



Our wAater Public Advisory Group Meeting #5 Summary

Meeting Date: February 22, 2023

Meeting Time: 4:30 – 6:30 p.m.

Location: 2664 Riva Road, Annapolis, MD (Independence Room)

Anne Arundel County Department of Public Works (DPW)	HDR	Public Advisory Group
George Heiner	Brian Balchunas	Tammy Domanski, Anne Arundel Community College Environmental Center
Karen Henry	Hannah Billian	Lloyd Lewis, Chesapeake Environmental Protection Association (CEPA)
Beth O’Connell	Rahkia Nance	Doug Nichols, Greater Severna Park Council
	Meghan Robinson	Tim Williams, Water Environment Federation (retired)
	Ed Shea	Jerry Pesterfield

Welcome

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

Purpose and Objectives

George Heiner reviewed the agenda and objectives of the fifth meeting:

- To review the feedback for the Integrated Management Plan (IMP) and the Our wAater program
- To discuss the future of the Public Advisory Group (PAG)

Integrated Management Plan Feedback

George Heiner reviewed the feedback received from the PAG for the IMP and discussed actions that DPW would take to address feedback.

- Lloyd Lewis asked if the source of costs (funds) is covered in the IMP. George Heiner mentioned that the basis of project costs is cited in the plan. He noted that a statement can be added to the plan detailing sources of funding, including utility funds, stormwater fees, County taxes, private funding (septics), and State and Federal grant funding.

Our wAater Program Feedback

George Heiner provided an overview of the Our wAater program elements and reviewed the feedback received on the program from the PAG. He discussed actions that DPW would consider to address feedback.

Small Systems Upgrades

- Doug Nichols and Lloyd Lewis suggested evaluating the financial impacts of being charged County sewer rates on members of the community in order to anticipate any challenges related to equity.
- DPW may want to coordinate with the County Department of Social Services to get a better sense of the communities' needs.
- Jerry Pesterfield noted that DPW could communicate to the property owners what portion of the ground rent is allocated for water and sewer and how this would be incorporated.
- George Heiner noted that these topics will be included in coordination with the property owners and public outreach efforts.

Septic-to-Sewer

- Jerry Pesterfield mentioned that he has not seen any instructional material on DPW's website detailing proper septic system maintenance techniques.
- George Heiner and Karen Henry explained that this information is available through the County Health Department website and linked through DPW's Our wAater website. George Heiner said DPW will review the visibility on the Our wAater website and adjust, as needed to increase homeowners' awareness of their maintenance responsibilities.
- Tammy Domanski and Tim Williams noted that real estate agents don't provide information regarding septic ownership or maintenance when individuals purchase homes. Karen Henry noted that a septic maintenance document could potentially be provided to residents in their tax bills, but DPW would need to partner with the Health Department and General Services.
- Tim Williams asked what the deferment is for the Septic-to-Sewer Program. Brian Balchunas explained that homeowners can defer 50 percent of the assessment cost either until they sell the home or after 40 years. Elderly and low-income homeowners can also defer 100 percent of the assessment until the sale of the home.
- Tim Williams asked if examples are discussed at community meetings describing how failing septic systems impact beach closures. George Heiner noted that water quality is discussed, but it is difficult to directly correlate beach closures to septic systems without extensive sampling and source-tracking efforts.
- Karen Henry noted that contaminated wells are tracked by the Health Department. General information from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is provided at community meetings stating that septic systems can affect private wells. George Heiner indicated that the County is always looking to collect more relevant data.

- Tammy Domanski asked if the subsidy amount is conveyed clearly as a dollar amount to communities during informational meetings. George Heiner mentioned that the average capital cost incorporating the subsidy is shown in presentations. He also noted that in the future DPW could show a subsidy range or average subsidy amount to convey the value of the subsidy with the message that it may not be available forever. DPW could consider ways to make the value of the County subsidy clearer to homeowners.
- Tammy Domanski asked if homeowners are aware of what a “failing septic system” means. George Heiner noted that more testing needs to be done to provide a clearer dataset to communicate that a failing system isn’t always readily apparent.
- Brian Balchunas noted the fact that a properly operating septic system discharges pollutants is conveyed during community presentations.

Managed Aquifer Recharge (MAR)

- Jerry Pesterfield suggested that DPW talk to other organizations outside of the region to learn how they communicate MAR to the public and what approaches have been successful.

Weighting Exercise Results

George Heiner reviewed the results from the PAG Meeting 4 criteria weighting exercise and the takeaway from the results.

- George Heiner explained that DPW could distinguish between discretionary and non-discretionary projects in the future to clearly communicate which projects are subject to prioritization.
- Tim Williams noted that meeting regulations should not hinder the implementation of projects that provide innovative or sustainable solutions. He mentioned that the IMP could be used to communicate with regulators that innovative projects can provide great benefits as opposed to just looking at regulatory obligations alone.

Advisory Group Future

George Heiner shared the plan for the PAG and outlined what program topics the group would focus on in the future. He provided a preliminary suggestion of quarterly meetings was noted that DPW is interested in expanding the membership.

- Doug Nichols, Tim Williams, and Lloyd Lewis agreed that the PAG should expand to increase diversity and suggested including members with diverse viewpoints regarding DPW initiatives (e.g., real estate developers).
- Karen Henry noted that the PAG could be advertised through social media.
- Jerry Pesterfield and Tim Williams suggested that DPW could track the progress of programs (e.g., reporting goals and percent achieved each quarter). Ed Shea noted that this could be done through the adaptive management component of the IMP based on feedback and performance.
- Karen Henry suggested measurements relating to the IMP and PAG could be posted on OpenArundel.

George Heiner thanked everyone for their participation and encouraged the participants to let DPW know if they would like to remain involved in the PAG through email (rahkia.nance@hdrinc.com).