

Minutes  
Baltimore County Commission on Environmental Quality (CEQ)  
May 24, 2023 at 7 pm on Webex

CEQ webpage: [www.baltimorecountymd.gov/Agencies/ceq/index.html](http://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/Agencies/ceq/index.html)

Participants: Barbara Hopkins, Esq, guest speaker; Brian Lindley, Jennifer Aiosa, Radu Zamfirache, Carol Newill, Chris Overcash, Dustin Shearer, Karen Wynn, Lynda Eisenberg, Mahnaz Mazaheri Assadi, Lois Jacobs, Steve Malan, Valerie Androutsopoulos, Andy Miller, Brian Fath, Kathy Reiner Martin. Commissioners Brian Bernstein and Jennifer Langford did not attend.

- I. Welcome. This is the 7th and last evening in the CEQ series on the expected increases in extreme weather and water-related challenges (coastal and non-coastal) in Baltimore County, their projected impacts, and the development of resiliency to protect essential infrastructure and public health. Goals of the series are to present information and to stimulate discussion, thus encouraging timely progress on climate change adaptation in our county. Unfortunately Dr. Gregory Branch was unable to join us to talk about public health implications.
- II. Barbara Hopkins, Esq., will speak on how municipalities across the U.S. are implementing green stormwater infrastructure, including Baltimore County, in the setting of regulations, flooding, aging infrastructure, and quality of life in disadvantaged communities. She has been Executive Director of NeighborSpace and of the Baltimore County Green Alliance, and has worked on questions about open space and development and how many sewage-producing units should be allowed.

Ms. Hopkins is currently Executive Director of the Green Infrastructure Leadership Exchange, which activates local governments in the U.S. and Canada to implement green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) equitably. The presentation is about the first-ever nationwide survey to gauge the state of GSI implementation by local governments and stormwater agencies in the U.S. The report, [\*The State of Public Sector GSI in the U.S., 2022\*](#), can be [found here](#). The Exchange has 56 agency members and over 350 individual members across the U.S. and Canada.

Presentation:

This presentation discusses the state of public sector green stormwater infrastructure. I still live in Baltimore County and care very much about what happens here. I hope that by sharing results of this report we can make a difference in how Baltimore County chooses to manage its green infrastructure.

The Exchange has 56 member organizations including Baltimore City and Baltimore and Montgomery Counties. The mission is to activate local government and stormwater agencies in the US and Canada to implement green stormwater infrastructure equitably. We have peer learning circles that work on developing strategies.

Why equity? Because of underinvestment and flooding in communities of color, which is an issue around the country including here in Baltimore County. Poor neighborhoods have access to 42% less park space than wealthier communities. Flooding disproportionately harms neighborhoods with substantial Black population. Solutions that manage stormwater are a natural way to reduce pollution, bring value to our community and make it a better place to live; and can help meet MS4 permit requirements, bring greater equity to communities of color, create job opportunities, and new parks.

Key findings in the new nationwide survey will now be discussed. Major funders were the JPB and Pisces Foundations, and the report was rigorously reviewed by many partners.

Purposes of the survey:

- 1: Understand current state of implementation and drivers, and barriers and levers affecting adoption.
- 2: Move the industry toward a natural standard for GSI that considers equity, community engagement,

co-benefits and long term maintenance within the One Water framework.

3: Offer recommendations for the public sector and those seeking to support these initiatives.

Whose story are we telling? 52 public sector stormwater management organizations representing 13% of the US population responded. Water agencies, water authorities, stormwater managers in local government; from 27 states, a variety of population sizes and team sizes and sewer types etc.

The URL in the agenda shows both the report and a dashboard of the data discussed in the report and can be sorted by state, type of sewerage and other filters.

Questions primarily are in four categories including: what is driving local governments to implement GSI; what levers can they pull to create effective programs; is it being implemented effectively; how much are we doing, where and at what cost.

Drivers:

Ten common drivers for implementing GSI were identified and we asked participants to rate importance for building support.

Water regulation is the #1 driver for GSI; co-benefits are not far behind. Flood resilience and supporting aging infrastructure are secondary drivers and community quality of life and equity are tertiary drivers. We need to craft regulations to help create more incentives.

Levers

Three distinct groups – most levers were rated as very or somewhat effective. Who is pulling levers? People levers, policy levers, emerging practices levers, ranked in descending order of how many respondents said that they have used that lever.

People levers – supportive elected officials; strong senior champions; public outreach and education; demonstration projects; cross pollination between departments or agencies such as public works, planning, recreation & parks.

Policy levers – about 70% of respondents use these. They require more funding and policy alignment. requiring GSI on new development and redevelopment, funding short-term maintenance, classifying as capital investment and others.

Emerging levers are used by fewer but are still considered effective. Diversify funding e.g. with stormwater fees; federal grants, state revolving fund, loan programs, asset management systems and workforce development initiatives across jurisdictions – key to long-term maintenance and co-benefits that pull in community members. Bringing in private landowners too.

Advancing an equitable national standard as a new standard for GSI– centers community, vegetative practices (trees, planter boxes – require maintenance – A co-benefit of the collection of stormwater is to help with growth of trees, bioswales, things that beautify the community; multiple benefits, impact assessed, maintained, and regularly inspected. Philadelphia has a mural program that goes along with their GSI program – the goal is to improve livability in community.

Impact assessment includes not just how much stormwater is treated but also measuring community impact. Look at things like health improvements in the community, improvements in air quality, how many community members are getting jobs helping to take care of practices once implemented. These go beyond environmental impacts to include social and economic impacts of implementation.

The majority of respondents prioritize most factors at least sometimes, but a lot of work needs to be done. Maintenance, multiple benefits, vegetative practices are favored by many. Maintenance is left out

of the question by at least ¼ of respondents but maintenance is necessary for success.

45% cannot say what portion of their cumulative GSI funding is directed to projects in disadvantaged, socially vulnerable, or environmentally vulnerable communities.

Acres managed with GSI built to date are distributed between ROW projects, private development/redevelopment, and parcel retrofits, but skew toward parcel retrofits.

We worked with survey directors to develop questions about spending. There is a wide range of jurisdictions with huge differences in staff and budgeting.

Reasonable consistency in results indicate that GSI comprises about 10% of all spending on stormwater.

Recommendations: Data standardization – focusing on local government; move toward a national glossary of terms and shared metrics for GSI to enable more fruitful data collection and clearer communication among Stormwater Management Organizations (SMOs). Includes defining what counts as GSI, what we mean by retrofit, calculating units in both gallons and acres.

Centering equity: invest in capacity building to center equity. Training and culture change are needed in order to gain the trust of communities.

Apply best practices from the equity guide for GSI practitioners which offers seven equity goal areas and a roadmap for continuous improvement. Ensure each jurisdiction has adopted a well-informed, shared definition around equity; that the definition leads to rigorous standards for equity, clarity, and accountability for SMO and contracted service providers.

Early stage: build buy-in. Baltimore County belongs here.

Cultivate supportive elected officials for whom GSI and its benefits are a high priority.

Hire, promote, cultivate, and retain strong senior champions for GSI within your organization.

Invest in public outreach and/or education to grow a coalition for support for public investments.

Develop multi-benefit demonstration projects on high profile locations as proof of concept.

Senior champions for most member organizations are department heads and the next layer below them.

Questions:

Radu: would like to welcome everyone to Baltimore County's GSI program which he has been leading since the beginning of March. Founded in last fiscal year, still looking to make the last hire – people are hard to identify with the right background and skills. Strong senior leadership support is there; funding from budget and grants, looking to get more in both, and not on the regulatory side but much on Public Works side and connected to county's asset management system.

Brian: is the GSI title interchangeable with things like nature-based solutions or ecological engineering?

Answer: This goes back to one of the findings in the report which is the need for standardization. Those terms are often used interchangeably but GSI is a subset of those things – how you manage stormwater with plants and trees and other means of capture and storage. We need to be on the same page so we have shared language.

Chris – I have been working with the Corps of Engineers' "engineering with nature" program, much of

which is in the coastal zone but some also is in green stormwater infrastructure as well. What about climate adaptation?

Answer: That is a great point because it's a real struggle for the water community to get the climate funders to say climate and water are connected, but I agree. With this report and other evidence building activities we can get there.

Andy: What about restoration of soil moisture storage capacity?

Answer: It is a robust topic of discussion and there is an article on the web page about a group looking at that very closely.

Kathy: We talk about how we deal with floodplain problems and how the County needs to buy properties for floodplain protection. How do you do this from a watershed standpoint so you have big enough projects to make a meaningful impact without displacing everything that's there – especially if the land is already occupied?

Answer: We have not totally come up with an answer to that problem – a lot of practices are on public land because there is so much regulatory pressure to meet permit requirements but without always thinking as broadly. Not necessarily a lot of cooperation regionally but the funding is starting to move in that direction. RISK is a group of engineering companies and nonprofits in the Great Lakes region, working to see how we can make a bigger impact. You will see more of this regional look. Here in Maryland we have a great group - the Chesapeake Stormwater network – a regional model getting a fair amount of funding to help collaboration across watersheds. They came out with a great 101 intro to GSI that got rave reviews from our members.

Mahnaz: In your slide 17 you talk about education and you said a good portion of the funding goes to education. What is the mode of this effort and how does it engage the public?

Answer: We are not directly educating the public but trying to educate our members who are mostly middle managers in agencies and are responsible for the implementation of GSI programs. We are trying to teach them through materials such as our equity guide for GSI practitioners about how you can successfully engage communities – without that, everything that follows may not be useful. How do you explain what you are attempting to do within a community? There are learning circles that meet monthly to discuss these issues and strategies that are or are not effective, and seeking to document that to codify best practices.

Carol: Spending – if what you were trying to do is encourage behavior change to do more GSI and to draw more attention to community and equity, should you stratify your analysis by population size, whether coastal or not – there may be different dynamics in smaller municipalities especially if they are not located along a large body of water like Chesapeake Bay or one of the Great Lakes.

Answer: If you go to the link in the agenda you'll see the data dashboard and one of the things we paid for was to have the consultant make that sortable so you can sort by region, size of municipality etc to see how results differ. It's harder for the smaller municipalities but the benefits far outweigh the costs.

Kathy: if we are thinking about Baltimore County, for decades DEPS has been doing Small Watershed Action Plans but often those sit on the shelf. It sounds like those would be a good place for us to be starting to think about how we prioritize. The plans are there and they were built with community, business, government and specialist input, maybe under outdated regulations but there is a lot of information and direction there.

Answer: I would take it one step further and prioritize the places in the county where equity is lowest. Highest poverty, lowest number of parks, highest number of people of color.

Chesapeake Stormwater Network is a regional group here in the Chesapeake Bay region. A desired goal is to increase cooperation across watersheds.

Radu was invited to comment.

Radu: Social equity index is part of our scoring system. As for the SWAP documents, I know of their existence but they are under DEPS purview not DPW. Kathy – the silos have to come down.

What are the components of Baltimore County's social equity scale?

Radu: That is published by the State of Maryland and is built into the system. We don't process them ourselves.

Thanks to Barbara for an interesting presentation on a very complex topic. Several of us will be reading your report.

III. 8 pm: Minutes of 4/26/2023 meeting, correct and approve. Thank you, Lynda and Andy. Unanimous approval.

IV. Update on Oregon Ridge Master Plan. In-person meeting tonight (5/24) at 6 pm is to include a presentation of the report by the landscape architect firm Lardner/Klein, followed by 30 minutes for public comments/questions (2 minutes each), then informal viewing of display boards provided by Lardner/Klein. The plan is here: <https://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/departments/recreation/programs/oregon-ridge-lodge/master-plan>

Naturalists, members of local environmental groups and leaders of community organizations have met and unanimously approved a statement in response to the Oregon Ridge Park Master Plan, focusing on the recommendations that addressed the natural environment of the forest, streams, wetlands and meadows. To "Protect, Restore, Enhance" this natural preserve is listed in the Master Plan as one of the first priorities, although the bulk of the Plan emphasizes new buildings, roads, and parking lots. In response, the statement addresses: (1) Implementing the stated recommendation to "Protect, Restore, Enhance, and Educate"; (2) Creating the new Natural Resources Manager position, with staff, supplies and equipment as well as support from DEPS; (3) Constructing environmentally sustainable foot trails and bridges, following published guidelines (cited); (4) Creating true transparency and incorporating public and stakeholder input during the entire process of discernment and implementation of work at the Park. The document is included as an Addendum to this Agenda.

Only for the Natural Resources Manager position is there a condition that says "if funding is available" and the natural resource community feels strongly about this and will make a statement about this tonight.

V. Update on Forest Conservation code changes. State law (SB 526 /House bill 0723) Forest Preservation and Retention addresses several of the concerns that were raised by speakers at CEQ's Symposium in 2022, except it does not address the time period for maintaining newly planted trees. Baltimore County Green Alliance is following up with County Council members Marks and Patoka and others. DEPS is working on a current survey of tree plantings, and plans to update the Landscape Manual.

Last night at a NeighborSpace event, Carol was told by councilman Patoka that there will be some changes to Baltimore County code. DEPS is updating the manual and the question is, do we wrap it up or wait to hear what the State is going to be doing in updating their regulations and their manual? At the most recent Green Towson Alliance meeting there was interest in a public input opportunity for the county's landscape manual. DEPS was going to have environmental consultants, community groups and CEQ get involved. Is there a possibility that changing the time period might be revisited? Comparison with Howard and Montgomery

counties was already in our report to the Council and perhaps we can reiterate that comparison?

Tree planting under forest conservation is ongoing – the consultant has finished doing the inspection, so a report will be put together soon. Forest Management staff has increased to 10 staff members, with three dedicated groups, an urban section and a maintenance section.

## VI. Closing comments: Carol Newill

This concludes CEQ's series on stormwater-related challenges to Baltimore County and the development of resilience to them. We thank all our expert speakers for sharing their knowledge and experience with us. We thank the County and State elected officials, administration members, and other workers in government and non-government agencies for attending. We hope the series has been useful to discussions of priorities and implementation of strategies to protect our essential infrastructure and public health as climate change continues.

Questions: What topic(s) shall CEQ address beginning in September? Would you like CEQ to host another series of talks on a particular topic area, and if so what topic area? As a Commissioner, are you interested in pursuing an analysis of the current state of a particular topic in our County, as a member of a Workgroup, and presenting the results as a report (as part of a series, or as a project in itself)? Please share your thoughts by email or phone by the end of June. Carol will put something once she has responses collated.

Enjoy your summer break!

CEQ meeting dates: 9/27, 10/25, 12/6/2023.

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### **Addendum: Comments by Nature Council and concerned citizens on implementation of the Oregon Ridge Park Master Plan (5-18-23)**

**1. Implementation of Plan Recommendations** is the next crucial part of this Master Plan.

**a. "Protect, Restore, Enhance, and Educate."** The Master Plan acknowledges that Oregon Ridge Park is both a cultural center and a natural preserve. *"This vision unifies the park, with robust stewardship of its natural resources, historic structures and artifacts, and reinvestment in infrastructure and amenities."* **Protection, restoration, and enhancement of ORP's natural and historic resources are integral drivers of this master plan."**

**b. "Baltimore County Recreation and Parks will formalize a park mission statement that provides overarching park guidance and acts as a covenant to the residents of Baltimore County. This mission statement will focus on natural area preservation and enhancement, passive recreation, and the unique natural resources of the park, including the large forest blocks and reproducing brook trout."**

**c. There must be a firm commitment to provide equal priority and resources to the Natural Resources management sections of the plan as that given to the active recreational portions (ball fields) and infrastructure (buildings, roads, restrooms) recommendations of the plan.** This is a new aspect of Park management and care must be taken in its development. Years 1 – 6 recommend Trail improvements and the development of a Natural Resources Management Plan. (Natural Resources items only are included here.)

**2. A Natural Resource Manager** is required to protect, restore, and enhance the natural resources of the park.

**a.** Recommend the hiring and full funding of a Natural Resource Manager for Oregon Ridge Park in Year 1 along with funding for the necessary support staff.

**b.** Ensure inclusion in the Park budget as well as all necessary maintenance supplies and equipment.

**c.** The position should report directly to the Director of Recreation and Parks and collaborate with and receive support from the Department of Environmental Protection and Sustainability.

**d.** The position must require the requisite experience and education in wildlife ecology, forest and land management and environmental conservation practices.

**e.** Will work closely with (or potentially replace) the consultant chosen to develop the Natural Resources Management Plan (Pg 127, “Next Steps, years 1-6)

**3. Sustainable Foot Trails and Foot Bridges** are essential to protect streams and educate and inspire park visitors.

**a.** Ensure that sustainable, non-motorized Class 3 ‘hiking only’ trails meet wilderness hiking standards as outlined in the *“Pennsylvania Trail Design & Development Principles: Guidelines for Sustainable Non-motorized Trails.”* Publication found at <https://conservationtools.org/guides/126-pennsylvania-trail-design-and-development-principles>.

**b.** Bridges over stream crossings must be designed, built, and maintained with best practices to ensure the protection of the streams, while also maximizing the education benefits of bringing park patrons close to these pristine waterways.

**c.** Plan and create the non-motorized trail system with robust public input at every stage as also outlined in the Guidelines referenced above.

**4. Transparency** – ensures public trust and support in the Plan and its implementation.

**a.** Continue to maintain a transparent process during the implementation of the Master Plan.

**b.** Public and stakeholder input should be a priority throughout implementation prior to commencement of recommendations.

**b.** Progress reports should be scheduled at periodic intervals and upon inception/completion of plan milestones.

**d.** Oregon Ridge Park public advocates and stakeholders promise to maintain an active role throughout all stages of Plan implementation.

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