

Environmental/Environmental Justice Seat on the Green Empowerment Zone Governing Board

Application Form

Name of Advisory Board applying for: Governing Board of the Green Empowerment Zone

Position: Director who lives or works in the Green Empowerment Zone representing environmental or environmental justice organizations or interests

Application must be submitted by 5 pm on Friday, January 30, 2026, to Alyson.greenlee@dcd.cccounty.us (details below)

Name of Applicant: Shoshana Wechsler

Home Address: [REDACTED]

City, State, Zip: [REDACTED]

Work Address: virtual

City, State, Zip: virtual

Contact Phone: [REDACTED]

Email Address: swechs@sonic.net

Education (University/College Attended and Degree): BA English, UC Berkeley; MA American Literature, U of Texas at Austin; MA, British and American Literature, Stanford U; Ph.D. (ABD) British and American Literature, Stanford U

Occupation/Job Title: Coordinator, Sunflower Alliance

Current Employer Name and Address: Fulltime volunteer / Sunflower Alliance

Please describe your environmental and/or environmental justice (EJ) experience, including which community you have done this work (please provide specific examples of your work, activism, advocacy, or lived experience related to air or water quality, climate resilience, renewable energy, green workforce development, EJ advocacy or other relevant work):

For well over a decade, I have been a fulltime environmental justice and climate activist along the refinery corridor and industrial belt of Contra Costa County. I was called to this work after witnessing the 2012 catastrophic explosion and fire at the Chevron refinery in Richmond, fully visible from my front porch. At that time I was already engaged in activism around statewide fossil fuel extraction and was immersed in learning the ins and outs of state climate policy. The Chevron event brought graphically home to me the necessity of working in my own backyard.

This was not a new interest. One of the chapters of my Ph.D. dissertation was on a long documentary poem about the first Union Carbide disaster which occurred in Gauley Bridge, West Virginia in the 1930s, when hundreds of itinerant Black workers died of silicosis within two years of mining silica without protective gear. Working with that astounding Depression-era text had everything to do with my later environmental justice activism in Contra Costa County.

I was a co-founder of the Sunflower Alliance in 2013, which came together to address local refinery issues and lend resources and support to frontline communities. This brought me into close contact with staff for Communities for a Better Environment (CBE) and the Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN), whom I consider to be my first real mentors in environmental justice work. CBE and APEN opened the doors to advocacy at regulatory agencies like the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

By 2014, I was meeting weekly to discuss the necessity of a just transition for refinery communities and the refinery workforce—with leadership from APEN and the United Steelworkers.

In that same year I joined forces with community members in Pittsburg to stop a petroleum storage depot from being built in a residential neighborhood. That was my first real community organizing. I went on to co-create campaigns around transport of crude-by-rail in Benicia and Richmond; tar sands refining in Rodeo; dredging in the Carquinez Strait (to enable larger oil tankers); and oil drilling in East Contra Costa.

Please list any environmental and/or environmental justice organizations that you are currently affiliated with and describe that affiliation:

Sunflower Alliance is a member of the Climate Justice Alliance (CJA), a venerable national environmental justice organization. I serve as the Sunflower Alliance representative to CJA, and in that capacity have attended two national conferences. I've also served as the Sunflower Alliance representative to Idle No More-SF Bay and was honored to have been chosen to attend a national Indigenous conference called by the Ponca Nation in Oklahoma.

I also represent Sunflower Alliance at meetings of the Last Chance Alliance, a statewide organization working on California fossil fuel issues.

I am closely affiliated with local community-based groups such as CBE Richmond, Healthy Martinez, No Drilling in Brentwood, and the Rodeo Citizens Association.

I'm also a longtime participant in 350 Bay Area, having served until recently on their communications staff. I am also a member of the Energy Committee of the SF Bay Chapter of the Sierra Club and have a lifetime membership in the Club.

Finally, I chair the Sustainability Commission of Contra Costa County.

Please describe any other Community Activities you are involved with:

Interaction with plants is a great antidote for distress! I am a docent for the Regional Parks Botanic Garden, the native plant garden in Tilden Park.

Why are you interested in holding an environmental or environmental justice seat on the Governing Board of the Green Empowerment Zone?

Everything I have done over the last several years to reduce the pollution burden carried by frontline communities has come from a deeply-rooted desire to promote environmental equity. An energy system that depends on the existence of sacrifice zones—and demands the suffering of marginalized communities—is ripe for abolition. This means hastening our collective transition to clean energy, ensuring that the energy revolution leaves no one behind. My own community enjoys lush greenery and clean air, at least most of the time, and its pleasures and privileges ought to be everyone's. It's also threatened by high fire risk that is intensifying with the worsening climate crisis. Climate change spares no one, and the transition to clean energy, whatever the current setbacks, requires our full societal resources and unleashed creativity. The green empowerment zone, ultimately, needs to extend everywhere.

On both the technological and political fronts, developing an equitable, truly green energy system is a hugely complicated undertaking. The rush to leave fossil fuels behind can create its own blindnesses and repeat the same entrenched patterns. We have to make sure that new developing technologies live up to their hype, and that they don't create a whole new set of irreversible problems. But by employing a holistic perspective, and working pragmatically *and* aspirationally, we can accomplish something here that will serve as a model for communities across the U.S. I would love to be part of this process.

Do you have any potential conflicts of interest with the work of the Green Empowerment Zone?

No. If anything, my involvement with the Sustainability Commission should enhance my participation on the Board of GEZ.

Do you have any obligations that might affect your attendance at regularly scheduled meetings?
(Meetings are currently held 3rd Friday every other month at 9:30 am in Martinez)?

No.

You may attach a separate page(s) for response or attach a resume. You must answer the questions even if you attach a resume.

I certify that the statements made by me in this application are true, complete and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief, and are made in good faith. I acknowledge and understand that all information in this application is publicly accessible (except that my home address and phone will be redacted and not publicly disclosed) and/or omissions of material fact may cause forfeiture of my rights to serve on the GEZ Governing Board.

Signature: *Shoshana Wechsler*

Date: January 29, 2026