

**BALTIMORE COUNTY ADVISORY
COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
(CEQ)**

**2006 ANNUAL REPORT TO
BALTIMORE COUNTY EXECUTIVE AND BALTIMORE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

January 2007

BACKGROUND

The Baltimore County Advisory Commission on Environmental Quality (CEQ) met regularly throughout the 2006 calendar year. Joan Plisko, Chair, set the agendas and ran each meeting. This *Baltimore County Advisory Commission on Environmental Quality (CEQ) 2006 Annual Report to the Baltimore County Executive and Baltimore County Council* fulfills the requirement specified in County Bill No. 86-03 and provides a summary of CEQ activities during 2006.

CEQ MEMBERSHIP

As of December 2006, the CEQ membership included the following individuals:

District 1:

Joan Plisko, Ph.D. (Chair), Env. Systems Engineer
Steve Schreiner, Ph.D., Senior Scientist and Information Technology Manager
Sharon Schuler, Naturalist/Env. Educator

District 2:

Lois Jacobs, Landscape Architect/Designer
Rex Wright, Industry at large

District 3:

Linda Davis, Educator
Charlie Conklin, Retired – Bethlehem Steel

District 4:

Clifford Collins, Special Education Instructor

District 5:

Shirley Carl, Community Activist/Environmental Educator
Bill Huppert, Retired Educator
Brian Fath, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Biology

District 6:

Ray Davis, Retired Educator

District 7:

Russell Donnelly

CEQ MISSION STATEMENT

While the CEQ spent much of 2005 establishing itself as a viable organization, we spent much of 2006 moving forward the mission it had previously established:

The purpose of the CEQ, through its duties and responsibilities as stated in the County Council Bill No. 86-03, is to encourage protection and preservation of the natural environment in Baltimore County and its waterways, including the Chesapeake Bay, by educating the community to make environmentally sustainable decisions and enlightening, advising, and initiating dialogue with County officials. We will facilitate communication between the County government and its residents on environmental needs, programs, and legislation.

The CEQ worked on two substantive issues with successful results: Green Building and Conservation Landscaping. At the same time, the CEQ worked hard on administrative issues, which are also described in this report.

GREEN BUILDING

From April June 2006, CEQ members, along with other technical experts from the building community, met with and advised Councilman Gardina on issues relating to Green Building legislation. Following those meetings, in April and May, CEQ members then members met individually with Councilmen across the county to discuss issues and questions related to proposed Green Building legislation.

In June 2006 Councilman Gardina submitted Bill No. 85-06, Property Tax Credit for High Performance Buildings. The CEQ provided letter of support and the CEQ Chair provided comment on June 27 at the County Council work session. In brief, the CEQ strongly supported the Bill and indicated that it was a win-win situation for both the government and the citizens of the County. The CEQ applauded the County Council for their efforts and was delighted to see that on July 3, 2006, County Council unanimously passed Bill No. 85-06.

In October 2006, CEQ members met with Councilman Gardina to discuss proposed Bill #118-06, which offers tax credits to residents for implementing energy efficient technologies in their home. At this time, CEQ provided suggestions for modification to improve the proposed bill.

CONSERVATION LANDSCAPING

After a deliberative process that included brainstorming opportunities for beneficial environmental improvement projects within Baltimore County, interviews with county agencies and the County Council, research from other jurisdictions nationally, and application of CEQ-developed criteria for project selection, the CEQ identified Nature Friendly Landscaping on county-owned lands as a primary project to be addressed by the Commission.

The CEQ assessment concluded that Nature Friendly Landscaping, subsequently referred to as Conservation Landscaping (CL), is a method of designing and maintaining beautiful parks, building and school grounds, roadside plantings, and yards to (1) reduce harm to the environment, (2) save time and money with lower maintenance requirements, and (3) maintain healthier places to live, work, and play. The CEQ believes Baltimore County government has the opportunity to lead the County in this important area by (1) assessing landscaping practices on county lands, (2) implementing and maintaining CL practices, and (3) sharing the results and benefits with county residents and other interested parties.

As a result, on April 5, 2006, the CEQ convened and facilitated a Roundtable attended by representatives from the Baltimore County Office of Planning, Department of Environmental Protection and Resource Protection, Department of Public Works, Department of Parks and Recreation, Department of Public Schools, and Department of Permit and Development to share CL practices across Baltimore County departments. The purpose of the Roundtable was to: (1) recognize opportunities for the design, implementation, and maintenance of CL, (2) create a common definition of CL, and (3) identify common concerns, obstacles, and challenges. After much discussion, participants agreed to convene a CL Project Team (CLPT), comprised of agency representatives and members of the CEQ, to further the opportunities of and address the challenges to the CL concept in order to benefit Baltimore County agencies and--most importantly--county residents.

The CLPT has been meeting since May 2006 and has addressed eleven (11) major areas that would benefit from CL practices: Air Quality, Energy Conservation, Pesticide/Fertilizer Reduction, Water Quality Improvement, Stormwater Management, Ecosystem Management, Resource Reduction, Aesthetic Improvement, Education, Community Engagement, and Maintenance Practices.

Since the beginning of the CL project, the CEQ and CLPT have been collaborating with Fairfax County, Virginia representatives who are in the process of implementing a Five-Year Natural Landscaping Plan. Their program began in 2004 as a result of a discussion with the Board of Supervisors (similar to Baltimore County Council) on the issues of meeting air quality standards. That discussion prompted the formation of a Natural Landscaping Committee. The CLPT met with the Fairfax County Committee in December 2006 to better understand their process and to share the opportunities and challenges of such a program.

As a result of the CLPT meetings and commensurate activities, a draft proposal of recommendations to the county agencies, administrations, and eventually the County Council, is in the final stages of development. The CEQ plans to present this draft to County Council in Spring 2007.

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

- The CEQ, with assistance from DEPRM, secured a spot on the Baltimore County website. Please visit <http://www.co.ba.md.us/Agencies/ceq/index.html>.
- On behalf of the CEQ, the CEQ Chair participated in the County's Builders for the Bay Roundtable Process and currently remains on the Builders for the Bay Executive Steering Committee.
- The CEQ formed a Membership Subcommittee whose charge is to sustain the membership base of the CEQ.
- The CEQ is considering holding a Public Meeting to gain insights from County residents on pressing environmental issues.
- The CEQ Communications Subcommittee worked diligently to get some media attention in 2006. The Subcommittee networked with a number of reporters at local newspapers.