



**2015 ANNUAL REPORT TO
BALTIMORE COUNTY EXECUTIVE AND
BALTIMORE COUNTY COUNCIL
May 30, 2016**

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BACKGROUND

The Baltimore County Advisory Commission on Environmental Quality (CEQ), which was established by legislation in 2003, met nine times throughout the 2015 calendar year. Steven Morsberger, Chair, set the agendas and presided at the meetings. Secretary, Andy Miller, took minutes at the meetings.

This Baltimore County Advisory Commission on Environmental Quality (CEQ) 2015 Annual Report to the Baltimore County Executive and Baltimore County Council fulfills the requirement specified in Baltimore County Code Subsection 3-3-2106 and provides a summary of CEQ activities during 2015.

CEQ MEMBERSHIP

The CEQ enjoyed active membership during 2015. The 2015 CEQ membership included the following individuals:

District 1:

Valerie Androutsopoulos, District 1 Representative

Steve Morsberger, At Large Member: Environmental Organization Representative

District 2:

Lois Jacobs, District 2 Representative

Andy Miller, Ph.D., At Large Member: Educator and Scientist of Environmental Policy/Management

District 3:

Bill Breakey, M.D., District 3 Representative

Linda Davis, At Large Member: Educator

Glenn Elseroad, At Large Member: Agricultural Representative

District 4:

Jeff Supik, District 4 Representative

Rex Wright, At Large Member: Business Community Representative

District 5:

Jim Burkman, District 5 Representative

Carol Newill, District 5 Representative

Brian Fath, Ph.D., At Large Member: Academia

German Mora, Ph.D., At Large Member: Academia

James Derui, At Large Member: Home Builders Representative

District 6:

Mary Gruver-Byers, District 6 Representative

District 7:

Russell Donnelly, District 7 Representative

County Government Liaisons:

Don Outen (EPS)

During the year, the terms of Jeff Supik and Jim Burkman expired and they chose not to be reappointed. The CEQ thanks them for their dedicated service to the Commission.

The CEQ welcomes new members German Mora, James Derui, and Carol Newill along with continued county support from Ayla Haig from the Department of Environmental Protection and Sustainability. Currently there is one vacancy on the Commission for the District 4 Representative.

CEQ MISSION STATEMENT

The CEQ activities in 2015 furthered the mission previously established for the CEQ:

The purpose of the CEQ, through its duties and responsibilities as described in the Baltimore County Code, Subsection 3-3-21, 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 by enlightening, advising, and initiating dialogue with County officials. It facilitates communication between the County government and its residents on environmental needs, programs, and legislation.

As a group of dedicated volunteers for environmental integrity, the members understand the need for following and monitoring environmental plans.

CEQ WORK ITEMS AND SUBJECTS

Forest Management

Donald C. Outen, Natural Resource Manager, Forest Management, Department of Environmental Protection & Sustainability addressed the Commission on this topic and organized field trips for Commission members to observe one of the forest thinning projects in the County. Approximately 48% of County land is forested. The importance of healthy forests for environmental quality and water quality cannot be overstated. However, many County forests under public or private management are in poor condition for a variety of reasons including poor management in past years, invasion by exotic species, over-population of white-tailed deer that destroy forest understory and inhibit regeneration. Mr. Outen detailed a number of practices that are being pursued to address the health of County forests, including planting native trees on available open spaces and removal of undesirable trees to encourage development of a forest canopy that is ecologically preferable. Mr. Outen also described the innovative collaboration between County and private landowners for forest management in the Prettyboy watershed. The Commission was impressed by this initiative and looks forward to learning more about its level of success in future years.

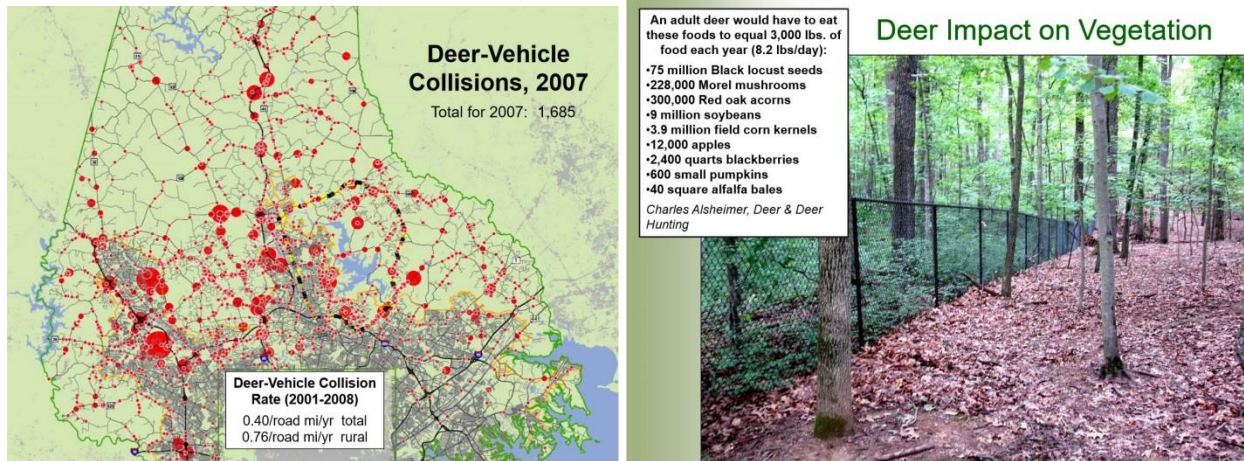
Water Quality

The CEQ was apprised of the progress and goals of implementation of Stormwater fees levied on residential and commercial properties and advised the County on approaches to communicate the benefits of the fee to County citizens. In the Fall, the Commission discussed at several meetings the proposal to phase out the stormwater fee that was introduced by the Council in the fall of 2015. The members of the Commission felt strongly that this would be a mistake and severely undermine the capacity of the County to implement the required reduction of Total Mass Daily Loads (TMDL) and comply with Maryland's National Pollution Discharge Elimination System Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permits. This opinion was shared by technical experts as well as by environmental advocacy organizations. Commissioners provided information to their Council members to this effect and

presented testimony at the Council work session. The Council was not persuaded by the arguments and passed a bill in November, which will phase out the stormwater fees.

Deer Over-population and Management

The over-population of deer in Baltimore County is still a major problem, as it is in many suburban areas of the Eastern United States. Recent analysis and estimates in Baltimore County indicate that there are 49,325 deer or 82 per square mile. Based upon analyses of forest cover and other measures, it is estimated that to remain healthy and sustainable, the county deer herd should number approximately 5,000, or roughly 10 percent of its current population.



Hazards associated with the deer over-population include public safety risk from vehicle collisions, risk to human health from Lyme disease, property damage and damage to forest ecosystems through over-grazing.

Many control methods have been proposed and tried. Experience to date suggests that the best method for deer removal is through shooting by skilled sharpshooters, although it is almost impossible to remove deer at a rate faster than their natural reproduction. New concepts are being developed to encourage deer removal, such as incentivizing farmers to permit hunting on their lands.

Environmental and Public Health Impacts of Road Salt

The application of large amounts of salt to County roads for winter weather conditions has been an ongoing concern for the Commission. In 2009, the Commission prepared a detailed report on the health and environmental risks of this practice. There is evidence that since the Report was published in 2009; sodium levels in groundwater and freshwater stream and rivers have continued to rise causing larger concerns for public health and freshwater ecology. Road salt application has also been of concern to the Baltimore Metropolitan Council for a different reason. The region is concerned because salt is getting difficult to obtain in long winters and some jurisdictions actually ran out of salt during the prolonged winter cold weather conditions in 2015. Cost of salt application is a major driver for local governments' concern as is the expectation that a TMDL for chloride will be introduced by MDE in the future. The Commission continues to believe that this is a critical issue and that alternatives to heavy salt application should be pursued to reduce risks to public health and freshwater ecosystems.

Open Space in Urban Areas

The current County law requires developers to provide 1,000 square feet of open space per dwelling unit or pay a “fee in lieu” thereof. In 2013, following approval of a reduced schedule of fees, the County Council issued a resolution requiring the Administration to review the County’s open space needs and recommend changes to the policies surrounding the fees, the fees themselves, and the Local Open Space Manual, which governs the provision of open space on development sites. As in most jurisdictions, developers in Baltimore County must include green space (1,000 square feet per home) in their development projects. If they cannot meet the standard, they can request a waiver and pay a fee instead. The Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance was adopted in 1988 and Baltimore County Local Open Space Manual was adopted in 2000. Currently, 20% of all open space waiver fees collected go to NeighborSpace. Four principles of NeighborSpace include:

- Replace an overly complex, zoning-based fee schedule with a simpler schedule related to the relative need for open space and the cost of providing it;
- Ensure that all types of residential development projects bear a responsibility for providing open space or paying a fee in lieu thereof;
- Establish a process for assessing, collecting and expending open space waiver fees that is transparent and predictable;
- Incentivize the payment of waiver fees over providing open space on site so as to encourage a network of open spaces with public benefits versus isolated and fragmented private green spaces.

The open space waiver fee is based on the underlying zoning (a zoning based fee schedule). Legislative bill 78-15 was passed that requires a annual report regarding the provision of local open space, including the identification of development projects, the disposition of all waivers requested, fees in lieu of providing open space that are assessed or collected, and projects funded; and generally relating to the annual reporting of local open space provided for development projects and the disposition of all fees collected. This bill is intended to provide better transparency with funding for open space and associated waiver fees from County development projects.

Mowing “Old-Fields”

A problem exists with current mowing practices in County properties, such as County parks: There is no consistent policy for the preservation of old-field environments, which provide important habitats for many wildlife species. An old field has multiple benefits, including enhancing water quality, providing habitat for pollinators, moths, spiders, butterflies, etc. and they are easy to maintain. The County has policies for protecting wetlands and forest ecosystems, but no consistent policy for protecting and maintaining old-field habitat.

The Baltimore Bird Club and County naturalists have encouraged the County to retain and preserve old-field habitat on its property. However, there are three primary reasons why the County’s maintenance personnel have been reluctant to support the retention of old fields including the need to control invasive species, community objections over the “untidy” and “weedy” appearance of old fields, and in County parks, the need to maintain room for additional parking for seasonal events.

There needs to be a process to identify the prime areas of concern, and tailor mowing practices to the particular requirements of each field. There appears to be a need to provide further education to the agencies concerned about alternative landscape maintenance practices.

CONTACT WITH CITIZENS

Various citizen enquiries came to the CEQ via its website. The requests were referred to the proper County agencies. Frequent issues focused on trash disposal, stream erosion and water quality, stormwater management and maintenance, and open space.

CONTACT WITH COUNTY

During 2015, CEQ members:

- Met with Council members to update them on CEQ activities and to discuss current environmental concerns and priorities in their districts.
- Attended Council Work Sessions and testified at the November 10, 2015 session in opposition to Bill 85-15: Elimination of the Stormwater Remediation Fee
- Welcomed the ongoing, regular attendance of County government staff who attended meetings and provided advice and support to the Commission:
 - Donald C. Outen, Natural Resource Manager, Forest Management, Dept. of Environmental Protection & Sustainability
 - Ayla Haig, Sustainability Coordinator, Dept. of Environmental Protection & Sustainability
 - Kui Zhao, Demographer & Master Plan Coordinator, Department of Planning

COMMISSION INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNICATION

The CEQ members discussed questions, concerns, and priorities in their districts and areas of environmental expertise. CEQ members:

- Updated the CEQ website.
- Prioritized topics for future CEQ consideration.
- Attended various environmental lectures and events around the County.
- In August, CEQ member Glenn Elseroad and his wife hosted the annual CEQ social dinner picnic at his house.

ONGOING CEQ MEMBER CONCERNS

The Commission will continue to review environmental issues confronting the County in the coming year, and will be particularly interested in pursuing questions or issues referred by Council members. During the course of CEQ discussions, individual members raised the following issues for possible later action by the commission:

- 2016 Comprehensive Zoning Map Process
- Stormwater remediation and progress towards achieving TMDL reduction goals
- Effects of climate change in Baltimore County
- Recycling and waste reduction
- Invasive species
- County property mowing schedules
- Alternative energy generation/production in Baltimore County

- Revising building codes for better energy efficiency and "gray water" use
- Open space and redevelopment toward walkable communities

GUESTS

The CEQ would like to thank several guests in 2015 representing organizations with special interests or expertise that presented information and promoted member discussion at meetings:

Larissa Johnson, *MDE Climate Change Outreach and Communication and MD Climate Coalition*

Charlie Conklin, *Gunpowder Valley Conservancy*

Laurie Taylor- Mitchell, *Cromwell Valley Park Council*

Rose Anderson, *Baltimore Bird Club*

John Canoles, *Baltimore Bird Club*

Barbara Hopkins, *NeighborSpace*

John Alexander, *Department of Planning – retired*