

Minutes
Baltimore County Advisory Commission on Environmental Quality (CEQ)
September 28, 2022 7 PM
Online Meeting on Webex

CEQ meeting dates, membership information, and reports are available at www.baltimorecountymd.gov/Agencies/ceq/index.html

Our thanks to Brian Lindley of EPS for coordinating Webex meetings during the pandemic.

Attendance: Carol Newill, Brian Lindley, Lois Jacobs, Radu Zamfirache, Andy Miller, Joan Plisko, Karen Wynn, Radu Zamfirache, Jennifer Langford, Justin Gallardo, Valerie Androutsopoulos, Lynda Eisenberg, Henry Ayakwah

I. Welcome- Carol Newill, Chair

Everyone mute please.

II. Thank the outgoing commissioners, and welcome the new. Thank Brian Fath for serving as Chair last year, and Andy Miller for continuing as recording secretary.

III. Meeting format options: Continue virtual for now? County has not yet upgraded ventilation in meeting spaces. Green Towson Alliance has been meeting in an outdoor pavilion but not clear the county has anything comparable. Lois asked if we could meet in the big hearing room which has better air circulation. Consider possibly one or two in-person and especially winter meetings online. Brian has scheduled our meetings in the past but is not sure about who schedules that bigger hearing room. We might need to go through Planning if we want to use that room. Jennifer Langford can reach out to Steve Lafferty to ask about that room. Comment was made that the virtual format is a more efficient use of everyone's time. Suggestion that short committee meetings work better over zoom as they save travel time. Joan suggested we meet in person perhaps every second meeting – it's more likely for us to have conversations and get to know each other than if all meetings are virtual. Running a hybrid meeting is more difficult and not recommended.

There were mixed opinions about whether we should require masks or not. Some of us are immunocompromised and need masks, others are still more comfortable with them, but not insisting that everyone wear one. The county right now has no masking rules and people are meeting in-person. Joan suggests following the lead of the county and let people opt for masks if they choose.

Do we have the option of WebEx for someone not able to attend the meeting? It has a lot of

drawbacks. Suggestion is we hold off on that issue until we get past the holidays.

IV. Aspects of the current efforts to ban plastic bags at grocery stores – Karen Wynn

We need to have a plastic bag ban – there are a lot of environmental problems with the proliferation of plastic bags. Talking with David Marks and Todd Crandall and David will probably be the lead on the bill but the earliest he will put it in will be December. There is a draft that Cathy Bevins' people had and started publicizing but it's not clear how they got it. David is getting pressure from a lot of groups for how to structure the bill. The biggest thing would be to not have mandatory fees in the city where you have to be charged per bag and it puts an accounting burden on businesses who then have to send checks to the city. The recommendation is don't make it inconvenient and expensive. Valerie says there are ways to do this that are not too complicated. Karen and Joan both suggest CEQ research best practices. Some groups want a mandatory fee for paper bags so people don't just buy paper bags. City of Westminster has a plastic bag ban and Lynda Eisenberg will research it. Wegman's started banning plastic bags on July 28 and charges for paper bags and is trying to get customers to move toward reuseable bags. Montgomery County may have a total ban. Andy commented that he visited New Jersey in May and June just a couple of weeks after a total ban was imposed and stores only had reuseable bags for sale.

The city said they would get bags out to communities but even with those bags and grants to nonprofits it's a lot of work to get widespread or universal adoption. Local stores say it's ok to stand outside and offer bags to people but never followed through. There is an issue for people who live in underserved communities who believe they need the bags to avoid being targeted as possibly having stolen merchandise.

Lynda asked who is responsible for administering and enforcing this program if it is passed. Brian Lindley suggested maybe DPW and Solid Waste might oversee a program. The committee can address these questions. DeAndrea Walker is still Acting Director of DPW and was in Baltimore City government for a while and we might be able to learn something from her experience.

What questions would David Marks and other council members like to have answers? In the bill now there is nothing about special circumstances, people on WIC, etc.

Lois commented on our previous report as it related especially to coastal areas with tourist industries where this was a strong issue for regional economies. Carl recommended everyone watch *The Story of Plastic*, which won an Emmy Award. Jenn Aiosa was a speaker at a panel discussion about this very recently.

Valerie and Karen and Lynda volunteered to be on the committee working on this.

V. Updates and next steps for making our CEQ reports available to the public and posted on the CEQ webpage.

1. Forest Conservation in Baltimore County: Challenges and Opportunities, May 1, 2022

The report has gone out informally but is not on the county web site yet. Brian Lindley has not heard about this in the last few days but believes the report is almost ready to be posted, possibly with comments from county review. We can ask Dave Lykens for a copy of the DEPS response to the report. Carol has tried to reach him multiple times with no response. There were other items in the report that went above and beyond what the Council asked for and this may have caused a delay in consideration. But you can't change one process without a ripple effect on other processes that might involve multiple departments.

We might need clarification regarding the role of CEQ and to whom we answer. Our charter says we are a commission of the County Council although we work with executive departments and some of us are appointed by the County Executive. Carol suggests we post the report on our web page as is and let the policy discussions remain separate from the report itself.

The question of who is represented in this report was raised. The members of CEQ are not a group of experts on these issues but we did consult with recognized experts who have done the research. Joan suggests that it is appropriate for county government to ask for additional consideration of issues but that this should not stop us from posting the report on our web site. Brian says that Dave Lykens would be happy to come to a meeting to talk with our group. The report will go up soon.

2. Chat Questions organized by topic area, asked by the public following a presentation on 5/12/22 by Go Ape at a virtual meeting hosted by the Department of Recreation and Parks, especially addressing Oregon Ridge Park, A Report from the Baltimore County Commission on Environmental Quality 5/18/22.

We spent some time discussing this report, which was prepared in response to the fact that the Dept of Recreation & Parks announced that they would not record the community input and Q&A portion of the meeting but would only record the presentation by Go Ape and introductory remarks. The report was as close as we could come to a written transcript of the comments, questions and answers during the remainder of the meeting which was then reorganized by topic area and made publicly available to anyone attending the meeting in a Google Doc. Thus far it has not been posted anywhere other than by sharing with individuals. Not long after the meeting, the county announced that the proposal for Go Ape to design a facility for installation on

public park land (potentially in Oregon Ridge) was being dropped. The question that remains is whether this report of what was said at the meeting should be posted on the CEQ web page. It was pointed out that much of what was said is still relevant to issues that should be considered in putting together the Master Plan for the park, which is discussed in the next agenda item. No final decisions was made at the meeting.

VI. Update on Master Plan for Oregon Ridge Park. Carol Newill

Oct. 1 is the public meeting for discussion of the Master Plan according to a sign that was posted at Oregon Ridge by the Nature Council or a group affiliated with the Nature Council. Carol Newill reports that on October 6 there will be another presentation at a public input meeting that will be held virtually. The only public notice about this from the county, so far as we know, is on the Recreation & Parks web page and it's not clear whether there has been any effort to publicize either meeting to the citizens' groups who have strong interests in conservation of park natural resources.

Without consultation with the Nature Council or other groups, Rec & Parks announced a Family Fun Festival with free food and bands at the same time as the annual Honey Festival. The Family Fun Festival will be at 11:30 a.m. and at 1 p.m. there will be a public presentation by Elizabeth Lardner (consultant) inside the lodge offering various options people might consider for the future of the park. There is some question about whether care has been taken to fully engage with all of the groups that have invested time and effort in conserving the natural resources of the park over time. They do want to have people who aren't necessarily typical users of the park and they want to interview others who might be potentially interested in making use of the park in future, and that is a valid effort. But that should be combined with a serious outreach effort to organizations that have long-term volunteer commitments to conservation and forest preservation in the park. The Nature Council decided to put together an online survey for the public and three days later Rec & Parks put up their online survey. Any organization that is part of the Baltimore County Green Alliance should have a copy, but Carol can share it.

VII. Ideas for the coming year's topics, speakers, reports. What can be helpful to decision-makers? Aspects of Climate Change that affect Baltimore County? Other?

We did not have a chance to discuss because the preceding conversation occupied most of our time.

VIII. Administrative tasks

- a. Minutes of 5/25/22 meeting - correct and approve. Thank you Valerie Androustopoulos.

Not yet ready for approval.

b. Annual report for 2020 has been posted on CEQ webpage: 2021 nearly finished, thank you Lois Jacobs.

c. Meeting dates: 10/26, ? 11/30, ? 12/28, 1/25, 2/22, 3/22, 4/26, 5/24.

Beyond this point there was no longer a quorum at the meeting.

Question from Henry Ayakwah about what procedures we have in the county before we accept. (will fill in details with input from Henry as we could not hear his comment clearly enough at the end of the meeting.

IX. October 16 get-together at Oregon Ridge Park, Lake Pavilion, 2 to 6 pm, spouses and partners are invited. Event coordinator is not announced yet. Email communications will follow.

X. Closing Comments: Carol Newill.

Adjourned 8:45 p.m.