

St. Mary's County
Commission on the Environment (COE)
Meeting Notes for June 3, 2015

Committee meeting called to order at 7:10pm in Room 14 of the Potomac Building on June 3, 2015 by COE president, Thomas Brewer.

In Attendance:

Thomas Brewer, COE
Mary Fearn, COE
Gordon Smith, COE
Mike Thompson, COE
Brad Newkirk, COE
Mark Burroughs, COE
Paul Waxman
Bill Hunt, St. Mary's DLUGM deputy Director
Sue Veith, St. Mary's Environmental Planner

- 1) Minutes from May 6, 2015 were unanimously approved.
- 2) Bill Hunt started the meeting with a suggestion from the County Attorney that minutes from all county commission meetings be more limited than what has been provided in the past. Limiting the minutes to items such as date of the meeting, who attended, and actions (motions) was proposed. The use of audio recorders was also proposed which would allow anyone interested in the entire meeting discussion to hear the recording. Bill set up recorders as a test run for this meeting.

After discussion, COE members agreed that lengthier minutes than suggested were favored partly to provide a way to quickly understand topics from previous meetings and given the concern that people interested in the COE would not want to listen to a long audio recording. COE members also agreed to a new format for minutes where the proposed agenda items for that night's meeting would be included along with what was discussed. This new format is used below with **proposed agenda items bolded** and discussion from tonight's meeting not bolded.

- 3) Bill Hunt mentioned that George Erichsen, St. Mary's County Department of Public Works and Transportation, would like to attend the next COE meeting to receive feedback on proposed Solid Waste and Recycling recommendations. A draft of these recommendations was distributed by Bill. The action for COE members is to provide input to Thomas Brewer on the recommendations by June 24, 2015. This will allow Thomas time to review inputs and ask for more feedback if needed.

4) **COE Website Updates**

-I forwarded the Annual Report to Diane Gleissner, who should be updating the site soon. Sue was advised to contact the help desk and can provide updates at the meeting on her efforts to post the meeting minutes. Thomas reported at our June 3, 2015 meeting that the COE website has been updated with a revised purpose, goals, and annual report. Sue did request help desk support which will eventually allow her to post minutes.

5) **Plastic Bag Fees**

-Mark was going to look into plastic bag fee programs. If he found anything, he can update us on his findings at the meeting

Mark provided data from the Montgomery County plastic bag fee program. 5-cents per bag is charged, of which 1-cent goes to the store to manage the funds while 4-cents is provided back to the county. The revenues from this charge are deposited into the county's [Water Quality Protection Charge \(WQPC\) fund](#). The revenues are meant to shift the burden of litter clean-up costs from public taxpayers to consumers who have a choice to avoid the 5-cent charge by bringing reusable bags. Gordon asked if this fee applies to other establishments than stores. It was confirmed the fee is collected at all stores, service stations, grocery stores, department stores and other sellers with retail outlets.

6) **Sustainable MD Certification**

-The Leonardtown Town Council passed the "Leonardtown Resolution Supporting Participation in the Sustainable Maryland Municipal Certification Program." I will be trying to find a senior college student to base their St. Mary's Project around the certification, providing more free labor to help Leonardtown achieve a certified status by next year.

Brad said that there are other classes with more junior students which could also be a source of free labor. Thomas will contact Professor Muchnick, Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies, for ideas.

7) Composting

-I spoke with a representative at Green Mountain Compost, the industrial composting facility that I mentioned previously. The Chittenden County, Vermont operation was originally private with some public contribution, but now is completely public. The facility handles the entire county, which has a population of just over 150,000 people and includes the city of Burlington. They average around 4000 tons of food waste per year and around 7000 tons of leaves per year. Private haulers transport the food waste and the leaves are collected from residents and municipal waste. They purchase between 1000 and 1500 cubic yards of chipped wood per year to help with porosity.

They no longer use grass or manure due to persistent herbicides. Even after going through a horse's digestive system and composting, some problematic herbicides remained in the soil, causing obvious problems. As a result, they had to stop sales of their compost for almost 2 years to identify and eliminate the problems. Their finished product sells for \$64 per cubic yard. The estimate on the cost of constructing the facility and some of the equipment was \$2.3 million and after halting sales, they required around a half million in subsidies per year, but feel they are close to getting back to the profitable state with which they started. He noted that this did not factor in the money saved by the county, which has tipping fees of over \$100. He stated that if this were factored into the equation, he imagined the result would be a net positive for the county, but I will be contacting county representatives to learn more about their balance sheet regarding solid waste.

I found this helpful as we had discussed horse manure as a green ingredient, and without further research, I would say avoiding the potential for persistent herbicide contamination would prevent us from wanting to source horse manure. As for the wood chips, we could probably obtain that through municipal waste and Christmas trees without having to purchase much from an outside vendor, but I need to do some more research on how much we accumulate on average in a year. I would advise no longer mulching and giving away municipal waste like we do now, and instead utilizing the resources to produce quality compost. I plan on speaking with the Green Mountain Compost representative, as well as a Chittenden County Public Works representative, in order to strengthen our proposal with specific numbers. I also have an upcoming meeting with John Bohanan to discuss ways to promote and develop support for the project. As a former politician, he has strong connections throughout the area, and as a member of the BRAC (Base Relocation And Closure) commission, he feels that this project may be beneficial to the Base as well as the general community. His support and guidance could prove invaluable with this project and I look forward to the opportunity to meet and discuss this with him.

Sue looked up the herbicide mentioned in the proposed agenda item above and found it was an aminopyralid. This herbicide caused damage to plants, such as tomatoes, when the compost from Green Mountain Compost was used.

Also, it was unclear why Green Mountain Compost purchased chipped wood. Thomas plans to follow-up with Green Mountain Compost with this question.

It was mentioned by COE members that trees are a carbon sink from when they start growing until later in their life.

8) Healthy St. Mary's Partnership

-HSMP is having their first annual meeting on Thursday, June 4th from 1-4:30pm at the Tech Center in Leonardtown. I have registered for the event, plan to attend, and will report back at the next meeting.

Thomas still plans to attend this first annual meeting. HSMP has four action teams to address the priority health issues in St. Mary's: Access to Care, Behavioral Health, Healthy Eating & Active Living and Tobacco Free Living.

- 9) Brad mentioned that many plastic water bottles are provided by the county at St. Mary's public forums, which seems wasteful from a recycling stand-point. It was asked whether compostable cups could be provided. Sue mentioned there is a push to have healthier foods at meetings.
- 10) Thomas will be following up with the Board of Education on composting in St. Mary's County schools.
- 11) Sue mentioned a proposed plan where solar panel farms could be built at St. Mary's County landfill sites, where the land can't be used for many purposes due to the landfill. The county commissioner minutes may offer more details.

- 12) COE members expressed interest again in touring the St. Mary's County Metropolitan Commission (METCOM) Marlay-Taylor Water Reclamation Facility, which has anaerobic digesters. Visiting on a Friday was suggested. Mike will look into setting up a visit.

The meeting adjourned at 8:12pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Mark Burroughs.

The next COE meeting is scheduled for Wednesday July 1, 2015 at 7pm in Room 14 of the Potomac Building.