

COE agenda 2-3-16

Plastic Bag Ban at Convenience Centers/Transfer Stations

-Bill passed along a news release from the Commissioners (<http://www.co.saint-marys.md.us/pio/docs/2016-15PlasticBagsShouldNoLongerbeUsedwhenRecycling.pdf>). It states that plastic bags and film packaging are no longer allowed in the single stream recycling because Prince George's MRF has banned them and will be charging additional fees for contaminated loads. The county has placed bins for plastic bags at the convenience centers, and there is signage on the single stream recycling dumpsters. The release also mentions that the County is looking into TREX or other processors to organize user-friendly plastic bag/film collection. The release concludes with some stats: the County's recycling rate for 2014 was 44.2% (above the state mandated 20%) and overall waste diversion was 50% and that we rate 3rd in overall waste diversion among similar counties in MD with populations under 150,000 people.

MACo Request for County Input

-Bill sent out an article discussing that the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) has requested input from the Counties regarding anaerobic digestion and recycling facilities (<http://conduitstreet.mdcounties.org/2016/01/29/maco-calls-for-county-input-on-anaerobic-digestion-recycling-facility-legislation/>). MDE has sponsored legislation that enacts new regulations with regards to anaerobic digestion facilities as well as recycling facilities, and MACo has supported the legislation with amendments, including leniency on recycling facilities and the request that counties input their opinions regarding anaerobic digestion facilities. We should discuss this and determine if we have a recommendation for the Department of Public Works and/or the County Commissioners.

Sinking Farmland

-Mike sent an email about sinking farmland due to over-farming and diminishing aquifers. The subject mentioned an article of interest, but I did not receive a link. I would be curious to learn more, so hopefully Mike can fill us in at the meeting.

Natural Geoengineering article

-Gordon sent an article about letting nature fix some of the greenhouse gas problems by letting it return to the way it was before man influenced it. An example included killing moose predators, which could lead to moose over-eating saplings and preventing trees from growing into CO2 sinks. Gordon asked what we could consider in our own county as the landscape has changed drastically in past decades.

Food Waste article

-Gordon sent an article on food waste (http://e360.yale.edu/feature/unnatural_balance_how_food_waste_impacts_worlds_wildlife/2945/) discussing the effects of human food waste on animal populations. The article described food waste as subsidizing certain opportunistic predators. It described seagulls and their effect on certain fish populations as well as the normal predators of those fish. It also discussed the move to stop artificial feeding of bears in Yellowstone in the '70's and how that eventually was beneficial to the bears. There is certainly a substantial effect on the environment when our waste feeds populations of animals that would not normally thrive. As I discussed in my response to Gordon's email regarding natural geoengineering, I truly think composting is the most important topic we can address as the Commission on the Environment, because it affects so much of our environment. Composting food waste reduces methane emissions from landfills and, when applied to agricultural land, decreases the need for artificial fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, and irrigation. The webs formed in rich compost, made from fungus, are beneficial to the strength of the soil and the health of the plants, reducing erosion and chemical runoff. Composting food waste into soil amendment addresses the biggest issues we have in our county.

Meeting with Public Works

-As composting is the issue I find most pressing to our environment, I have requested a meeting with George Erichsen, Director of Public Works. We have discussed different ideas for our county in previous COE meetings, and I would like to discuss the feasibility of some of the ideas with him. I would like to discuss at this meeting some of the questions I should be asking him. Some questions I wrote down at our December meeting include: Would changing regulations go over hauling contracts? Can we post a list of haulers/vendors and their associated costs for the public to access? Would it be cheaper for the county to handle the hauling centrally like some other counties in the state as opposed to our present approach? We can discuss what other questions we may have at the meeting. I liked the idea to have Wildewood be a potential pilot program for dropping off food waste and yard waste at the St. Andrew's Transfer Station. I would also like to discuss the feasibility of producing biodiesel for county vehicles, including STS vehicles and school buses.

Leonardtown's Green Team

-I have contacted the St. Mary's professor in charge of the Environmental Studies program to seek interested college students. I have asked if he still plans to invite Mike Hunninghake down to discuss Sustainable Maryland municipalities. If that does not happen, and there is no student interest, I would like to move forward with getting Leonardtown certified.

Aquifer report

-Bill handed out an administrative report on the tri-county aquifers. I have looked through it briefly, but would like to learn more and discuss this issue, as its implications could be disastrous.

Lexington Park Plan

-I wrote a note to myself on the last agenda to discuss the Lexington Park Plan, so we shall.

Earth Day

-Brad spoke with some of the Leonardtown Town Council members and they would like to coordinate with the COE to improve the emphasis on the environment in our county for Earth Day in the Square. I will let Brad elaborate on what was discussed and then we should plan what we want for our stand.

Nicole Basenback

-Sue asked that we discuss how Nicole might help the COE