

St. Mary's County  
Commission on the Environment (COE)  
Meeting Notes for July 1, 2015

Committee meeting called to order at 7:02pm in Room 14 of the Potomac Building on July 1, 2015 by COE president, Thomas Brewer.

In Attendance:

Thomas Brewer, COE  
Gordon Smith, COE  
Mike Thompson, COE  
Mark Burroughs, COE  
Kimberly Eggbert, COE  
Paul Waxman  
Sue Veith, St. Mary's Environmental Planner  
George Erichsen, Director of Public Works and Transportation  
Nick Zurkin, County Recycling Lead  
Jason Baer, MD Environmental Service  
Matthew Shields, MD Environmental Service

- 1) Minutes from June 3, 2015 were unanimously approved. Format for minutes will continue to be **proposed agenda items bolded** and discussion from tonight's meeting not bolded.
- 2) Kimberly Eggbert was introduced as a new COE member. Helen Dorsey is no longer a COE member.
- 3) **Recommendations for Public Works**

**-We will discuss the short-, medium-, and long-term recommendations by Public Works and determine what recommendations we want to make as a commission. This will be done at the beginning or end of the meeting at George Erichsen's discretion, as he is our guest and may not want to stay for the entire meeting.**

The COE had very lengthy and constructive dialogue with Public Works and Transportation and MD Environmental Service team members. Many suggestions by COE team members will be considered for the recommendations. Mr. Erichsen also provided many insights on recycling to the COE, some of which are captured below.

- 4) **Bottle Deposit Bill**

**-Sue sent out a link after the last meeting with information on the recent bottle deposit bill that was introduced in the House and Senate. MACo (The Maryland Association of Counties) opposed the bill and the website contained a link to their written testimony. In short, they argued that county recycling programs depend on the revenue from the marketable commodities within the waste stream, and that bottles make up a large portion of this revenue. Furthermore, they believe this will have a deleterious effect on consumer behavior as they have become accustomed to single-stream recycling and complicating that may create apathy.**

What was not mentioned in the testimony was the destination of the bottles in the program. When I read through the bill, I found that the legislation sets up a Maryland Beverage Recycling Organization, a private for-profit entity that will develop and operate the Maryland Redeemable Beverage Container and Litter Reduction Program. In short, this Organization will be run by a board consisting of distributors, bottlers, and private label distributors and will be tasked with overseeing the operation and maintenance of the Program with redemption centers throughout the State that collect bottles and administer the refund to consumers. The Organization would have to deposit \$2,000,000 annually from unredeemed deposits into the Redeemable Beverage Container Environmental Grant Program, which would be administered by the Chesapeake Bay Trust. The Organization collects revenue from the sale of containers for recycling/reuse, unredeemed deposits, and exemption fees collected from retail buildings of 5,000 square feet or larger that do not participate.

What was not clear to me was the expected revenue for the Organization. It seems that they may profit largely without having to help out the counties that would lose revenue from selling recyclable products, which seems to be the main concern of the MACo. I read the following article, which seemed to promote bottle deposit legislation: <http://www.pri.org/stories/2014-02-18/chinas-green-fence-cleaning-americas-dirty-recycling>. The story describes the 2013 Green Fence policy in China that required cleaner recyclables. China had been the leading importer of recyclable materials for years, but they ended up putting large amounts of

recyclables into landfills due to contamination, including lack of cleanliness as well as mixing in items that do not belong. As a result, they required cleaner products and began rejecting shipments, which causes materials recovery facilities to lose money for the shipment costs and lack of revenue after rejected products are returned. The article claimed that this Green Fence policy could cause us to clean up our act and work harder to clean and organize recyclable products, but this story was coming out of California, where there was a company, CarbonLITE, that processes about 2 billion bottles per year. The article stated that the bottle deposit bill in California benefits the company and that the 11 states with container deposit laws have significantly higher recycling rates. The MACo pointed out that the states with these laws have had them before single-stream recycling was popular and thus benefit from already having a program that makes sense, and that moving away from single-stream could be difficult and unsuccessful.

From what I have read, I would have to agree with MACo that privatizing the recycling of beverage containers would not be advantageous if our present single-stream recycling and materials recovery facilities produce clean, recyclable beverage containers.

It was mentioned that glass is not as much of a recycling revenue producer (compared to paper and aluminum), especially broken glass as you cannot recycle it. A past project to help bars and restaurants with recycling was proposed but turned out to not be feasible.

#### 5) Plastic Bag Fees

-Mark provided data from the Montgomery County plastic bag fee program. After researching the bottle deposit fees, I would like to revisit the idea of recommending a plastic bag fee in the county. I would like to research the MoCo program further to determine any obstacles or problems that they have encountered. My reason for supporting a bag fee, but not a bottle deposit fee, is the fact that plastic bags and film packaging cannot be recycled, but instead only compressed into plastic lumber, as we have discussed previously. Since consumers presently have a place to take beverage containers to be recycled and our recycling rate is fairly good, I do not see the bottle fee producing that much effective change. We do not have good numbers on the rate of returning bags to the grocery store plastic bag receptacles, but even if the fee does not change behavior, it would produce revenue for the county.

Harford County set up a dumpster where farmers (agricultural related plastic) and marinas (boat wraps) deposit plastic, which is then sold to Trex.

#### 6) Sustainable MD Certification

-I have been in contact with Professor Muchnick and will be meeting with him next week to discuss student projects that could assist Leonardtown with their certification process. He stated that he would be interested in collaborating further with the COE and the county to expand community outreach for the students.

There was no further update on this topic.

#### 7) Further SMCM help

-Amy Henderson, Assistant Professor of Economics, and Emek Rose, Assistant Professor of Mathematics, have reached out to the commission recently, offering up student help with analyses of our choice. Essentially, we can provide them with general research questions, and they will produce a professional analysis with a conclusive report. This could be very useful for our composting facility research...

The possibility of conducting a waste audit was discussed. Students would not physically do the audit, but could analyze the data.

#### 8) Composting

-I have been in contact with Dan Goossen of Green Mountain Compost, the public composting facility that we have discussed, and I am currently putting together some numbers to show the cost/benefit analysis of the facility. The Chittenden Solid Waste District (CSWD) is a municipality created by Vermont to manage the county's solid waste and Green Mountain Compost is one of their facilities. College students will be analyzing the solid waste stream since the facility was constructed to determine if the county is saving money by decreasing the solid waste stream through composting instead of going into the landfill. If private haulers were able to save companies money by hauling food scraps from large producers of food waste (grocery stores, restaurants, hospitals, schools, etc.) at a lower rate than general solid waste, as is being done in Vermont, we could motivate businesses to save money and provide product to be composted and sold by the county to raise revenue that could go toward the landfill-related debt that we have incurred. Coincidentally, the cost of building the Vermont facility is almost the exact same as the landfill-related debt we have in our

county, which is ~2.3 million. Determining estimates on potential revenue could show the net positive effect that a public composting facility could produce. Also, Mr. Erichsen mentioned to me that Expressions of Interest can be helpful in the implementation of a large-scale project such as this one.

It was mentioned that Howard County has curbside bins for composting.

9) **Healthy St. Mary's Partnership**

**-I, along with Gordon, Brad, and Sue, attended the annual meeting of the Healthy St. Mary's Partnership, an alliance of healthcare workers and concerned residents intent on increasing the health of the community. The annual meeting was well attended and the speakers were great. I was impressed by the work that has gone into the Partnership, and look forward to participating and helping in the future.**

There was no further update on this topic.

10) **Plastic bottled water at public meetings**

**-As Brad mentioned, there is bottled water provided at public meetings in which water fountains are located. I felt that this was a good recommendation to be considered by Public Works for their recommendations.**

There was no further update on this topic.

11) **Marlay-Taylor Water Reclamation Facility Tour**

**-Mike was told by the Chief of Facilities and Operations that a tour for the COE would be possible, but not for another 9 months as the site is not fully functional now.**

It was explained that the facility is being upgraded.

12) **Landfill mining was brought up as a new topic. This is a process where solid wastes put in a landfill are mined and processed. Landfill mining can uncover valuable recyclable materials while at the same time reduces the amount of material in a landfill and allows hazardous materials (if present) to be removed.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:50pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Mark Burroughs.

The next COE meeting is scheduled for Wednesday August 5, 2015 at 7pm in Room 14 of the Potomac Building.