

St. Mary's County
Commission on the Environment (COE)
Meeting Notes for August 5, 2015

Committee meeting called to order at 7:10pm in Room 14 of the Potomac Building on August 5, 2015 by COE president, Thomas Brewer.

In Attendance:

Thomas Brewer, COE
Gordon Smith, COE
Mike Thompson, COE
Mark Burroughs, COE
Mary Ferns, COE
Brad Newkirk, COE
Paul Waxman
Sue Veith, St. Mary's Environmental Planner
Bill Hunt, St. Mary's DLUGM Deputy Director

- 1) Minutes from July 1, 2015 were unanimously approved. Format for minutes will continue to be proposed agenda items bolded and discussion from tonight's meeting not bolded.

- 2) **Advisory Board Changes**

-The Commissioners made a couple of small changes. According to the Boards/Commissions document, we have single four-year terms and we constitute the Solid Waste Advisory Committee. It also states that we shall be provided staff support from DLUGM and advisory support from PW&T. I am not sure what the original terms were, so I am not sure if anything has changed for our Commission. As for the second document, I am not sure what changed, but it seems that the goal was to make it easier to become a board/commission member.

It was discussed that we are still the Commission on the Environment (COE) as the Solid Waste Advisory Committee does not exist. Sue will check the number of 4 year terms that we can serve. Also, Sue will check what is contained in the now repealed Code of St. Mary's County to ensure the repealed chapters do not pertain to the COE.

- 3) **Plastic Bag article**

-Gordon sent out a plastic bag ban article; it seems Hawaii is the first state to ban plastic bags at retail stores. What I found most interesting was this quote:

"This was not done by the state legislature, but instead by all four County Councils," the Surfrider Foundation, an environmental advocacy group, said in 2012 when the ban was first passed. The group called the effort "a great example of local activists and decision-makers addressing the serious issue of plastic pollution."

I think that shows the importance of starting small, so I maintain my position that we should enact plastic bag fees at a county level and use the revenue to increase the amount of plastic bags and film packaging going to Trex through various initiatives. Plastic bags are only a small amount of the plastic that cannot be recycled, but can be compressed into plastic lumber, including bread bags, dry cleaning bags, Ziploc bags, shrink wrapping, agricultural waste, boat winterizing plastic. Banning the bags will not eliminate plastic waste, but fees will raise money from those apathetic consumers that enjoy the convenience of a plastic bag, but do not care to recycle or do not know that certain plastics are not recyclable. I still need to research Montgomery County's program some more before suggesting anything to the Commissioners.

Gordon also sent an email about the Elkridge Materials Recovery Facility, noting how people do not realize that single-stream recycling does not handle plastic bags and film packaging. I think we should find out if Trex tries to obtain the plastic waste that is presumably landfilled after being rejected from the MRF. Trex also has promotional competitions for schools and communities; those that collect 500 pounds of plastic in a six-month span get a high-performance composite bench...Leonardtown, perhaps? Lastly, I called Wal-mart and they said you can bring plastic bags to the service desk, but they do not have a receptacle.

Gordon stated that the Elkridge plant does not accept any plastic now and he believes the Washington Post reported the plant is losing money. Also, it seems plastic bags slow down the processing at the plant.

Walmart works with Rocky Mountain Recycling for plastics and cardboard.

The COE discussed a visit to the Capital Heights plant to see the processing station.

Mark took an action to ask Nick Zurkin if they have considered collecting plastic bags at the transfer stations.

- 4) **Sustainable MD Green Team**

-I spoke with Mike Hunninghake, the Program Manager for Sustainable Maryland, and he is excited to work with us. He wants us to form a Green Team. I have one person that has expressed interest to Laschelle McKay, the Leonardtown Council administrator. I am going to ask one of the Council members to be on the Team. Is anyone interested in participating? I plan to have some college students on board, as I would like for them to be a big part of the certification process. Those interested can discuss how the Green Team will meet and move forward from here.

This effort supports the certification of Leonardtown. Forming a Green Team will get Leonardtown additional points towards certification. Mary Ferns offered to sign up for this Green Team. Mike Hunninghake offered to visit to give us a tutorial.

Action: If anyone else is interested in the Green Team, they need to email Thomas.

5) **Long Range Transportation Plan Meeting**

-Bill sent out a flier for the meeting that took place this Monday, but I was unable to attend because of work. Was anybody able to attend? I am curious as to what was discussed and if there is any plan to construct parking lots in strategic places to cut down on base traffic, either providing buses to transport people on base or simply allowing people to carpool from the parking lots.

It appears very few Calvert citizens attended this initial kickoff meeting. Action to all: Provide Sue comments on the Transportation Plan within two weeks.

Also, this led to COE discussions about weed killers used by the state on many roadways. Thomas has an article discussing chemicals added to weed killers.

6) **Composting**

-I recently spoke with Allison Lilly from UMD to discuss their composting program. I learned that their Facilities Management Team hauls yard waste to the Western Branch Composting Facility, which is operated by MES and managed by Prince George's County. The facility grinds up the grass, leaves, brush, branches, and Christmas trees, uses windrows, and produces Leaf-Gro, which is sold all over the state. They sell around 50,000 cubic yards and use the revenue to offset the composting operational costs. This seems like a model worth noting, but I want to research more the economics of the model. Mrs. Lilly also gave me contact information for some key players in the world of composting.

Of the contacts, I have reached out to Brenda Platt, the top compost advocate in the area. Brenda is the Co-Director of the Institute for Local Self Reliance, described by Wikipedia as a "non-profit organization and advocacy group providing assistance to communities about local solutions for sustainable community development." She also chairs the National Capital Region Organics Task Force, which states that they are "a group of government, public interest, institutional and business representatives working to expand recovery, full capture and utilization of organic materials in the metropolitan Washington, DC region." Brenda heads up the Sustainable Plastics and Composting Makes \$en\$e projects, so I am sure that she will be a valuable resource to our composting cause as well as our plastic bag/film collection cause. I look forward to meeting with her, and I plan to attend the quarterly meeting of the Task Force coming up in October. I also plan to reach out to Steven Birchfield of MES and Benny Erez of EcoCity Farms to learn more about different initiatives in the state.

I have been in correspondence with the College professors, but it seems that our idea for a project was not consistent with the aims of the particular course that they originally had in mind. However, a student is interested in performing a cost-benefit analysis related to composting for her St. Mary's Project. We can guide her to gather information and research our County's solid waste stream and compare it to existing composting facilities to help develop our proposal to the County Commissioners.

Thomas plans to ask about testing of Leaf-Gro for aminopyralids as the COE in the past discussed problems with a New England based compost company.

Action: Thomas will pass out an article on Vancouver food waste fees.

Thomas plans to meet with the student interested in performing the cost-benefit analysis mentioned above.

Lastly, Thomas plans to meet soon with a contact who will discuss composting facility ideas with John Bohanan.

7) Mike Thompson attended a Chaney gravel pit reopening in McIntosh Run that appears to be an environmentally contained plant.

8) Mike noted that his home solar system was the 10th installed in St. Mary's County but now there are 1469 solar systems. It is expected there will be at least 2200 systems by the end of this year.

St. Mary's College is considering solar parking lot systems.

9) Lastly, Sue mentioned that Eastern Long-Eared Bats (the ones that get white nose disease) are now protected and that clearing limitations have been put in place.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Mark Burroughs.

The next COE meeting is scheduled for Wednesday Sept 2, 2015 at 7pm in Room 14 of the Potomac Building.