



HOWARD COUNTY
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY BOARD
3430 Court House Drive ■ Ellicott City, Maryland 21043 ■

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Past Chair

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DRAFT

2018 Annual Report Environmental Sustainability Board

To the County Executive and the County Council:

The primary responsibility of the Environmental Sustainability Board (ESB) is to advise the County Executive and County Council on matters related to environmental sustainability. Each year we produce an annual report that summarizes our activities and suggests priorities for the future. This year we also reviewed the recommendations of the Environment Transition Report and used that structure to organize our prospective vision for Howard County.

2018 ACTIVITIES

In 2018, we addressed various areas of concern through (1) information gathering from the government and the public, (2) activities of board committees, and (3) discussion and recommendations.

Information Gathering

The ESB met with Mark Deluca, Director of the Bureau of Environmental Services in the Howard County Department of Public Works. He gave an overview of BES but focused on the evolution of solid waste management by the County. Three current issues are:

- Single-stream recycling has resulted in more contamination and less or no revenue from recycling. A “Know Before You Throw” campaign is being implemented to reduce contamination of recyclables with trash.
- Food waste makes up 14% of solid waste and a quarter of non-recyclable trash. The “Green Bin” food waste pick up has been limited to certain neighborhoods, but can be expanded when the composting facility expansion is complete.
- The composting facility will not be big enough to accept food waste from the entire county, so one promising option is anaerobic digestion technology, which is being piloted locally by a commercial firm.

The board also engaged with citizens and other organizations on the following topics:

- Sustainability features of Downtown Columbia redevelopment with Antony Justin of Howard Hughes Corporation and Chris Streb of Biohabitats. Howard Hughes Corporation will work with Safe Skies Maryland to monitoring bird building collisions and incorporate bird safe considerations in design of upcoming buildings in Downtown Columbia. The stream valley restorations in the Crescent required by the Downtown Columbia Plan are nearly complete, but note that degraded streams remain on Columbia Association property in Symphony Woods.
- Native Plant Passport Challenge by Sonia He of ESB. The Native Passport challenge objective is to promote planting of native plants and is at https://www.cleanwaterhoward.com/sites/default/files/native_plant_passport.pdf.
- Exelon/Constellation BHQ Move Pre- and Post-Occupancy Transportation Data by Ed Wilson of ESB. Even though Exelon/Constellation provided commuter options to reach their new Harbor East facility, such as Park and Shuttle, walk/park and then ride the Harbor Connector, walk, bike, transit, and carpool/vanpool, their survey showed that, even with the many cheaper options provided, most employees (69%) still choose to drive into work.
- Environmental activities of Patapsco Heritage Greenway by Hanna Zinnert. Patapsco Heritage Greenway is the only heritage area among the state's 13 that have environment as a main focus. PHG's Environmental Stewardship Events include watershed cleanups, invasive plant removals, tree plantings, tree maintenance, storm drain marking, watershed education workshops, and a new pet waste campaign in the Deep Run watershed.
- Land development process from business perspective by Josh Greenfeld of Maryland Building Industry Association and others. The development community said it is roughly 5% more expensive to go with the County's Green Neighborhood option over conventional neighborhood development. In a site visit to the partially completed Green Neighborhood, Oxford Square, the developers described the challenge of coordinating with the construction of the co-located public school and FAA's limits on tree heights over concerns about attracting birds in proximity to BWI Thurgood Marshall Airport.
- Health initiatives of Howard County Local Health Improvement Coalition (HCLHIC) by Kelly Kesler. The vision of the HCLHIC is that all residents of Howard County will have access to healthcare and health outcomes will be equitable for all. In addition to a rapidly growing senior population, 24% of residents do not speak English at home. The HCLHIC Point of Decision Campaign includes support for community government/business participation and infrastructure, which is trying to make physical activity the norm.

- Energy conservation initiatives at Columbia Association (CA) by Jeremy Scharfenberg. CA has received BGE, EPA, and DOE recognition for their many energy conserving initiatives, including LED lighting, mechanical upgrades, combined heat and power cogeneration unit, and 100% renewal power (25% solar, 75% wind). They recently launched a Climate Change and Sustainability Advisory Committee with the primary focus on climate change, but also environmental sustainability issues, such as waste, recycling, and light pollution.
- Single-use plastics reduction efforts by Ashley Van Stone of Trash Free Maryland and Pat Hersey and Carolyn Parsa of Less Plastic Please. It is estimated that only 9% of plastic in the US is recycled each year and that by 2050 there will be more plastic than fish, by weight, in the ocean. Plastic pollution is of growing concern locally, as well as nationally, with numerous public outreach campaigns, such as refusing straws at restaurants. The Maryland General Assembly is considering banning polystyrene and allowing Howard County to charge a 5-cent plastic bag fee.
- Environmental outdoor education by Beth Decker of Maryland Association of Environmental & Outdoor Education (MAEOE). MAEOE is the leading organization for environmental education providing certification, workshops, and conferences. There are over 600 Green Schools in Maryland and Howard County has 51; Howard County also has two Green Centers—Howard County Conservancy and Robinson Nature Center.
- Monitoring of biological response to removal of the Bloede Dam on the Patapsco River by William Harbold and Jonathan Watson of Maryland Department of Natural Resources. The Simpkins and Bloede Dams have now been removed from the Patapsco River and are expected to increase access to spawning and nursery habitats for migratory fish species, better connectivity between habitats for resident species, and a higher diversity throughout the river system. A potential negative could be easier pathway for dispersal of invasive species.

Board Committees

One of the major activities of the ESB is the formation of committees, drawing upon both board members and outside members. These committees may be self-generated or mandated by executive or legislative request. In 2018, the following committees were active:

Energy Task Force. Following submission of the task force report and ESB letter to County Executive Kittleman supporting the task force recommendations in 2017, Leah Miller was hired as the first full-time Energy Manager for Howard County in 2018.

Bird Building Collision Task Force. Convened in 2017, this task force and its associated non-profit, Safe Skies Maryland, continued its three-pronged approach to reducing bird building collisions: (1) advocate for legislation and governmental action, (2) support adoption of bird safe solutions by facilities and developers, and (3) educate and engage partner organizations and the public. Originally submitted in 2018, statewide legislation was revised as the Energy Conserving and Bird Safe Building Act of 2019 (Maryland Sustainable Buildings Act) and sponsored by Howard County members in both the House and

Senate; as of March 4, 2019 the bill was passed by the Senate and is still be deliberated in the House. During 2018, Safe Skies Maryland installed bird safe window treatments at the Howard County Conservancy and Maryland Department of Natural Resources, while expanding education and advocacy across the state.

Green Apple Award Committee. Convened in 2017, this committee completed its planning in coordination with the Howard County Conservancy and Howard County Public Schools System (HCPSS) for an annual award honoring county teachers who have gone above-and-beyond in environmental education. The ESB approved the program, which will be awarded in May 2019.

Plastics in the Environment Committee. The committee was convened to address the ESB high-priority issue of single-use plastics and their negative impact on environmental sustainability. In coordination with the Howard County Conservancy, the committee has developed a “Pass on Plastics” campaign and begun public outreach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In August 2007, the Commission on the Environment and Sustainability produced a blueprint for a sustainable Howard County that included creation of an Office of Environmental (now Community) Sustainability (OCS) and an Environmental Sustainability Board (ESB). The Commission also produced 100 recommendations for sustainable actions organized into eight issue areas:

- Water quality
- Air quality
- Health
- Energy
- Green building
- Open space and land preservation
- Education and outreach
- Governance

Over the last 11 years, the County has made significant progress, completing many actions and identifying new ones. Our 2017 annual report provides a retrospective on how the county has done in each of these areas and includes specific recommendations for going forward.

In this 2018 annual report, we take the opportunity to discuss the systemic improvements in county government that we believe will most effectively, and efficiently, lead to a more sustainable Howard County. The ESB believes that these systemic changes are well laid out in the Ball Administration Transition Report on the Environment, so we use that structure for our recommendations below:

1. County Decisionmaking

- ESB believes that the commitment of the County Executive is critical to achieving sustainability and we applaud his strong statements and specific commitments to sustainability and addressing climate change at the start of his administration
- Similarly, we believe that a strong voice from the County Council, that places a priority on sustainability in legislation and budget, is equally critical
- We encourage the administration to work across departments so that they are not only communicating on individual projects, but are working toward common goals with measurable sustainability metrics
- We also believe it is critical for Howard County to work more effectively with neighboring jurisdictions on sustainability issues such as transportation and water supply

2. **Outreach and Engagement**

- ESB believes that outreach and engagement has lagged behind and is critical to equity and inclusion
- The message of sustainability should be conveyed as “being fair to future generations”
- Outreach needs to go beyond accessible information to taking sustainability information to where people are, e.g., to local events unrelated to the environment
- Success in sustainability is behavioral change, which only comes from true engagement—so that people understand it, care about it, and are moved to act on it
- Businesses are also critical partners to achieving sustainability, so we encourage the county to pursue the recommendations of the 2016 Commercial Stormwater Solutions Work Group and similar initiatives

3. **Funding**

- We recognize that the county faces substantial budget challenges and that innovative approaches to sustainability will be needed, such as more flexibility in using funds typically stove-piped in individual programs
- We applaud the aggressive commitments to energy conservation since these will reap financial benefits as well as environmental ones
- We recommend the county aggressively pursue grant funds, locally and nationally, by making Howard County a model of innovative sustainability

- We believe that additional revenue will be needed to address structural deficits, maintain our AAA bond rating, and meet short-term sustainability goals, and therefore recommend increases in the trash fee, developer impact fee, and transfer tax

4. **Development**

- Overdevelopment is one of the major concerns of Howard County citizens, so we recommend all future development by smart, sustainable, and climate-resilient, by preserving most of the 10% uncommitted lands in the county and focusing on redevelopment
- The county should ensure that the current update to the Development Regulations “right the wrongs of the past” by including substantive environmental protections and open space or green infrastructure network zones
- We recommend that all development review ensure full consideration of cumulative environmental and social impacts, through inter-department collaboration and public tracking of results
- The county should spearhead the continuing evolution of sustainable buildings by adopting the latest LEED and green building methods, including bird safe standards

5. **Resilient Infrastructure**

- Climate change and extreme weather require a commitment to resilient natural and built infrastructure, so we applaud the current Safe and Sound Plan for Ellicott City and suggest that its principles be applied to a second Howard County community to demonstrate its widespread utility
- The Green Infrastructure Network (GIN) map developed by ESB and Department of Planning and Zoning has great potential to ensure ecosystem services such as flood attenuation, but it needs to be implemented through new land protection and management requirements
- The Forest Conservation Manual is out-of-date and needs to be updated to include greater protections such as (1) acre-for-acre forest protection, (2) forest protection planning early in the development process, (3) use of fee-in-lieu where it can maximize forest benefits, and (4) preservation of priority forests
- Agriculture provides an untapped opportunity to sequester carbon in the soil and fight climate change, so we applaud taking on the U.S. Climate Alliance Natural and Working Lands Challenge

6. **Multi-modal Transportation**

- We applaud the commitment to increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of public transportation services, walking, and bicycling in and around Howard County and to ensure that connectivity is front and center in land use planning and site development
- We recommend that development review require connectivity in new projects, given that including multi-modal requirements can reduce some automobile requirements and reduce developer costs
- The Bike, Pedestrian, Transit, and Complete Streets plans should be completed and implemented as soon as possible
- Complete Streets should be incorporated as requirements in the Development Regulations Update

7. **Update Plans**

- We commend the County Executive for signing on to the “We Are Still In” declaration of the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement and anticipate that this will include updating the 2010 Howard County Climate Action Plan and inventory of greenhouse gas emissions
- We also applaud the designation as a Maryland Smart Energy Community with commitments for 20% from renewables, 20% reduction in fleet consumption, and 25% reduction in facilities consumption
- We recommend the county update the 2014-2024 Solid Waste Management Plan with special emphasis on reducing food and plastic waste

Thank you for your interest in these matters.

Sincerely,

Mark Southerland, Ph.D., Past Chair
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