



**2020 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE
BALTIMORE COUNTY EXECUTIVE AND
BALTIMORE COUNTY COUNCIL
November 27, 2021**

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BACKGROUND

The Baltimore County Advisory Commission on Environmental Quality (CEQ) which was established by legislation in 2003, met eight times during the 2020 calendar year. Commission Chair, Lois Jacobs, set the agendas and presided at the meetings. CEQ Secretary, Andy Miller, took minutes at the meetings. It must be noted here, that this year was both difficult and different due to the Covid-19 Pandemic that struck full force in March, and modified all County and Commission functions. The January meeting was the only in-person meeting. February featured a film on Pollinators sponsored by EPS. Starting in March, all meetings were via Webex.

The CEQ 2020 Annual Report to the Baltimore County Executive and Baltimore County Council fulfills the requirement specified in the Baltimore County Code subsection 3-3-2006 and provides a summary of CEQ activities and actions in 2020.

CEQ MEMBERSHIP

The Commission saw active and purposeful participation by its members throughout 2020. The 2020 CEQ membership included the following commissioners and County liaisons:

Name	Appointed By
Brian Bernstein	County Executive at Large
Linda Davis	County Executive at Large
Brian Fath, PhD	County Executive at Large
S. Glenn Elseroad	County Executive Agricultural Representative
Andy Miller, PhD	County Executive Educator and Scientist
Joan Plisko, PhD	County Executive Environmental Organizations Representative
Rex Wright, PE	County Executive Business Community
Valerie Androutsopoulos	Council District 1
Lois Jacobs, Chair	Council District 2
Chris Overcash	Council District 3
Linda Eisenberg	Council District 4
Carol Newill, MD, PhD	Council District 5
Avery Harden	Council District 6
Karen Wynn	Council District 7
Brian Lindley	County Government Liaison, EPS
Kui Zhao, MCP	County Government Liaison, Planning
Sheldon Epstein, PE	County Government Liaison, DPW

CEQ MISSION STATEMENT

CEQ activities in 2020 furthered the mandates established for the Commission.

The purpose of the CEQ, through its duties and responsibilities as described in the Baltimore County Code 2015, subsection 2-2-21, is to encourage protection and preservation of the natural environment in Baltimore County and its waterways, including the Chesapeake Bay, by educating the community to make environmentally sustainable decisions and by enlightening, advising, and initiating dialogue with County officials. It facilitates communication between the County government and its residents on environmental needs, programs, and legislation.

As a group of dedicated volunteers for environmental integrity, our members understand the need to follow the Science and to consider, evaluate and monitor County environmental policies and procedures, and suggest modifications when needed.

WORK ITEMS / REPORTS / PRESENTATIONS

Presentation: "Public Health Aspects of Climate Change"

- Gregory Branch, MD, MBA, Baltimore County Director of Health and Human Services.

At our January meeting, Dr. Branch discussed how a warming climate impacts public health. Vector-Borne Diseases transmitted by fleas, ticks and mosquitos increase in hotter climates; these diseases include Zika, Lyme Disease and West Nile Virus. To decrease risk of transmission, the County maintains surveillance of specific vectors via traps and sprays when vector prevalence increases. Other areas impacted include Water Quality, Mental Health, Respiratory Health, Compromised pregnancies, and resilience to extreme weather events. The DOH provides emergency preparedness information; the County has excellent infrastructure for cooling centers, including libraries. The top priorities for the County are trash, rats and sewage.

Presentation: "Trees on Playgrounds - County Policies and Possible Changes"

- Commissioner Carol Newill, MD, PhD

Also at our January 22nd meeting, Carol introduced the subject of Playground Trees (or their lack) which is likely to be ongoing. Playground equipment gets very hot without shade, which will get worse with increasing heat due to climate warming. At present, trees are not allowed within 30 feet of playgrounds due to possible safety concerns (e.g. falling branches) according to Property Management staff. There is said to be a 2012 policy on tree planting on public land but Carol could find no written evidence anywhere of this policy; she contacted Property Management, Recreation and Parks, Environmental Protection and Sustainability, Blue Water Baltimore, and Chief Sustainability Officer Steve Lafferty. Although EPS facilitates the tree planting process, a recent proposal for shade trees near a new park's play area was denied by Property Management, as was a similar request from Blue Water Baltimore. Outdoor play is an important component of children's health and development, but may be discouraged by increased ambient temperatures and hot playground equipment. A suggestion was made that CEQ look into the possibility of planting or retaining shade trees near play equipment areas as climate change impacts make hot play equipment and increased ambient temperatures more dangerous than potential "safety hazards" of trees - which can be lessened by appropriate maintenance and choice of tree species. Carol has agreed to chair a small committee on this topic. Several other Commissioners are also interested in helping.

Follow-up on Food Waste Presentation from 12-4-2019:

Commissioner Joan Plisko, PhD will send her presentation to Steve Lafferty and help CEQ set up a high level discussion about Food Waste Prevention in Baltimore County. This is not only a County Government issue - it is also important for institutions like Towson University, restaurants and health facilities. Early ideas include incorporation of school free and reduced lunch programs (30% of County children are in these programs), bolster and facilitate programs already in place, and create additional partnerships. More information will be provided at upcoming meetings.

Follow-up on Pesticides and Toxins:

Baltimore County has stopped using RoundUp. DPW will use new chemicals starting this Spring, they feel would be better, specifically Cheetah Pro, whose main ingredient is glufosinate rather than glyphosate. Glufosinate is a synthetic compound that is supposed to be less dangerous to human health, although it is a chemical with a structure closely similar to that of the naturally-occurring glyphosate.

"The Pollinators" Film Event - February 26, 2020

In February of 2020, EPS sponsored a showing of the important documentary film "The Pollinators", directed by Peter Nelson (2019). CEQ voted to support this one-time event and attend in lieu of our regular scheduled meeting on the same day. Although most of us were already aware of the role of bees as pollinators and their alarming decline of numbers in recent years, few of us realized that in the United States there is a mass industrialized approach to beekeeping. Colonies exist in much denser settings than in nature, and are moved cross-country by large truck convoys to large areas of monocultured croplands or orchards. Bees are exposed to greater risks of disease, accidents, temperature changes, predators, and use of toxic pesticides at the wrong time by neighboring farms and orchards. Monoculture means after pollination there is nothing to eat, and bees would starve if not trucked to other areas, There are no unsprayed meadows or natural landscapes where bees could exist year-round on their own. Huge amounts of fuel are needed for the truck convoys, and life is unstable for beekeepers as well. Travel is constant, costs are high, bee populations are prone to collapse and/or disease, reaching a financial break-even point is often in doubt. There are however, more recent and positive developments; there is much more awareness of threats to pollinators. Many groups and organizations encourage planting of pollinator-friendly natural areas - and promote beekeeping in rural and urban settings that include gardens, rooftops, balconies and containers. EPS gave attendees a copy of its new pollinator guide, "How to Attract Pollinators", to help residents plan, plant, and maintain pollinator-friendly habitats.

Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Commission Work and Projects

As the Pandemic spread and intensified in March, non-essential functions, offices, facilities and in-person meetings and/or events were shut down or cancelled. EPS advised the CEQ to cancel our scheduled March meeting, but we were already planning how to switch to on-line meetings. Brian Lindley was preparing to link with the County's Webex system, which would become the new normal. All our present work, communication, and projects would be virtual for the foreseeable future, and we would learn to cope, adjust, modify and re-assess how to move forward. We also realized the County would now have massive budget shortfalls and changed priorities - including hunger issues and protection of essential County Functions. There would also be new and continuing impacts on and from Climate change that would have to be addressed.

Presentation: Food Recovery and Food Waste in a Pandemic: How to move Forward
- Joan Plisko and Linda Davis, 3-25-20

Since January, Joan and Linda have worked on document revisions and did more research to incorporate information to help County government deal with the impact of the present crisis. They worked on three categories - People, Planet and Economics - using information from the NRDC, EPA, Baltimore City's Interagency Food Policy Initiative, and Baltimore County's framework. The report needs to reframe its message to reflect the public health crises and longer term needs. Timing of the release of the report needs to reflect the near-term situation. At this time, people are out of work, isolated and many are hungry. The report should address immediate strategies first, such as the County joining Middle Mile or facilitating getting more food from closed restaurants out to needy residents. Restaurants still open are shifting to curbside grab-and-go or delivering to homes. Hotels and Convention Centers where much food waste came from are mostly shut down. Middle Mile and Maryland Food Bank need more volunteers and are receiving food for distribution. Short and long term recommendations are needed on both increasing food recovery and decreasing food waste.

A Food Policy Commission (longer term) should also be considered. Baltimore City has a whole initiative funded by NRDC. Both NRDC and WWF have money from the Rockefeller Foundation to work on food waste policy nationally and globally. We should revisit this after the immediate crisis passes (or is under control).

If we wait for some months, we can incorporate lessons from County efforts to maintain food security and what strategies are successful. We also have to include pandemic impacts on global warming, and the connection between food security and food waste. We will delay the complete report revision, and at this time draft a letter with a small number of suggestions focusing on the present crisis.

By April we had input from County Sustainability Coordinator Steve Lafferty who said for important issues like this we should have recommendations ready to go and then 'calendar for six weeks out' to get feedback; given the present situation, there may not be a "right time"; when CEQ feels it is appropriate to move forward, 'just put it in the queue'. Carol Newill sent an email to Elizabeth Sachs, County Director of Government Reform and Strategic Initiatives, about the Middle Mile Program with the Maryland Food bank; Elizabeth was happy to receive the information as there was much concern about getting food to people at this time.

Glenn reported on the Farm Bureau meeting on getting food to buyers. Many farmer's markets are closed or will close soon. Much food will be dumped or wasted and farmers will have to grow less; they cannot just give away the food they produce. Many farmers are selling directly to the public where possible and/or work with organizations who can help with distribution. There is also back-up on feedlots. The virus is now breaking out in meat packing plants around the country. Many people are now having food shipped directly from farms to avoid crowds in markets.

At the May 27th meeting it was agreed that the amended report is to be sent to EPS first, then to the County Executive's office. Steve suggested we state our goals:

1. Informative function - get information out as widely as possible.

2. County Action - we would like the County to take up this issue and/or partner with other entities/organizations.
3. Get input from others at Regional Level.

A letter with short-term suggestions was sent to the County Executive. The revised Food Waste and Food Recovery White Paper was posted on the CEQ Website by September 2020.

Discussion: Environmental Protection and Public Well-Being in the age of Covid-19.

Lead: Brian Fath, PhD, 5-27-20

What should CEQ focus on in a time of Budget Shortfalls and the County Executive's 3 Basic Priorities: education, public safety, and support for Essential County Services? How will Climate Change and Environmental Protection be addressed at this time?

- A. Climate Resiliency - this topic is still important and we should support actions/activities in this area.
- B. Access and Operations - Greenhouse Gas Inventory is near completion; other programs (gas to energy, glass recycling) close to a contract. Still needed: community understanding of climate change impact.
- C. Communication - emphasize high priority issues, primarily flooding and related impacts.
- D. Educational Materials - For the general public there should be a Climate Top Ten List and/or 10 to 20 different things to put on residents radars.

Brian Lindley suggested that we look at the new Backyard Tree Program for smaller properties/areas. This a multi-department climate strategy to help with canopy goals. New maps in the Fall will show canopy changes.

Carol Newill said the Green Towson Alliance is getting trees planted, sharing native plants for yards, and working on flooding issues. What is the County doing about sewers and clean waters?

Steve Lafferty stated that water quality is at the heart of all County efforts in all areas. We need to examine how climate change affects County systems - how do we protect Fire Stations, Hospitals and other sites. We also have to deal with the Capital Budget - what/where to cut, projects may have to be eliminated. CEQ could propose a tree replacement policy; DPW is not replanting. We need more interagency collaboration.

Presentation: Trees on Playgrounds - Draft Report

Lead - Carol Newill and Lynda Eisenberg, 4-22-20

Carol had a slide presentation with a draft report. A key element is high ambient temperatures from direct sunlight on playgrounds and high temperatures on play equipment surfaces that can cause burns. Children have less ability to thermoregulate and are more vulnerable to heat extremes, placing them at increased risk of heat exhaustion and heat stroke, exacerbation of asthma or diabetes. Children and caregivers may avoid outdoor play altogether in hot weather. Play equipment can reach 160 to 190°F. Plastic equipment retains more heat than wood/sand/gravel. There are additional health risks from UV exposure.

Trees reduce ambient temperature more than artificial structures do, are lower cost, improve aesthetics, provide learning opportunities about nature, clean particulate air pollution, take up and transpire storm water. We need to consider native tree species that can tolerate hotter temperatures, longer droughts, and more extreme rainfall. Recommendations for a written policy to increase shade trees on playgrounds

should include: preservation of existing healthy shade trees, planting new trees, goals and timelines, clarify role of County Forester to have scheduled hazard inspections among others.

Brian Fath suggested that rather than draft a policy, we have a position paper with clear suggestions. Actual language is up to the County Council. Kui Zhou said there should be input to master planning documents which address school playgrounds and public parks. There should be a menu of options for different situations.

By September, Carol and Lynda were refining a document and preparing a questionnaire, consulted with Blue Water Baltimore, and obtained a GIS file with locations of County playgrounds.

Lynda suggested that even a quick GIS Survey will provide useful information. Carol and Linda can look at the same image and compare notes. Recreation and Parks has a new head; they are trying to resume a three-year maintenance cycle that could incorporate planting shade trees. Valerie and Brian Fath said having some surveys for baseline data would provide supporting information. This is an ongoing topic that will carry over into next year.

Presentation: "Climate Action Planning - County Initiative"

Steve Lafferty, Baltimore County Sustainability Coordinator

Eastern Sanitary Landfill has a working facility to capture methane gas from the landfill and convert it to energy for the grid. Under Maryland law methane conversion is considered a renewable resource and is credited to Baltimore County. It is an important challenge, especially as methane is more damaging than carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas.

Glass Recycling - the County had stopped glass recycling as the glass was not clean enough to reuse; single stream recycling left glass contaminated. We now have a contract with a city company to clean glass and send it to a reuse facility in Pittsburgh. After seven years of no progress, we are now moving forward.

Climate Action Planning - the County wants to first look at government facilities and determine how to protect government assets. We are creating a greenhouse gas inventory and strategy to deal with sea-level rise, temperature increases, and severe weather events across the seasons. Data is being gathered on transportation and fleet operations, energy consumption and waste. DPW accounts for 70% of emissions from on-road vehicles and all off-road vehicles. The fleet is changing to more hybrids or electric vehicles.

The Consultant hired by the County said incineration of trash is better than landfills because methane from landfills is longer lasting and more dangerous than carbon dioxide from incineration. We have to rank what is important; essential services, utilities, public works, then Parks and Playgrounds - which do not need the same level of protection. We are also learning how to build resilience into the budget planning process, which is not commonplace.

Residential trash - in the second quarter we collected 50% more trash than in 2019; consequently landfills will fill up more quickly. Commercial Waste is often transferred out of State. There is discussion on

getting an anaerobic digester for the County. The future will involve regional facilities. We cannot landfill or incinerate our way out of the challenges ahead.

Solid Waste Workgroup - Advisory Committee

In October, the County Executive's Office asked Lois Jacobs (as CEQ chair) to represent the CEQ on a newly assembled Advisory Committee that would meet November 20, 2020 thru March of 2021, to revisit all issues relating to solid waste, recycling and reuse. The recent 10 year plan will become part of a larger report and process with short, medium and long term goals and actions; how, when, and what to fund and develop, and in what order will be part of this process that will be chaired and run through the County Executive's office with the help of outside consultants.

Steve Lafferty: the committee is diverse with a range of opinions and expertise at the table. DPW staff present and past are participants as are haulers, environmental organizations, a County Council Member, and many others. They are considering some recommendations CEQ made to the last 10 year plan. Lois will forward to our Commissioners all materials and information from the Solid Waste Workgroup meetings.

Joan Plisko: Food Waste work is a natural to include in this conversation. There should be some effort to reduce waste toxicity so as to reduce its impacts. Health care generates biohazardous wastes that often get into landfills and incinerators without being treated. Linda Davis has suggestions not in the Consultant's outline - e.g. plastic bags. Glenn sent out a letter with recommendations which Lois passed along to Stacey Rodgers and Leslie Wigfield in the County Executive's office for inclusion in the 12/3/20 Workgroup Discussion. How and where can parts of Joan's Food Recovery White Paper be used in the Solid Waste Workgroup's Report? It has to fit into the structure proposed by GPD (the Consultants) who usually do not deal with the subject. Linda Davis said a copy of the White Paper should be sent to the Consultants as a statement from CEQ that they omitted this issue. Lois sent a White Paper copy to Stacy Rodgers who forwarded it to all Workgroup participants. Food Recovery ultimately was addressed in the final Workgroup report.

Request for CEQ Input from Councilman Kach: Bill 94-20: Hemp Farms

The Councilman requested CEQ's take on possible human health risks posed by hemp farming. This is a complex medical and epidemiological topic which itself is beyond the scope of CEQ expertise.

Carol Newill provided a brief review of epidemiological studies and summaries in the medical literature, which did not provide definitive evidence of risk of harm to physical health.

Glenn Elseroad: The Farm Bureau and farm organizations are concerned regulations on hemp farming may jeopardize farmers' rights to farm. Only a few properties have problems or complaints. Odor problems occur just before and just after harvest. Concerns are mostly about a possible health issue.

Andy Miller: We don't have definitive evidence about health impacts and available research seems inconclusive. There is no significant change in peer-reviewed literature.

Our Commission decided to send Councilman Kach a letter with the resources we found, but let him know we do not have the expertise or guidance to provide a considered judgment or generate new

information. We will attach, however, information gathered by Carol Newill on this topic (see attachment at end of this report).

By December, the County Executive sent a letter to the Maryland Secretary of Agriculture to directly contact the community involved in this issue and promote dialogue rather than going directly to legislation.

Presentation: MedStar Harbor Hospital: Green Infrastructure and Healing Garden Project.

- Joan Plisko

Harbor Hospital, on the banks of the Patapsco, is located in a neglected neighborhood with many recognized health issues. The reduced Tree Canopy and urban heat map in this neighborhood are typical examples of Baltimore's environmental justice problems. Joan Plisko partnered with the Arbor Day Foundation on this project; they started with a planning grant to address serious flooding problems and research on health and wellness benefits of green infrastructure. No trees were removed, and many new ones were planted on the hospital's campus as part of a stormwater project. Design and implementation funding from Maryland Department of Natural Resources and Chesapeake Bay Foundation helped buy trees and plants and to implement final stormwater design plans for treating 5+ acres of impervious surface. Fourteen stormwater facilities installed included bioretention areas. Turf grass areas were reduced and replaced with planted areas of perennials, shrubs and trees. Natural areas and healing gardens reduce stress and promote positive patient outcomes and staff retention. Signage throughout the campus informs visitors about tree cover, pollinators, heat island effects, and climate resiliency. Staff and community programs for learning, wellbeing and related activities were being developed just as the pandemic hit, and will resume when we get past this phase. They would like to see physicians prescribing exposure to nature. There's also a grant in to fund a green roof, solar panels, and a living shoreline. This project has implications on how the County can work with large institutions on these issues.

Deer Management: Update 12-2-2020

- Brian Lindley

Surveys were carried out at Cromwell Valley, Oregon Ridge and Marshy Point. A Lake Roland survey was considered, but resident reaction to a possible hunt concerned DEPS Director Dave Lykens. Deer population "hot spots" tend to be edge environments rather than deep forest, but there is no Comprehensive Countywide Survey to rely on. The hunt used to be around January, but now can be as late as March. This is year one of a new five-year contract. There was no hunt last year; usually 25-50 deer are taken out at Oregon Ridge. It may take some years to know if there is a difference in forest regeneration.

CONTACT WITH CITIZENS

Citizen concerns and enquiries came to CEQ via its website and/or to individual Commissioners. Requests were directed to the appropriate County Agencies. Frequent topics were trash disposal, recycling issues, flood damage, stream erosion, urban tree destruction and park related problems. Our Commission liaisons steered us toward the appropriate persons to deal with specific problems.

CONTACT WITH COUNTY

- Attended the DEPS sponsored "The Pollinators" Film Event in February. It was the last in-person contact among the CEQ in 2020.

- Communicated virtually or by phone with Council members to update them on CEQ activities and concerns.
- Attended Council Workshops and meetings as necessary.
- Welcomed ongoing attendance, advice and support provided by our CEQ County Liaisons Brian Lindley (EPS), Kui Zhou (Planning) and Sheldon Epstein (DPW).
- Had as guests: Dr. Gregory Branch, Baltimore County Director of Health and Human Services, and Steve Lafferty, Baltimore County Chief Sustainability Officer.

COMMISSION INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNICATIONS

CEQ meetings continued to focus on environmental priorities despite changes to work and operations mandated by the Pandemic. Most hearings, lectures and in-person events were cancelled this year, or switched (when possible) to virtual modes which could be joined remotely. We nonetheless were able to consider topics and actions for ongoing and future consideration.

CEQ MEMBER CONCERNS

The CEQ will continue to review environmental issues confronting the County, the Council and the Executive. Issues for future actions include:

- Climate change Adaptation and Resilience
- Operation and Priority changes/modifications due to the Pandemic
- Urban and Forest Tree Canopies and Reforestation
- Recycling and Waste Reduction - including Food Waste Strategies
- Deer Management - other wildlife issues as appropriate
- Pesticides and Toxins