



# Our wAater Public Advisory Group Meeting #2 Summary

Meeting Date: November 16, 2022

Meeting Time: 4:30 – 6:15 p.m.

Location: Independence Room - 2664 Riva Rd, Annapolis, Maryland 21401

## Welcome

Rahkia Nance opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and thanked them for volunteering their time and participating in the Public Advisory Group.

Anne Arundel County Department of Public Works (DPW)	HDR	Public Advisory Group
Chris Phipps	Ed Shea	Tammy Domanski, Anne Arundel Community College Environmental Center
George Heiner	Rahkia Nance	Sally Hornor, Magothy River Association
Beth O’Connell	Hannah Billian	Erik Kreifeldt, Severn River Association
Chris Murphy	Meghan Robinson	Lloyd Lewis, Chesapeake Environmental Protection Association
Karen Henry		Doug Nichols, Greater Severna Park Council
		Jerry Pesterfield, Heritage Harbor
		Tim Williams, Water Environment Federation (retired)

## Purpose and Objectives

Rahkia Nance reviewed the agenda and objective of the second meeting. The objective for this meeting is for the group to provide feedback on the Small Systems Upgrade Program and the Septic Connection Program.

## Small Systems

George Heiner provided an overview of the Small Systems program, the program’s benefits, and its challenges. He outlined the program goals and highlighted the five existing treatment plants that are under consideration for upgrades to reduce nitrogen discharge into the Patuxent River watershed.

- Regarding nitrogen reduction estimates, Chris Phipps noted that the permit limit is an annual average of 4 mg/L total nitrogen, but the County designs facilities for 3 mg/L. He emphasized that the estimated nitrogen reduction values presented are likely conservative because the current discharge permits allow higher nitrogen levels.

- George Heiner discussed the challenges of managing public perception with a public facility serving one private owner, and the concern that the presence of a new water reclamation facility (WRF) could generate interest in developing at a higher density.
- Lloyd Lewis mentioned that there is already concern among residents of Lothian regarding the potential form development and that in the past there have been attempts by developers to develop Waysons Corner. Chris Phipps noted that the underlying zoning regulations have prevented development from happening already. Tim Williams and Lloyd Lewis suggested that DPW coordinate with the Office of Planning and Zoning (OPZ) to determine the zoning of the program area and to develop a plan to prevent unintended consequences such as residents losing homes because of redevelopment.
- George Heiner explained the challenges related to operational cost for smaller treatment systems when compared with the larger systems currently operated by DPW. Chris Phipps noted that sewer rates for these new customers could be the same as for all users in the service area, and that costs related to operating the small systems is small enough that it would not impact the rates of all customers. The plant owner would be billed by DPW. Jerry Pesterfield expressed that DPW should be more concerned about criticism from not doing something to address the private treatment plants as opposed to criticism from absorbing the costs.
- Tim Williams expressed a concern that if the County's new WRF required the current owner to incur additional cost, that they would in turn put that burden on the residents. Regarding affordability, George Heiner noted that DPW is unaware what the current plant owners are charging tenants. There is concern regarding the gap between tenants' current utility rates versus the DPW rate.
- Lloyd Lewis suggested that a public outreach effort be implemented to communicate to other people in the area the reasons why they would not be allowed to connect to the new WRFs. Outreach should emphasize that DPW is fixing these failing private treatment systems.

## Septic-to-Sewer

George Heiner led the discussion on the Septic-to-Sewer program goals and challenges. He provided an overview of how the program evolved since the Task Force was initiated.

- Sally Hornor asked why the North Shore/Magothy area near Gibson Island was not included in the eligibility area since many of those residents are on septic. George explained that the Septic-to-Sewer eligibility area does not include areas where future service is not planned, such as Bodkin Point.
- There was a discussion regarding the format for the community outreach meetings.
  - Jerry Pesterfield suggested that the virtual meeting format could be a downside since many people in his community do not have internet.
  - Lloyd Lewis agreed and added that an added benefit of in-person meetings is that community members can sell each other on the program.
  - Erik Kreifeldt highlighted some advantages of the virtual meeting format and suggested that virtual may be more helpful for the initial community meetings, and that an in-person meeting may be more valuable when the group has more serious interest in the program.
  - Karen Henry noted that DPW is considering a hybrid meeting approach where the meeting is held in person, but residents can also log into the meeting online to increase accessibility for everyone.
- George explained that cost has been the primary concern for attendees of the community meetings so far and is the main reason why more applications have not been submitted.

- Jerry Pesterfield suggested presenting more tangible benefits to community members such as an estimation of home value increase ranges by switching to public sewer. He also noted that many people in his community did not know their septic tanks required periodic maintenance. The group discussed the possibility of higher home values when connected to public sewer, and whether DPW could provide studies by others that compare home values for septic vs. public sewer.
- Tim Williams suggested sharing a timeline for the subsidy with the public and funding options that are available.
- Tammy Domanski pointed out that there does not appear to be an advocate for the program.
  - George Heiner explained that DPW so far has avoided advocating a course of action because it is intended to be a community-driven program. The presentations focus on explaining the program features, which does mention the environmental benefits in the context of why the County and the State make funding available to support these types of projects.
  - Tammy suggested that DPW identify an advocate for the program.
  - Sally Hornor noted that watershed groups would be appropriate advocates to present the water quality benefits. The group discussed the role that HOAs could play.
  - Jerry Pesterfield suggested that the HOA's role should be limited to communication and to provide a conduit for DPW, but that they don't need to be an advocate.
- The group discussed whether DPW could take a firmer stance in requiring connection or further compelling homeowners to connect to sewer. DPW should appeal to the interests of homeowners, point out that they have a vested interest, and educate septic owners on the negatives of a system failure that they don't even know about. It would be helpful if there were a comparison of costs to connect today compared to waiting for some future date when a homeowner may be required to connect.
- Jerry Pesterfield suggested that other alternatives be evaluated and offered, such as cluster systems. Chris Phipps explained that the primary focus of this program is to connect existing septic systems to the existing water reclamation facilities.

## Final Discussion, Wrap-Up, and Next Steps

Rahkia Nance thanked everyone for their participation and encouraged the participants to visit the Our wAAter webpage.

- Meeting 3 will be held on Wednesday, December 14, 2022 at the Patuxent Water Reclamation Facility (1640 Professional Blvd, Crofton, MD). The meeting time is being changed to 3 p.m. to maximize daylight hours. Meetings 4 (January 25, 2023) and 5 (February 22, 2023) will be held in the Independence Room of the Heritage Complex, 2664 Riva Road, Annapolis MD.