

## Minutes

Baltimore County Commission on Environmental Quality (CEQ)  
October 25, 2023 at 7 pm, Jefferson Building, 105 W Chesapeake Ave, Towson

Attendance: Valerie Androutsopoulos, Radu Zamfirache, Andy Miller, Brian Fath, Karen Wynn, Dustin Shearer, Lois Jacobs, Brian Lindley, Mahnaz Mazaheri Assadi, Linda Davis, Henry Ayakwah, Carol Newill.

Excused absences among Commissioners were: Lynda Eisenberg, Brian Bernstein, Steve Malan

Thank you to Brian Lindley for helping with the website and communication with DEPS. Thank you to Henry Ayakwah for facilitating our use of this room and PowerPoint. Congratulations to Lois on her birthday.

7:00 Welcome to the 2nd in-person meeting in a very long time. Note that our windows are open and the room air filter has been running. Masks optional.

7:05 Maryland 5 million Trees Initiative, to plant and grow a tree for every Marylander by 2031. Speaker is Cara Dudzic, Central Region Tree Planting Specialist, Forest Service, Maryland DNR.

Working with the 5 million trees initiative since February. Giving an overview of maintenance issues and maintenance requirements for partner programs.

Overview – established as part of the Tree Solutions Now Act in 2021 – to plant 5 million by 2031 and at least 10% to go to underserved areas. Focus on afforestation rather than reforestation. All trees committed toward 1 trillion Trees Global Initiative.

Underserved area planting goals: 10%. Using interactive mapping tools. Support from MDOT, Maryland Urban and Community Forest Committee, Chesapeake Bay Trust Urban Trees and others. Criteria are listed on map showing areas that qualify.

List of implementing partners – also including Md Dept Ag, DNR and Forest Service, MDE. Mentioned higher ed institutions including UMBC and CCBC Essex. One of the big programs in Md Dept Ag is Conservation Reserve program – taking land out of production to be afforested. Contract with federal government where landowners are given small payments in exchange for agreement to maintain their trees in a 30-yr contract. Helps with forested buffers on agricultural land. Most CREP plantings are close enough to water to affect sediment and nutrient loads. There are a good number of acres buffered in Carroll County; plenty of room to do more in Baltimore County. People in the program are doing a lot of outreach; 13 contractual staff in MFS. MDE is running the tracker of how many trees are planted and where.

Funding – receives \$15 million annually, \$10 million through CBT. Both urban and rural opportunities. 13 different programs listed.

Urban and community forestry includes anything within the built environment. 5 Million Trees Umbrella Program with partners – fill gaps of unmet need; make it easy to plant trees; focus on conservation and equity priorities such as shade/cooling for communities, declining species, opportunities on conserved lands such as public parks and schoolyards and private easements. There are neighborhoods that have historically been redlined, lack tree cover, may be affected by an incinerator, water treatment plant etc. Conservation and equity priorities are not mutually exclusive – overlapping Venn diagram.

Options for turnkey planting with 3+ years of maintenance or qualified native landscaping vouchers. If you submit an application in July you can plant in Fall, if in February you can plant in Spring. The “turnkey” planting is primarily with some partner programs. Have to plant usually at least an acre and promise to keep the trees for 15 years. An acre will support about 300 trees with tube shelters to protect from deer. CREP also comes with maintenance requirements.

Partners include Alliance for Chesapeake Bay, Trout Unlimited, Chesapeake Bay Trust, Baltimore Tree Trust, Arbor Day Foundation, American Forests, US Forest Service, Maryland Forestry Foundation.

Maintenance strategies: expand volunteer opportunities including new Maryland Tree Stewards Program, Urban and Community Forestry Training,

Growing models in conservation community – riparian rangers starting in MD (ACB), college volunteer groups, Casey Trees “25 to Stay Alive” pledge to water trees planted.

Contract regional tree care crews –

Support 14-yr agreements on private lands; landowners opt-in; requests bundled regionally

Urban and Community project maintenance –

Need community buy-in; communication and education for facilities and operations staff; avoiding human destruction. Critical that everyone at a location is on board and you need that buy-in. Watering and water access; is there a source nearby and how easy is it to get water to the trees? Permission given even to crack open a fire hydrant to keep trees alive during a drought, protection, pruning, long term planning; trees as an operational solution vs an operational problem; designing for maintenance and setting projects up for success.

One picture shows grounds of Springfield Hospital in Carroll County; they put in 16 acres of trees this year, planning 80 more. This will eventually make mowing unnecessary and grounds will become afforested rather than mowed turfgrass areas, which will improve stormwater control whereas turf grass behaves almost like asphalt. Pruning done properly is also important to keep trees healthy.

We are two years into the program and hiring. Total trees planted is 333,256 (screenshot of tracking dashboard) – took some time to get up and running. People are encouraged to

register their trees.

Spring 2024 planting outlook: 5 million trees funding – first time MFS is using that funding rather than existing partner programs. On track for 26 acres and 89,050 trees and that is just on State Park land. 5 yrs. maintenance included. Doesn't include invasive species removal. Twice annual mowing and once annual herbicide application are needed to keep invasives from overtaking a planting and smother the trees.

Tree planting specialists are working statewide. Connecting private landowners to programs for larger scale planting (1 acre or more); grant resources for community groups and others; project planning assistance; technical assistance/volunteer education; outreach, education and speaking; contact [CaraE.Dudzic@maryland.gov](mailto:CaraE.Dudzic@maryland.gov) – Tree Planting Specialist for the Central Region.

Questions:

Once you put the trees in the hole do you water right after planting?

A: That is ideal if possible, especially if you have a truck with a water tank and pump. Planning for this requires designing to make watering possible.

How many gallons? A: Casey Tree says 25 in dry conditions every two weeks for a newly established tree. Deep watering with hose or irrigation system can achieve good results but people need to be able to commit to water deep and not just the top inch of ground. Different products may help (gator bags, but need to put water in the bags); tree diapers is a polymer chemical in a forest bag but can soak it and over time it releases water. Similar product in powder form is terra sorb and that will release water over time. In general just have to have people watching out for trees being planted. In some places with large areas covered you just have to rely on the rain.

Is there a concurrent effort to tackle established stands being overtaken by invasives?

A: Invasive management is vitally important but this program is not the hammer for that nail. Partly because of sediment load to Chesapeake Bay – working on afforestation and closing canopies. For invasive removal, if a private landowner has more than 5 acres they can apply to the forest service for a forest stewardship plan, the typical response will be a mow & spray program. For some invasives there really is no good alternative as removal is so labor intensive. Herbicide use doesn't mix well with volunteer programs because of need for certification; just removal without applying herbicide may encourage roots to send out suckers.

When doing large planting is there a 2-tier approach where large or mature trees go in and 5-10 years later other understory trees can be planted?

A: Typically now it's understory and overstory at time of installation. What was described in the question would be ideal but there are challenges. For example grid planting is not "natural" but we need to allow equipment to come through for maintenance. There is also a need for proposals for pocket forests. These are very ambitious but creating a natural pattern may not be compatible with need for continued maintenance. So these will not

look the same as a forest that grew up naturally.

Invasive removal seems like an uphill struggle but a repeated effort that concentrates on cutting vines so you can prevent seeding and starve out roots.

How many species did you decide to plant?

A: Some native species are either tough to propagate or won't grow everywhere. State nursery is on the Eastern Shore and can't grow all of them. There is a list of 50 recommended species that is a good start for homeowners. For large-scale stewardship planting, the nursery on the Eastern Shore has 50-60 species available this year. There is some discussion with property owners if there are preferences and species to be avoided.

There are a lot of questions about what is a tree vs what is a shrub. MDOT wants their plantings to be no more than 30% shrubs.

There is a blight attacking big beech trees. Are there plans to go into park system where we expect losses and planting in preparation for that?

It's tricky to plant in an established canopy and expect your saplings to survive. Much of our planting is not optimal in terms of pattern or spacing but improves odds for survival. For infill planting some of the parks have their own efforts. Solution will be to attack on multiple fronts including deer exclusion, invasive removal, planning for natural regeneration. There is no great answer for the loss of beech. We need to spread awareness and build a cohort of people who care about trees and are willing to help as volunteers. Without a legislative funded solution this is about the best we can do.

For 5 Million Trees are there targeted goals by county and incentives to meet them?

In some counties there are fewer opportunities to plant than others; we don't have county-scale goals. Incentives are sometimes made available by the county. One incentive is that you get free trees or incentives to maintain them. Some homeowners want to plant trees to support wildlife. There is not a statewide tax incentive or anything like that.

People do want to do this. There is a lot of interest from landowners in adding trees to their land. There is also a lot of interest in using trees to assist in building resilience against climate change. Some landowners are not necessarily going to be thinking about climate change and may not be voting along those lines but want trees because they are connected to the land, to support hunting and fishing resources etc.

Park Service has a huge wish list of places for planting and a number of trees will be put in on State Park land this year. In Baltimore County, Gunpowder State Park, Hammerman and others.

Most counties have landscape manuals calling for trees to be installed for mitigation but none of the trees for the 5 Million Trees program can be installed as part of a mitigation goal. The maintenance requirements for mitigation projects are a separate issue.

Is the dashboard still being beta-tested?

Yes, we are still testing it, getting foresters up to speed on GIS and how they want data added.

How do we get into the portal? Will platforms talk to each other, e.g. if we are reporting trees to one county agency can we avoid having to upload or type that information to multiple sites?

Can try to get that information from IT staff. Will get additional information for us.

7:45 CEQ Workgroup on Baltimore County Weed Ordinance (County Code 13-7-401)  
-Members are Brian Fath, Lois Jacobs, Steve Malan, Carol Newill.  
Discuss and finalize the report (see printout of the report).

As we discussed last time, the county still gives citations for yards with vegetation > 8 inches tall but a lot of low-impact landscaping is taller than this. State says homeowners (at least in HOAs) can no longer be fined for having low-impact landscaping. David Marks asked us to look into this a little bit more; based on last month's recommendation the workgroup was asked to come up with recommendations. This document provides an Option A and Option B – (A) abolishing the height maximum completely, or (B) creating an exception for low-impact landscaping. Next step would be for us to discuss this, hopefully approve in some form and then forward to the Council to decide what to do with it. Note that Appendix A has definitions and categories. Inspectors would have to be trained to recognize whether anything a neighbor complains about meets these criteria.

Another aspect had to do with the benefits of having a turf lawn (e.g. access, rights of way); but this allows people to put low-impact in place, does not require landowners to eliminate turf grass.

Paul Dongarra – low-impact does NOT need low effort or low maintenance. Big proponent of natural landscaping and meadow scaping but there should be language that clarifies what is needed to do this successfully.

Should we add some of the noxious weeds to be warned against? Brian Fath suggests they are already specified in other parts of the County Code.

Would like to move ahead with this report – ask members of CEQ to read and send comments to Carol by Tuesday Oct. 31. How do people feel about offering two options? Also what triggered the reduction from 12 inches to 8 inches? Some of the feedback was that it's not so much the height as the condition, but we don't know why that decision was made. Most people seem to think two options are a good idea. Brian Lindley commented that when Permits' (PAI's) Enforcement brings back a report they do check on what kind of planting is in question. Wolfgang Oehme is a world-famous landscape architect who has designed many kinds of planting including managed, low-impact landscaping; his

son Roland's yard has been cited recently.

8:00 Update from the Plastic Bags Workgroup - Members are Valerie Androutsopoulos, Andy Miller, Karen Wynn, Lynda Eisenberg.

Valerie got no answer from anyone about the reasoning behind the changes passed in the bag bill. She contacted CE Olszewski's office; she got no answer from Councilmember Pat Young's staff member.

Wade Kach voted in favor of the liquor store amendment but against the first two. Several exceptions were added in separate votes as well as reduction in paper bag charge. County Executive vetoed two of the amendments today including the liquor store amendment and the thickness of plastic bags. Bill 72-23 was the one that was not vetoed (paper bag definition and allowance for paper bags). The price for paper bags has been 5 cents since January. Sierra Club asked council members not to vote to override the veto and they think the veto on the thick plastic bag exception will be sustained.

What do other jurisdictions do? In Baltimore City they can't use plastic? If you go to a liquor store, get a cardboard box or use a reusable wine-carry bag.

8:15 Update on Oregon Ridge Park - Brian Bernstein and Carol Newill

- Park Master Plan is online at

<https://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/departments/recreation/programs/oregon-ridge-lodge/master-plan>

- Landscape Architect firm Lardner & Klein has been chosen to evaluate the park's trails, which will continue to be for hikers / walkers, not for horses, bikes, or motor vehicles.

- Nature Council, Rec & Parks, and DEPS are discussing deer control, and seem to be in general agreement that there are too many deer. Having too many deer prevents healthy forest regeneration, and causes human health threats including Lyme disease and automobile accident- associated injuries and deaths. People with interest in this problem are invited to volunteer to help work on a plan and evaluate its effectiveness.

- The request for a zoning variance to allow a new house close to the edge of the park by Baisman's Run stream was denied. The landowner has appealed.

Brian Lindley: deer surveys will be done soon and we are asking for extra surveys for Oregon Ridge. There are public health concerns – accidents, tick-borne diseases.

New business: Brian Fath was asked if Baltimore County planned to emulate Howard County's weekly curbside pickup of compost which is now being expanded. Karen says there has been some discussion and she will check on where that stands. It was discussed in connection with the solid waste management plan a couple of years ago. Should we invite someone from Howard County to speak at an upcoming meeting about their program? Brian can ask about this. CEQ Commissioner Lynda Eisenberg might

know since she is now Director of Planning there.

Welcome back to Linda Davis. She is appointed as an environmental organization representative.

8:20 Approve minutes of 9/27/2023. Thank you, Andy. No suggestions for changes. Approved unanimously.

8:25 Comments and suggestions about CEQ's work? New topics? Speakers?

Linda Davis pointed out that road salt returned to the table when she was last on the commission. Is that still an issue? We have been told there are new guidelines for salt dispersal but it's worth trying to find out more. There was also some suggestion that maybe the state was going to do something. Linda will follow up to find out more.

Are there other CEQ positions that are still open? Lynda Eisenberg hasn't yet decided what she will do; she hopes the Wednesday night weekly meeting might change to a different night. Carol Newill is now Mike Ertel's representative after redistricting and David Marks has not yet appointed someone.

8:32 Adjourn

Upcoming meetings: 12/6/23, 1/24/24, 2/28, 3/27, 4/24, 5/22, 6/24, then Summer Break.