

St. Mary's County
Commission on the Environment (COE)
Meeting Notes for October 7, 2015

Committee meeting called to order at 7:02pm in the Department of Land Use and Growth Management conference room of the Patuxent Building on October 7, 2015 by COE president, Thomas Brewer.

In Attendance:

Thomas Brewer, COE
Gordon Smith, COE
Mike Thompson, COE
Mark Burroughs, COE
Brad Newkirk, COE
Kim Egbert, COE
Paul Waxman
Bill Hunt, St. Mary's DLUGM
Sue Veith, St. Mary's DLUGM

- 1) Minutes from September 2, 2015 were unanimously approved. Format for minutes will continue to be proposed agenda items bolded and discussion from tonight's meeting not bolded.

- 2) **Non-recyclable plastics**

-I spoke with a representative from Trex, and they informed me that only certain plastics are accepted for their composite lumber. Beyond that, she was unable to give me specifics, but gave me a number to the recycling coordinator. I am waiting for a call back to ask about what they accept and reject. The representative did say that there were no programs or initiatives that she knew of that would try to reclaim non-recyclable plastics from Materials Recovery Facilities, like the Waste Management facility in Elkridge. I will try again to contact the recycling coordinator and also Waste Management to see if they are proposing any plan to avoid throwing that plastic into landfills.

Kim suggested looking on YouTube to see the process that Trex uses to recycle plastics. Sue opened a page of the Trex website to see what plastics they take (the website lists grocery bags, bread bags, case overwrap, dry cleaning bags, newspaper sleeves, ice bags, wood pellet bags, ziplock bags, produce bags, bubble wrap, salt bags, and cereal bags). Kim will consider working with schools on participating in the Trex Plastic Film Recycling Challenge. In this challenge schools compete to see how much plastic film can be recycled. Trex donates a composite bench to the winning school.

- 3) **Green Team**

-I spoke with Mike Hunninghake, the Program Manager for Sustainable MD. He will be working with Professor Muchnick of St. Mary's College to organize a presentation for students and interested community members. This will be an opportunity to recruit these individuals to join the Green Team for Leonardtown, but will also give an opportunity for students with homes throughout MD to see if they live in an eligible municipality that is in need of certification.

Brad mentioned an Environmental Studies major was just approved at St. Mary's College.

- 4) **Long Range Transportation Plan**

-Bill put me in contact with the Senior Planning Specialist for DLUGM, and they provided me with a digital questionnaire in PDF format that I can fill out and send back. If any are interested, email me and I can pass along the form.

Thomas contacted a cycling coordinator who mentioned the Long Range Transportation Plan at the coordinator's cycling team meeting. Thomas discussed proposing busing workers to the Patuxent River Naval Air Station (NAS). Sue mentioned a St. Mary's Transit Advisory Committee that coordinates with Patuxent River (NAS) representatives. The next Transit Advisory meeting is the 3rd Thursday in October.

- 5) **Solar Panels**

-Gordon sent out a link on solar panels before the last meeting, but somehow I missed it. It discusses the push to have solar fields, but the fear of this movement slowing due to a reduction in tax credits for commercial and utility-scale solar operations (30% to 10%) and the elimination of the residential solar tax credit (something to nothing) if Congress does not extend the federal investment tax credits for solar power beyond 2016. I agree with Mike's response, and I believe the residential solar tax credit may be of more importance in the long run, as cost will go down for large operations that are already moving more towards solar, but residents would still benefit from the financial incentive.

Mike said you currently get a 30% federal tax credit. There are many companies that sell solar systems now. It is unclear if the cost of solar panels is decreasing.

- 6) **Small waterways regulation**

-Mike sent out a link about a federal judge in North Dakota that prevented the EPA and Army Corps of Engineers from regulating some waterways according to the Clean Water Act. It seems most of the push is coming from farmers complaining that the Act, intended to regulate waterways that may be polluting larger bodies of water, may find irrigation and drainage on farms worth regulating. It seems to me that if these farmers are not actually polluting nearby waterways with their drainage, they should have no reason to be concerned, but the farmers that know they are irresponsibly handling chemicals and runoff have reason to be worried. Maryland is not one of the 13 states that were

exempted from the Act, because we did not sue the federal government, so it will be interesting to see if Maryland farmers find anything wrong with the intentions of the Clean Water Act as it is now in place.

Sue discussed efforts in St. Mary's County for Storm Water Management. Many exemptions were added to the Clean Water Act but over a dozen states sued the federal government.

7) **Composting Workshop**

-Sue sent out a link for a composting workshop that was scheduled to take place this past weekend in Charles County. I am not sure if it was cancelled due to weather, but if not, I would be curious to hear how it went. If we hear positive feedback, would we be interested in hosting a similar workshop in our county at some point? Or any other workshops?

Sue suspects the composting workshop was canceled due to the weather but that the Master Gardeners group may be interested in hosting a workshop.

8) **Board of Appeals Environmental Cases**

-Sue was asked if we would be interested in testifying in Critical Area variance cases before the Board of Appeals. I will let her explain more about what this entails, and then we can discuss whether or not we have the interest.

Sue said the St. Mary's County representative is looking for volunteers. Cases are heard once a month and often involve older lots approved before the Critical Area rules were approved. Thomas said he would not be comfortable testifying as two experts review each variance case. It is also unclear if the volunteer would speak for the COE or as a private person. No other COE members expressed interest in being a volunteer.

9) **Food Waste**

-Gordon sent out some links on reducing food waste, and this is an important topic. Composting can be a helpful way to reduce the waste stream going into landfills, but it is very unlikely that we will be able to handle all of the compostable material in our area at a single facility. Rather, it is important to identify examples of preventable food waste and to be more mindful of our individual habits. The articles provide some great tips for preventing food from going to waste in your own home. I will be attending the Maryland Food Charter Statewide Summit on October 15th and will report back with my notes of the event at the next meeting, which will include discussions about how to decrease the food waste in our state.

Gordon sent out these links on food waste in late September.

10) **Composting facility**

-I spoke with a representative from the Bureau of Environmental Services in Howard County that handles the operations of the composting facility located at the Alpha Ridge Landfill. As far as tours go, we can either pick a weekday or a Saturday. He mentioned that his October Saturdays were unavailable, as are my own. He mentioned that November 7th would work for him, so we will discuss whether we would like to take a tour then or if another time is preferable.

As for the operations, he said that they contract out a hauler to collect residential food waste and yard clippings as well as that from schools along the routes. Next year, they will only be accepting waste in paper yard bags, as they are no longer going to allow plastic into their facility. He said that the fall leaf boom causes storage problems on their small site, and because yard clippings and food waste are mixed presently, they do not have the option to let it sit dormant. They also do not have the ability as of yet to expand into the commercial food waste market, citing phone calls from onion processors and Edible Arrangements alone producing too much for them to handle. He also explained that commercial comes with a great deal of contamination. Residential composters tend to be more diligent in their separation, but restaurants seem less empathetic about what they throw in if it is not properly monitored. He mentioned a place near Pittsburgh that is doing a good job of working with restaurants to collect food waste, so I will be researching this further.

It seemed from our extensive talk that taking a year or two to collect brown feedstock, such as leaves, grass, and Christmas trees, may be helpful in the initiation phases, and that transitioning slowly is important; for instance, starting with residential pick-up before taking on the commercial food waste stream. All of these numbers need to be assessed to ensure that the facility does not get in over its head, but it is also important to note that there will be bumps along the way and that this should be seen as an evolving project. Compost is not a lucrative business, but rather a necessary part of solid waste stream divergence that can reduce costs to the county if done properly. Now the research begins...

Many COE members expressed interest in a tour. Sue said we could borrow a County van and Brad mentioned borrowing a State van also. Kim reinforced the idea of starting off small for a composting effort based on her experience. Mike asked if many composting businesses are making money. Thomas mentioned it appears only public-private partnerships are successful.

- 11) It was mentioned the Montgomery County Council passed a pesticide bill. This is one of the first jurisdictions in the country with such a law. Pesticides are banned on county parks starting July 2016 and on private property starting January 2018.
- 12) Thomas read from a bio-diesel book about school buses and how diesel buses pollute more (and how they could affect children on the bus when the bus is idling or moving slowly).
- 13) Sue mentioned there is training that the County could possibly pay for on Creative Financing for Sustainability Projects.

The meeting adjourned at 9:50pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Mark Burroughs.

The next COE meeting is scheduled for Wednesday November 4, 2015 at 7pm in the Department of Land Use and Growth Management conference room of the Patuxent Building.