



Photo by Bill Smith/EvanstonNow.com

Environmental Justice Playbook

A Step-by-Step Guide to Addressing Your Environmental Justice Issue

Created by:



A program of **CLIMATE ACTION EVANSTON**

Email: environmentaljustice@climateactionevanston.org

Web: www.climateactionevanston.org/environmental-justice/home



(Photo courtesy of Joyce Elias @krinklebein.com)

The EJE Playbook

Environmental Justice Evanston (EJE) created this Playbook to help Evanstonians address **existing** Environmental Justice (EJ) issues that are affecting them, their neighborhood or their community.

The Playbook offers a set of steps that can be followed by Evanston residents or business owners to resolve an EJ issue that:

- 1. unfairly denies them or their community access to one or more environmental assets (examples: parks, trees, and bike lanes), or**
- 2. unfairly burdens them or their community with one or more environmental hazards or health risks (examples: air pollution, noise, odors and rodents).**

Generally speaking, the larger the issue, the longer it will take to achieve a resolution. Smaller issues may take months, larger issues may take years. So as you begin your work to resolve an

EJ issue using the Playbook, set realistic expectations on how long your efforts will take. But stick with it, because people who have persevered have achieved success.

What Is Environmental Justice?

Environmental Justice, as defined in the City’s Environmental Justice Resolution, “is when every resident experiences the same degree of access to environmental assets, protection from environmental hazards and health risks, and an opportunity to play an effective role in making decisions that affect the quality of life in this community.”

Steps to Resolve Your Environmental Justice Issue



(Photo courtesy of Environmental Justice Evanston)

Here are steps EJE suggests following to address **existing** Environmental Justice issues that you are experiencing. You may choose to follow all these steps or select the steps that best apply to your situation.

1. Define the Environmental Justice Issue

Defining the issue you are experiencing helps to communicate the issue’s key details to others. Include the following information in your definition:

- a. Description of the environmental issue. (Air pollution, soil pollution, water pollution, wind-blown litter, odor, noise, rodents, vibrations, excessive diesel truck traffic, etc.).
- b. Street address or location of where the issue is occurring.
- c. Any photos that can capture the bad impacts that the issue is causing.

- d. Impact on you, your family and neighborhood. (Examples: our child is always coughing, air pollution from a business is dirtying our clothes, litter is blowing onto our lawn, etc.).
- e. Names or a description of the persons or groups of people who are affected by the issue.
- f. Description of any potential violations of city code (See step 5).
- g. History of the EJ issue including the length of time the issue has existed.
- h. Person, organization or source that is causing the issue.
- i. A list of any past communications with the person or organization responsible for the issue including requests to stop or remedy the issue.
- j. Possible solutions that would be satisfactory to the people affected by the issue.

2. Report the Issue to the City of Evanston's 311 System



This step is important because reporting the issue to Evanston's 311 system gets the problem officially recorded with the City. Report the problem every time it affects you and your neighborhood by calling 847-448-4311 or using the 311 contact information found here: <https://www.cityofevanston.org/how-to/311>.

Keep your own log of 1) the complaints you make using the 311 system, and 2) any other communications or actions you take as you try to resolve the issue. This could be valuable information if the number of your complaints grows without a resolution to the issue.

Also, every time you submit a complaint to the 311 System, 1) describe what solution you would like to see happen for the issue, and 2) ask how long it will be before you receive a response to your 311 complaint. Give the City the opportunity to respond and work with them to resolve the issue. If your issue is not resolved, proceed to the next step.

Currently, the City of Evanston does not have staff dedicated to solving environmental justice issues. This may limit their ability to respond to your submission. However, it's still important to get your issue recorded into the 311 database so it is on file with the City for future reference.

3. Report the Issue to Your Council Member



(Photo courtesy of City of Evanston)

Share the issue definition created in Step 1 above with your council member (alderperson). Make sure the definition has an accurate history of actions you've taken so far to resolve your issue.

Here is the link to the web page that will allow you to determine who your council member is: <https://www.cityofevanston.org/home/showdocument?id=4214>. And here is a link to a web page from which you can get the contact information for your council member: <https://www.cityofevanston.org/government/city-council>.

Ask your council member if they 1) know of other ward residents who may be experiencing the same EJ issue as you and 2) if they can help you address your EJ issue or recommend some appropriate steps to take. If they can help, work cooperatively with your council member to resolve the issue. If the issue persists, continue to the next step and keep your council member informed of your progress as you take additional actions.

4. Recruit People to Help You Resolve the Issue



(Photo courtesy of Environmental Justice Evanston)

Ask other people to get involved. They can share the work with you to follow the steps in this Playbook.

They can also help get the City's attention on your EJ issue by reporting it to the 311 system every time it affects them. ***The more people reporting the issue, the more it will get the City's attention.***

People you recruit can be members of your block club, neighborhood friends, ward meeting attendees, or any other person or group who can help.

With multiple people involved, consider using a shared log file like a Google sheet that can be accessible to all involved to track 311 contacts, phone calls to the City and other governmental parties, and other actions taken to address the EJ issue.

Here is a sample Google sheet log file:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1CldAITmPI41QrcP8CgSW-i_Rz2u0NxV84E2k wgTQqwM/edit?usp=sharing that was used by the Smith Park Neighbors organization to track a foul odor being experienced by their neighborhood.

This sample file can be copied and modified for your purposes. Such a log file can be used to highlight to City officials how many people are being affected by the issue, and how much effort those people are willing to put forth to get the problem solved. If recruiting additional people does not get the problem solved, continue to the next step.

5. Research Evanston's City Code



City code consists of the laws, codes, rules, regulations and ordinances of the City.

Researching city code is not for everyone. If you can determine through research that your EJ issue is violating city code, the City is probably more likely to take action to address your EJ problem.

(Photo courtesy of Environmental Justice Evanston)

If you don't have the background to do this research, ask a friend, family member, or associate to help you. EJE can also answer your questions on researching Evanston city code at environmentaljustice@climateactionevanston.org.

To see if there are city code violations for your EJ issue, you can search Evanston's city code database: https://library.municode.com/il/evanston/codes/code_of_ordinances. At the top of the page that is displayed when you click on the preceding link, enter one or more search terms in the Search field that apply to your EJ issue and then hit <Enter>.

For example, in a situation where you are experiencing an EJ issue where a company is generating air pollution, you could enter the search term "air pollution" in the Search field and hit <Enter>. You would then review the search results and see if any of the individual results includes city code text that defines what is and what is not allowable as far as air pollution in Evanston.

If you think the air pollution you are trying to address violates any city code that was returned in your search results, then make note of 1) the location of the applicable city code, and 2) the city code itself that is potentially being violated.

The following link will take you to an EJ Issue Search Assistant Google sheet to make some searches easier:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1SxI7W-lf9T-wTGWqIMQPON1KXE60fdvPD7XK6_1DlEA/edit?usp=sharing. This file provides search strings to use for various EJ issue areas that you want to search for in the city code database.

For example, if your issue is beach tokens, you'll see the search string in the Google sheet to search with is "admission tokens." This is because in the Evanston city code, beach tokens are referred to as "admission tokens." Copy the search string **exactly** as it appears in the EJ Issue Search Assistant sheet. If the string has double quotes, include the double quotes. Paste it into the Search field at the top of this web page:

https://library.municode.com/il/evanston/codes/code_of_ordinances. Then hit <Enter>.

After you search using your search term, such as "admission tokens," you'll see a set of search results. Review each search result, as explained above, to see if any city code has been violated. It's possible that you will have to look at many search results to find just one or two sections of city code that your EJ issue is violating. It's possible you may not find any.

If it looks like your EJ issue(s) may be causing one or more code violations, add text to your l.f. section of the EJ issue definition described in Step 1 above. Then in future 311 complaints and other contacts with the City, make sure to mention that the EJ issue in question is violating Evanston city code. It should strengthen your case with the City to address your EJ issue because the City needs to enforce City code violations.

6. Contact the appropriate City of Evanston Department or Division



(Photo courtesy of City of Evanston)

Use this City of Evanston web page to identify the City department or division that has responsibility for your EJ issue:

<https://www.Cityofevanston.org/government/departments/>

Contact the identified department or division and confirm they are the right people to be informed about and resolve your EJ issue. If not, ask them to direct you to the appropriate department or division.

Share your definition of the issue (see Step 1) with the identified department or division along with any log file you have used to capture your or your group's actions on the issue, and ask them to address the issue. Inform your council member that you have shared the EJ issue definition with the City. If the issue still isn't addressed to your satisfaction, move on to the next step.

7. Does the Potential Violator Have a Permit and Are They Abiding by It?

For many businesses and governmental offices, permits are required and must be adhered to in order to operate in a legal manner. If appropriate, research and determine if the potential EJ offender has an original permit from the City, County, State, or Federal government. If so, determine if the potential offender is in violation of their permit. If not, the absence of a permit indicates a problem.

If you have identified a permit violation or a missing permit that has not yet been documented, file a complaint to the issuer of such permits highlighting the identified violation(s). Follow up and stay on top of the situation.

For State of Illinois permits:

You may need to make a State of IL FOIA request to get a copy of the permit. Here is a link: https://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/court_of_claims/foiarequest.html

You can do an online search for permit violations that have already occurred by using this IL EPA link: <https://external.epa.illinois.gov/DocumentExplorer/>.

8. Research Any Additional Violations

If applicable, research any additional violations that might be happening at the City, County, State, or Federal level. You may need to file a State of IL FOIA request to get a copy of any supporting document(s).

If it looks like there has been a violation, contact the appropriate department or division at those governmental offices and ask them how enforcement is handled for the reported issue. Then, work with the appropriate contacts to ensure that the appropriate enforcement actions are taken. Keep on top of the situation to help move it forward.

9. Community Organizing



If the EJ issue being addressed is big and looks like it will need significant community support to get results, consider using community organizing practices to resolve the issue.

Here is a link to a document that can introduce you to community organizing concepts: [Community Organizing](#).

10. Responding to Offers of Resolution

During the steps above, the potential violator may try to resolve the issue with a solution or concession that may or may not be satisfactory to you. If it is, work with the offending party to resolve the issue. If it isn't, you'll need to continue to follow the Playbook steps that have not yet been executed or are the most relevant to your situation.

11. Helpful Ideas to Get More Attention for Your Issue

Write letters to the editors of local papers (editor@evanstonroundtable.com, evanston@patch.com, <https://evanstonnow.com/contact/>), contact a local TV news organization and see if they would be interested in reporting on the situation caused by the EJ issue, speak up at City Council meetings during the time allocated for public comment, and meet directly with the offending party to try to come to an acceptable solution to the Environmental Justice issue.