



Our wAater Public Advisory Group Meeting #6 Summary

Meeting Date: November 16, 2023

Meeting Time: 4:30 – 6:30 p.m.

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

Anne Arundel County Department of Public Works (DPW)	HDR	Public Advisory Group	
Karen Henry	Ed Shea	Elle Bassett <i>Arundel Rivers Federation</i>	Doug Nichols <i>Greater Severna Park Council</i>
George Heiner	Brian Balchunas	Tammy Domanski <i>Anne Arundel Community College Environmental Center</i>	Jerry Pesterfield <i>Heritage Harbor</i>
Chris Murphy	Meghan Robinson	Sally Hornor <i>Magothy River Association</i>	Bill Squicciarini <i>County Resident</i>
	Rahkia Nance	Erik Kreifeldt <i>County Resident</i>	Tim Williams <i>Water Environment Federation (retired)</i>
	Hannah Billian	Lloyd Lewis <i>Chesapeake Environmental Protection Association (CEPA)</i>	

Welcome

George Heiner (DPW) opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and thanked them for volunteering their time and participating in the Public Advisory Group (PAG). He acknowledged the group's two new members—Elle Bassett and Bill Squicciarini—and reminded the group to invite additional members who might increase the diversity of the group's perspectives.

Purpose and Objectives

George Heiner (DPW) reviewed the agenda and objective of the meeting. The objective of the meeting was to provide a status update on the Our wAater program and also for the County team to receive feedback from the group on County initiatives within the program. George also presented a mission statement for the group that DPW developed and mentioned recent updates to the Our wAater website related to the Advisory Group.¹

¹ <https://ourwaater.aacounty.org/about/publicadvisorygroup.html>

Our wAater Program Updates

Brian Balchunas (HDR) and George Heiner (DPW) provided an overview of the Our wAater program and updates since the last PAG meeting that was convened in February 2023.²

Septic-to-Sewer

- Regarding Maryland's Phase III Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP), Elle Bassett asked why the County septic inventory has not been reduced. Brian Balchunas (HDR) explained that since County Water Reclamation Facility (WRF) upgrades were successful in meeting WIP II goals, and therefore the large-scale septic conversion program initially under consideration was not needed at this time. WIP III goals are now more focused on overall nitrogen reduction as opposed to sector-by-sector reduction and presented an opportunity to examine alternative approaches.
- George Heiner (DPW) added that the County has taken several steps to make septic conversions easier and more affordable for residents including revisions to the County code, informational meetings for residents, and financial assistance. It was noted however, that despite the changes to the petition program and an extensive outreach effort, no communities had yet decided to proceed with a sewer extension project.
- Tim Williams asked what the County can do to increase incentives for septic conversions, referencing a Watershed Protection and Restoration Program (WPRP) meeting with many monetary incentives. Karen Henry (DPW) noted that the County's 2024 budget includes an increase for septic-to-sewer conversions and the County is prioritizing the conversion of properties in the Critical Area that are adjacent to existing public sewer. Ed Shea (HDR) suggested comparing the available Bay Restoration Fund (BRF) Septic Fund to what is generated by the Watershed Protection & Restoration Fee.
- Jerry Pesterfield suggested that the County take a firmer stance on septic conversions. Brian Balchunas (HDR) emphasized that the program is currently voluntary and that there may be more political will in the future to change that if the Bay is not meeting its water quality targets and the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) requires further reductions. George Heiner (DPW) noted that current users on public sewer pay for WRF upgrades through user rates and that it may be unfair to current users to compensate for a lack of septic conversions through another round of treatment plant upgrades that would also be paid for through user rates.
- Elle Bassett suggested including someone from outside the County in community informational meetings to serve as a program advocate and provide perspective on program goals. Tammy Domanski added that the Watershed Stewards would be a good option since they have members in almost every neighborhood throughout the County.

Small Systems Upgrades

- Elle Bassett noted that she is excited to see Small Systems Upgrades as a component of the Our wAater program and that she would like to see the County find the funding to support the upgrades for five (5) targeted communities in the Patuxent River watershed. Karen Henry (DPW) noted that the residents of these communities are all renters and if the property owner receives

² Slide content is available for review on the Public Advisory Group page of the Our wAater website. <https://ourwaater.aacounty.org/about/publicadvisorygroup.html>

financial assistance, then residents may not see the benefit of the funding. George Heiner (DPW) added that the County believes a substantial proportion of these upgrades can be funded through Bay Restoration Fund grants, but long-term operational costs will still be a challenge for DPW. Another primary concern is the affordability for the existing residents. The County does not want to create a financial burden for current residents of these communities.

- George Heiner (DPW) acknowledged that these same issues have been discussed in an earlier Public Advisory Group meeting, but thus far a resolution had not been found.
- Chris Murphy (DPW) noted that the current BRF program offers 100% funding if facilities are County-owned and 50% funding if they are privately owned. This provides more incentive for the County to assume ownership of the facilities. Karen Henry (DPW) added that the County program is currently funded by the Utility Fund, which is also strained by increased chemical costs for the WRFs.
- Jerry Pesterfield and Elle Bassett expressed support for the County prioritizing Small Systems Upgrades since these are failing treatment plants that impact human health.

Managed Aquifer Recharge (MAR)

- Jerry Pesterfield expressed concern regarding the treatment of “forever chemicals” such as per- and polyfluoroalkyl (PFAS) substances. George Heiner (DPW) noted that the MAR pilot facility has been very effective in removing these chemicals using treatment technologies being evaluated and is meeting current drinking water standards. Brian Balchunas (HDR) added that PFAS are ubiquitous in the environment and should also be controlled at the source if possible.
- The group expressed concern over County legislative challenges regarding demonstration testing. Karen Henry (DPW) noted that the County is proposing legislation to give Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) regulatory authority to permit a demonstration facility for managed aquifer recharge. George Heiner (DPW) explained that if the County can obtain legislative sponsorship, then the next priority is to obtain stakeholder feedback. The County would like to host more tours of the pilot facility, including groups that the PAG members are affiliated with.
- Tim Williams suggested that the County use the Hampton Roads Sanitation District (HRSD) Sustainable Water Initiative for Tomorrow (SWIFT) program in Virginia as an example when communicating with the public and legislators. George Heiner (DPW) and Brian Balchunas (HDR) agreed, and noted that the current Director of Water Technology and Research of the SWIFT program, Dr. Charles Bott, is on the County’s Independent Scientific Advisory Panel (ISAP) for MAR.
- Sally Hornor asked if nitrogen needs to be added back into effluent prior to aquifer injection. Karen Henry (DPW) clarified that the effluent does need to be compatible with the existing groundwater, but nitrogen is not added back in. George Heiner noted that some pilot system schematics show the ability to add nitrogen into the process, but this provision is in the event that there appears to be a nutrient deficiency in the biofiltration step that impairs performance. So far, this has not been necessary.
- Jerry Pesterfield asked if the County is conducting groundwater modeling. It was noted that the County supports the development of a regional groundwater model and has mentioned this to both MDE and the Maryland Geological Survey.

- Tim Williams suggested that the County communicate to legislators and stakeholders that the County is entirely dependent on groundwater for drinking water and that this is a potential future limitation for growth, emphasizing that the County is being proactive.
- Elle Bassett asked what the current source of funding for the MAR program is. Karen Henry (DPW) explained that the utility fund is currently funding MAR efforts since this fund is geared towards water and sewer. MAR addresses County goals for the water and wastewater divisions, including increasing drinking water resiliency and reducing nutrient discharge.

Outreach

George Heiner provided an overview of County outreach events from the past year. He noted that while the events were successful and provided an opportunity to engage with residents, there had not been any significant changes in the number of visitors to the website.

Final Discussion, Wrap-Up, and Next Steps

George Heiner thanked everyone for their participation and encouraged the participants to visit the Our wAAter website. Slides from tonight's meeting will be sent to the PAG members and added to the PAG webpage.

- The County aims to host stakeholder tours of the MAR pilot in December 2023.
- Future meetings will be held quarterly, with the next PAG meeting in February 2024.