

Giving neighborhoods a voice: Environmental justice workshop focuses on practices, resources aimed at helping communities

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STOCKTON — Dozens of people from various cities, agencies and backgrounds gathered Wednesday to learn about Senate Bill 1000 and environmental justice practices that can help their communities.

The San Joaquin SB1000 Community Workshop, organized by Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Stockton and the California Environmental Justice Alliance, gave people an opportunity to discuss environmental issues they see in their respective neighborhoods, learn about the law, as well as what actions individuals can take to make sure communities are adopting environmental justice practices in their general plans.

SB1000, or the Planning for Healthy Communities Act, requires local governments to adopt environmental justice goals and policies or elements into their general plans, according to CEJA, which co-authored the bill.

“The bill also includes a process for communities to become meaningfully involved in the decision-making processes that govern land use planning in their neighborhoods,” according to CEJA.

Jonathan Pruitt, environmental justice program coordinator with Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Stockton, said the event offered a space to discuss the issue, which is overlooked at times. Individuals learned from each other, they met other people in the community doing advocacy work and now can share resources, he said.

Bernadette Austin, associate director of the UC Davis Center for Regional Change, and CEJA’s Green Zones Program Manager Tiffany Eng held

presentations on understanding environmental justice and its impact, and the tools — like the mapping tool CalEnviroScreen — that are available to understand the problems facing neighborhoods.

Environmental justice is people’s basic right to live, work, play, go to school and pray in a clean and healthy environment, the advocates said.

The workshop, hosted by Fathers & Families of San Joaquin, also had attendees break into smaller groups to have conversations on certain topics, including health and transportation.

In a discussion group on housing led by Manteca Councilman Jose Nuño, who works for the Stockton-based Visionary Home Builders of California, Mary Meninga and Adriana Flores-Lopez shared their frustrations and dismay with the city of Lathrop over a road issue that impacts their homes.

Others in the group, which included Stockton City Councilman Paul Canepa and Fred Sheil of STAND Affordable Housing, briefly discussed the costs and policies associated with building affordable housing.

Representatives from the Sacramento area, Public Health Services of San Joaquin, Public Health Advocates and Pacific Gas & Electric were also among the people in attendance Wednesday.

This was an opportunity for community members to connect and see the organizations that are available to them and that can serve as a bridge down the line, Pruitt said.

Said Pruitt: “We want these communities involved (in planning) from beginning to end.”

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