



Environmental Justice Task Force

Spring Plenary Report April 9, 2018

Environmental Justice links to the seventh principle of Unitarian Universalism, calling on UUs to affirm and promote “respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.”

This year, the Environmental Justice Task Force voted to focus on three issues:

- A Renewable Portfolio Standard for New Jersey
- Remediation of Lead in New Jersey Water
- Making New Jersey a Community Solar State

A Renewable Portfolio Standard for New Jersey. The Environmental Justice Task Force has always focussed on global warming issues. To the end of mitigating global warming, we have pushed for substituting renewable sources of energy for fossil fuel sources. Legislation establishing a schedule of progress in adopting renewable sources — called a Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) — is an important step toward adopting renewable sources of energy. This year, we agreed to support a Renewable Portfolio Standard for New Jersey with the legislature. There are two proposals, represented by two different bills in the legislature. One, supported by Governor Murphy, specifies that New Jersey will reach 100% renewable energy by 2050. The other, proposed by Food and Water Watch, specifies that New Jersey will reach 100% renewable energy by 2035.

In the first few months of the year, we voted to support an aggressive schedule and adopted a position paper on the issue, requiring that New Jersey’s electrical power be supplied from 100% renewable sources by 2035.

We also voted to oppose the “nuclear subsidy” bill, because of the likely impact on the progress toward renewable sources and because of the lack of financial disclosure. These reasons are elaborated in a position paper. We sent the position paper to Budget Committee members before they considered the bill and encouraged UU Faith Action NJ members to call their legislators to oppose it. We signed a letter to Governor Murphy outlining reasons for opposition to this bill and requesting specific changes, along with a number of other environmental groups including the Work Environment Council, the Sierra Club, and Environment NJ.

Finally, we support the “Green Amendment” proposed by the Delaware Riverkeepers. If passed, this amendment would guarantee rights to pure water, clean air and a healthy environment.

Remediation of Lead in New Jersey Water. After a review of proposed legislation in this area, we agreed that because remediation requires more information concerning the sources of lead

in the water supply. Current proposed legislation is addressing this issue, and we are waiting for more information on the subject.

In order to learn more about the issue, we invited Chris Sturm, the managing director for policy and water at New Jersey Future, to give a presentation at the Spring Plenary on April 21, 2018.

Making New Jersey a Community Solar State. Community solar, also called solar gardens, is a way to provide the benefits of solar power to people who are unable to install solar panels themselves, either because they are not homeowners or because they cannot make that large an investment.

In the last legislative session, a bill was introduced that would enable community solar in New Jersey by allowing individuals to invest in a community-based installation of solar panels. The legislation had no provisions to provide for low-income residents or environmental justice communities. At our request, the Nissenbaum Law Group has written potential amendments to an existing bill enabling community solar. The amendments would support access to community solar by low-income residents of New Jersey and by environmental justice communities. We are contacting legislators about supporting these amendments.