conservation, natural resource conservation, environmental inspections, toxics, urban forestry and natural resources, habitat restoration and hazardous materials; and

(6)Review and approve the Environment Department’s budget, budget modifications or fund transfers.”⁸

Committees: The commission has two standing committees with three members each.

The Operations Committee is responsible for the budget, financial planning, and operations of the Environment Department. It also oversees public education and community outreach on environmental issues.

The Policy Committee oversees long-term planning and policy development for the Environment Department, including the assessment of environmental conditions and the development, updating, and review of plans for the long-term environmental sustainability of the city. It focuses on achieving the city’s zero waste goals and explores the issues of water conservation and toxics reduction. It also works

⁷ Office of the City Clerk, City of Chicago. [Legislative Body Details: Committee on Environmental Protection and Energy](#).

⁸ San Francisco Environment Department. [Commission on the Environment Bylaws](#).

with the Operations Committee and the Department Director on the restructuring of environmental programs and activities among city agencies and departments.

The Commission and/or the President, at his or her discretion, may establish other committees or task forces on an ad-hoc basis to perform tasks or functions as necessary, or to address issues outside the purview of the standing committees.

Composition: Seven members appointed by the mayor.⁹

Environmental bodies which predominately provide advice/recommendations, but may have some authority:

1. Baltimore, MD: Commission on Sustainability

Role: The Commission oversees the implementation of the Baltimore Sustainability Plan, monitoring and reporting progress annually.

Composition: It is a 21-member body with 20 individuals appointed by the Mayor and one city council representative appointed by the City Council President. Members represent environmental groups, community organizations, labor unions, public health and environmental justice interests, and private industry.¹⁰

2. Camden County, NJ: Environmental Commission

Role: As an advisory body, the Commission is charged with informing the Commissioner Board about environmental issues affecting the County and its residents. This can be the result of a direct request of the Board or by the Commission's own initiative.

It also informs and educates county residents about environmental issues that affect their lives. The Commission has developed various informational materials and programs and has sponsored projects that serve to enhance the quality of Camden County's environment.¹¹

It has the following powers:

"A. To promote the conservation and development of the environmental quality of the City of Camden.

B. To plan, implement and inform the public about local conservation programs.

C. To compile and keep an index of all open areas, publicly or privately owned, including open marshlands, swamps and other wetlands.

D. To conduct research into the possible use of resources such as air and water.

E. To recommend to the Planning Board (if none, to the Mayor and governing body of the

⁹ San Francisco Environment Department. [Commission on the Environment Bylaws](#).

¹⁰ Baltimore Office of Sustainability. [Commission on Sustainability](#).

¹¹ Camden County. [Environmental Commission](#).

municipality) plans and programs for inclusion in a Municipal Master Plan and the development and use of such areas.

F. To advertise, prepare, print and distribute books, maps, charts, plans and pamphlets, which, in its judgment, it deems necessary for its purpose.

G. To manage donated or purchased lands for conservation purposes and to operate conservation programs.

H. To act as the coordinating agency of the community on conservation matters and as a liaison between local conservation needs and regional, state and federal agencies ministering to those needs.”¹²

Composition: The Mayor appoints the seven members, one of whom is also a member of the Municipal Planning Board.

3. Colorado: Environmental Justice Advisory Board (EJAB)

Role: Advise the Environmental Justice Ombudsperson; develop a public complaint process related to the performance of the Ombudsperson; make recommendations about environmental justice policy questions referred by Governor or Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment (CDPHE); collaborate with other CDPHE programs to advise CDPHE about the best ways to engage with disproportionately impacted (DI) communities, as outlined in statute; and implement an environmental justice grants program.

The [EJAB](#) can:

- Choose who will receive grant funding, based on the amount of money the legislature makes available.
- Make policy recommendations to the Governor’s Office and to CDPHE about environmental justice topics.
- Invite experts and community members to speak and provide insight.

The EJAB cannot:

- Create the law, promulgate regulations, or enact policies on its own. The EJAB must make recommendations to other entities instead.
- Adjudicate rights or responsibilities. For example, the EJAB cannot issue or deny a permit
- Compel or subpoena witnesses. The EJAB can only invite members of the public to speak voluntarily.
- Appropriate funds to spend on the grant program. Only the Legislature can authorize expenditure of funds.
- Perform any supervisory role over the EJ Ombudsperson.

¹² City of Camden, NJ. [Article I Environmental Commission](#).

Composition: There are 12 members total – 11 voting members, 1 non-voting member. They reside in different areas of Colorado, reflect Colorado’s racial and ethnic diversity, and have experience with a range of environmental issues.¹³

4. Sacramento, CA: Environmental Commission

Role: The commission has the following powers and duties:

- A. “To provide information and analyses and to advise the Sacramento County board of supervisors and the city councils of Sacramento, Galt, Folsom and Isleton for the purpose of implementing an effective comprehensive environmental protection and management program for Sacramento County;
- B. To assist and advise the department in the formulation and implementation of its programs, including, but not limited to, air quality control, environmental quality control, and hazardous and toxic material issues;
- C. Upon request, to aid, advise and recommend to county departments and city departments within Sacramento County, information, programs and measures which will promote air quality, environmental health and hazardous materials control;
- D. To assess, analyze, and recommend for approval, appropriate local measures and other action in accordance with federal, state and local regulations including program elements administered by the department in accordance with city/county policies established by the board of supervisors and city councils;
- E. To review and recommend for approval ordinances, rules and regulations proposed by the department, including review and approval of the city/county air quality, environmental health, and the hazardous materials and air quality general plan element;
- F. As deemed necessary, to initiate investigations regarding matters within the commission’s powers and duties including private and public activities for purposes of advising the department and the board of supervisors or city councils;
- G. As appropriate and in accordance with federal and state law including local ordinances, the commission may be empowered by such city or county ordinance to act as the reviewing body concerning decisions rendered by the department in its role as the environmental enforcement agency pursuant to such ordinance;
- H. To provide ongoing policy and program advice on such other environmental management program matters as the board and/or city councils may refer to the commission;
- I. The commission may, as deemed necessary, call before it qualified individuals so that they may provide their opinion and recommendation to the commission regarding particular environmental issues in the absence of such expertise within the membership of the commission.”¹⁴

Composition: This nine member board includes five appointments by the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors; one joint appointment from the cities of Folsom, Isleton, and Galt; and three City of Sacramento appointees as follows:

¹³ Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment. [Fact Sheet-Environmental Justice Advisory Board](#).

¹⁴ Sacramento, CA. [Chapter 2.76 Sacramento Environmental Commission](#).

“Seat A - A member appointed by the Sacramento City Council who is not an elected official or employee of a government agency of Sacramento County and strive to appoint from one of the following vocational discipline areas of interest or experience; health or legal services profession, industry, engineering, transportation planning, environmental group, toxics/hazardous materials, environmental health, industrial hygiene, water quality, waste disposal, land use planning, vector control, or chemical reuse/recycling and the general public

Seat B - A member appointed by the Sacramento City Council who is not an elected official or employee of a government agency of Sacramento County and strive to appoint from one of the following vocational discipline areas of interest or experience; health or legal services profession, industry, engineering, transportation planning, environmental group, toxics/hazardous materials, environmental health, industrial hygiene, water quality, waste disposal, land use planning, vector control, or chemical reuse/recycling and the general public

Seat C - A member appointed by the Sacramento City Council who is not an elected official or employee of a government agency of Sacramento County and strive to appoint from one of the following vocational discipline areas of interest or experience; health or legal services profession, industry, engineering, transportation planning, environmental group, toxics/hazardous materials, environmental health, industrial hygiene, water quality, waste disposal, land use planning, vector control, or chemical reuse/recycling and the general public”¹⁵

5. Seattle, WA: Environmental Justice Committee

Role: The Committee is an opportunity for those most-affected by environmental inequities to have ownership of [Equity & Environment Agenda](#) implementation while enhancing partnerships with City departments and better connecting government to community-based solutions. It centers community ownership in decision-making, environmental program/policy design and Equity & Environment Agenda implementation while enhancing partnerships with City departments and better connecting community-based solutions into government.

The committee advises City staff on integrating the goals of the Equity & Environment Agenda into environmental and climate focused policies and programs; engages deeply with members to increase environmental justice community cohesion and understanding of work and needs in different communities; and grows environmental justice leadership in Seattle by co-creating and participating in learning activities about 1) programs or policies from other regions that may have relevance to local efforts and 2) City-led environmental investments and programs.

Composition: The committee consists of twelve members from a wide range of backgrounds and expertise in working with communities of color, immigrants and refugees, Native and Indigenous peoples, and low-income residents and English language learners.¹⁶

¹⁵ City of Sacramento, CA. [Environmental Commission](#).

¹⁶ Seattle Office of Sustainability & Environment. [Environmental Justice Committee](#).

Environmental bodies which predominately provide advice/recommendations:

1. [Alexandria, VA: Environmental Policy Commission](#)
 - a. [ARTICLE M - Environmental Policy Commission](#)
2. [Austin, TX: Environmental Commission](#)
 - a. [Code of Ordinances: § 2-1-144 - ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION](#)
3. [Bloomington, MN: Sustainability Commission](#)
 - a. [ORDINANCE NO. 2016-23](#)
4. [Cudahy, CA: Parks and Environmental Justice Commission](#)
5. [Eagan, MN: Sustainable Eagan Advisory Commission](#)
6. [Eugene, OR: Sustainability Commission](#)
 - a. [Council Ordinance Number 20379](#)
7. [Fairfax, VA: Environmental Sustainability Committee](#)
8. [Faribault, MN: Environmental Commission](#)
 - a. [City of Faribault Ordinance No. 2020-3](#)
9. [Fulton County, GA: Citizens Commission on the Environment](#)
10. [Golden Valley, MN: Environmental Commission](#)
 - a. [Ordinance No. 681](#)
11. [Illinois: Commission on Environmental Justice](#)
12. [Indianapolis, IN: Environmental Sustainability Committee](#)
13. [Inver Grove Heights, MN: Environmental Advisory Commission](#)
14. [Ithaca, NY: Sustainability and Climate Justice Commission](#)
 - a. [Article VI Sustainability and Climate Justice Commission](#)
15. [Kalamazoo, MI: Environmental Concerns Committee](#)
 - a. [Bylaws of the Environmental Concerns Committee](#)
16. [Laguna Beach, CA: Environmental Sustainability Committee](#)
17. [Laurel, MD: Environmental Affairs Committee](#)
18. [Minnesota: Environmental Justice Advisory Group](#)
19. [New York, NY: Environmental Justice Advisory Board](#)
20. [Newark, NJ: Newark Environmental Commission](#)
21. [Philadelphia, PA: Environmental Justice Advisory Commission](#)
 - a. [§ 21-3002. Environmental Justice Advisory Commission](#)
22. [Phoenix, AZ: Environmental Quality and Sustainability Commission](#)
23. [Portland, OR: Sustainability and Climate Commission](#)
24. [Providence, RI: Sustainability Commission](#)
 - a. [City of Providence Ordinance ORD-2021-18](#)
25. [San Antonio, TX: Climate Action and Adaptation Plan \(CAAP\) Advisory Committees: Technical & Community Advisory Committee and Climate Equity Advisory Committee](#)
26. [Santa Ana, CA: Environmental Justice Action Committee](#)
27. [South Fulton, GA: Environmental Committee](#)
28. [St. Louis Park, MN](#)
29. [Saint Paul, MN: Climate Justice Advisory Board](#)
 - a. [Climate Justice Advisory Board Bylaws](#)
30. [Tacoma, WA: Sustainable Tacoma Commission](#)
 - a. [Sustainable Tacoma Commission Rules of Procedure](#)