

Minutes

Baltimore County Advisory Commission on Environmental Quality (CEQ)

March 23, 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, Brian Fath, Karen Wynn, Mahnaz Mazaheri Assadi, Radu Zamfirache, Chris Overcash , Andy Miller, Lois Jacobs, Steve Malan, Justin Gallardo, Michael Ruby

I. Welcome- Dr. Brian Fath, Chair

Everyone mute please.

Steve Malan is our newly appointed member. We had a round of introductions prior to Steve introducing himself. Steve is an entomologist (Md Dept Ag, retired 2015) and is President of the Patapsco Valley chapter of Trout Unlimited and works as an adjunct instructor at Stevenson University. He is familiar with farms all across the state, did work interacting with farmers and talking with them about compliance and regulations and is here as appointed Agriculture representative and will be participating with the Maryland Farm Bureau as well.

Several members will have terms expiring soon. There is interest in turnover on the Commission so reappointment will not be automatic. Brian will be on sabbatical in fall so he won't be chair at that time. Those who want to continue will need to post a self-nomination in order to be considered.

II. Correct and approve minutes of 1/26 and 2/16 meetings.

Andy will correct missing names and fill in Bill Skibinski's background from the January minutes and will make small corrections in the February minutes as discussed. Minutes were approved unanimously pending those corrections.

III. Citizen request of CEQ re Go Ape company's zipline and ropes course using trees in the forest of Oregon Ridge County Park, brief report.

Oregon Ridge master plan process has begun.

Carol: we have a workgroup of several members (working group includes Andy Miller, Valerie Androutsopoulos, Karen Wynn, Brian Fath, Carol Newill) who are interested in this and several attended the most recent of the Rec & Parks Board. Like CEQ, that board also has multiple representatives but is chaired by the Director and minutes are taken by her secretary.

We (CEQ) have been approached by groups who heard rumors about the possible zip-line proposal and were concerned about its potential impacts. We have been in touch with the Board and with Director Roslyn Johnson. There is a \$500,000 contract signed in December 2021 with Lardner/Klein Landscape Architects, PC to produce a Master Plan for Oregon Ridge. Several of us attended the meeting; this was information only and no questions were allowed.

There will be several focus groups to develop questionnaires which will be distributed to groups all over the county. They will try to reach a broad cross-section of people from different groups. The group discussing this is heavily weighted more toward recreation than nature and the contract doesn't say a whole lot about natural resources. Go Ape was not mentioned as part of the planning process. The process as outlined at the meeting will have chances for additional input. Our role is to serve as watchdog and insist on transparency. Carol has learned there are two other ropes courses on private land within 14 miles so this might be in competition with those.

These hearings should be starting soon. Carol asked Roslyn Johnson how the environmental community can get involved – for example the Towson Green Alliance, which has 24 member organizations. She said to keep an eye on the Master Plan web page. As we get more information we can plan to participate both as a group and individually.

Mahnaz: I was at the meeting also and it was not very clear about what is happening or anticipated. The last Master Plan was in 1980. Are we allowed to send questions so we can learn about things like Environmental Impact statements? Can we see what is in the previous Master Plan? How will this one be different?

We now have a copy of the contract. We don't have a copy of the 1981 Master Plan but can probably get one.

We should ask them to invite us to these meetings so we have representation.

Andy asked whether there should be broader cross-department discussions when it comes to protection of the county's natural resources (e.g. Rec & Parks, DEPS, perhaps Planning and Sustainability). Also that we want to make sure that Rec & Parks understands that any substantial change to the natural resources of the park requires compliance with the change in the county code passed after we delivered the Painted Trees report was delivered to the County Council.

It was also asked (at our meeting tonight) whether there is a reason for a Master Plan covering Oregon Ridge only. Carol thinks the same company did a Master Plan for a single park in Montgomery County. She also points out that the County should be looking at our parks system as a whole with an eye toward its role in climate resilience.

The two other zipline courses are at Pearlstone and Genesee Valley. Joan Plisko knows about the one at Pearlstone which is on posts rather than trees.

Action points: Brian Fath will contact Steve Lafferty and Mahnaz will collect questions we can ask of Director Johnson. Lois also suggested we might want to include Jenn Aiosa. It would help to know whether there is a planning process for all of the parks together or only one at a time. We can proactively come up with our own questions for Parks and Recreation. Justin Gallardo asked whether there a way to have a uniform approach to updating of plans for all parks on some kind of regular schedule?

Carol asked whether there should be input into the content of the questionnaires before they are developed. How do we ensure that the response to polls is informed not only by what the polls say but also what is the obligation to protect park natural resources?

There is a Master Plan milestone planning meeting very soon. Mahnaz brought our attention to the meeting schedule and a lot will be happening over the next several months.

Steve Malan wondered if we should contact vendors of the other ziplines. We can start by coordinating with Joan Plisko regarding the zipline course at Pearlstone.

IV. Forest Conservation Challenges and Opportunities. Draft of report and recommendations.

- Carol Newill, Brian Fath, Lynda Eisenberg

Carol, Brian and Lynda were working together on a draft report but it's a big ask for a volunteer group on a short deadline. Carol wrote to Councilmen Marks and Patoka asking for a one-month extension and we are now looking for a May 1 deadline. Carol put together a framing introduction, Brian is working on recommendations, and an appendix will incorporate materials from the symposia.

Lois mentioned that there is always a list of native trees used for replanting. In a natural forest the list is restrictive because the companies that contract with the county usually offer a small number of species. Where do you get the diversity of species including trees that might be less profitable to carry? How do we plan for less common trees that should be there?

We do have at least one bullet point about the tree species types in the draft recommendations. The recommendations are not yet ready to share in draft form. Brian Fath suggests we should "go big" and be expansive about the request and then let the Council decide how it wants to respond. Don Outen thinks we should stay on target and respond to their request.

The preamble statement should be to minimize loss and cut down as few trees as possible; then have the core ideas that have to do with years of maintenance, observations that trigger action, fee in lieu, etc. These would be followed by bigger-picture thinking such as rethinking the Forest Conservation Act at the state level.

Carol pointed out that Anne Hairston-Strang was very clear about not cutting trees down if you can help it. Baltimore City is working hard on this with various interests in the development community. Howard County just revised their forest conservation law and they made it clear that it does not apply only to the development community but it does also apply to the parks and other county lands. Brian Lindley has been very helpful in explaining Baltimore County's Forest Conservation law. To what extent are we currently applying that law to the county's public lands?

Brian Lindley: The county does have to do forest conservation. In the case of Cromwell Valley, DEPS did the forest planting several

years ago. That and Meadowood were under the forest conservation goals. If another park takes down trees to build a new building they have to comply with the replanting regulations. Consideration of what trees will be most viable under future climate scenarios is already part of the thinking within the department.

For anyone willing to help please contact Brian Fath and Carol Newill and try to read the draft carefully when you receive it. Mahnaz volunteered to assist.

V. Update from Education and Outreach subcommittee –

Brian Fath didn't have a chance to reach out to Joan Plisko beforehand and isn't sure whether they have met. Mahnaz is on that subcommittee but there has not been another one recently.

VI. New business

- Brian Fath: Some new appointments will be made including for Agriculture. (Steve Malan, introduced tonight, is the new appointee.) Citizens interested in joining CEQ as an appointee of the County Executive must register their interest online. Link to the signup web page is on this page: <https://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/boards-commissions/>
- Shall we get together for supper outdoors in May? Consider a pavilion at Oregon Ridge?
- CEQ Annual Report for 2021 - please volunteer to assist. It would be good to get this up and posted before end of summer.
- Other new business

VII. Adjourn and enjoy the Spring!

Adjourned 8:10 p.m.

Remaining 2022 meetings: 4/27, 5/25, 9/28, 10/26, 12/7.