

Baltimore County Advisory Commission on Environmental Quality (CEQ) 9/25/2024 Minutes

Attendance: Chris Overcash, Brian Fath, Linda Davis, Karen Wynn, Lois Jacobs, Brian Lindley, Andy Miller, Steve Malan, Gregory Strella, Dustin Shearer, Brian Bernstein, Mike Ruby, David Bycotte. Excused: Valerie Androutsopoulos, Lynda Eisenberg, Mahnaz Mazaheri Assadi, Carol Newill.

7 pm Welcome and brief administrative matters:

- 1. Several Commissioners' appointment dates have expired; please see that your appointment is extended appropriately.** Valerie (District 1) and Jennifer Langford (homebuilders) have resigned and we wish them both well. Two others (Steve Malan and Lois Jacobs) need to be reappointed; and District 5 seat is still vacant. Samantha O'Neil in the County Executive's office welcomes suggestions for suitable candidates with pertinent experience.
- 2. Rota for Greeters:** Commissioner Brian Bernstein will take over the task of coordinating the rota for 2025; thank you Brian.
- 3. New chapter in our CEQ attention to Resilience to Climate Change Effects in Baltimore County: Resilience to Extreme Heat.**

Prepared remarks from Carol Newill:

In our new series of presentations and discussions, CEQ will address Extreme Heat, which has high costs in human life and health as well as in infrastructure malfunction and security.

Background: In CEQ's report in 2019, "Preparing Baltimore County for Resilience to Climate Changes," we recommended that "steps... should be taken as soon as possible in order to anticipate and respond to the complex challenges posed by ongoing and projected climate changes that will affect the health and safety of the residents of our County", improving preparedness, adaptation and resilience.

Climate resilience is that ability to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to hazardous events, trends, or disturbances related to climate.

FEMA defines extreme heat as "a long period (2 to 3 days) of high heat and humidity with temperatures above 90 degrees," or "a prolonged period of excessively hot weather, with temperatures above the average high."

A brief review of some on-line resources on resilience to extreme heat found that the CDC Climate and Health website observes that "extreme heat events are becoming more frequent and intense (across the nation). Deaths result from heat stroke and related conditions, but also from..." cardiac, respiratory, and cerebrovascular disease.

Nearby suburban and rural areas of Montgomery County in June of this year experienced 4 consecutive days of temperatures over 100 degrees. Baltimore in 2024 has had 45 days of 90-plus degrees so far.

A study published in Journal of the American Medical Association (Howard JT et al., 2024) found increasing trends of heat-related deaths across the country during 1999-2023

FEMA found that heat waves cause the highest number of deaths classified as Weather Fatalities, exceeding the four next most fatal weather hazards combined (including floods and hurricanes). They used national data from the National Weather Service in 2022.

Heat-related deaths are occurring in Maryland. CEQ's review of resilience will focus on community-dwelling people, not on occupational settings in particular.

The rising human and financial costs of hot weather disasters include not only effects on individual people's risks of worsening disease status and death rates, but also the accompanying increased loads on emergency management organizations and medical facilities including hospitals.

The effects of extreme heat include challenges to maintaining the ELECTRICAL GRID especially with increased reliance on air conditioning for schools, businesses, and people who can access air conditioning and feel they can afford to increase their electric bills (but not all do).

The effects of extreme heat also include damage to infrastructure such as transportation (roads), water treatment, food safety, agriculture, education, and other aspects such as law enforcement and security.

We as a community, a county, a nation are beginning to grasp the importance of increasing our resilience to extreme weather.

This evening we welcome **David Bycoffe, Chief of Baltimore County's Office on Homeland Security and Emergency Management**, appointed by the Governor in 2021, who will speak on current efforts to upgrade the distribution and accessibility of cooling centers.

Mr. Bycoffe's background includes 30 years as Director of Emergency Management for the Baltimore County Fire Department and 6 years as Battalion Chief. In 2023 he received a Master's degree in Emergency Management from University of Maryland Global Campus; the online description of that program includes climate adaptation.

The County's Office on Homeland Security and Emergency Management works on lessening the impact of natural or man-made emergencies and disasters through mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. They coordinate the activities of the County's Emergency Operations Center, which itself includes representatives of local government, nonprofit and private sector agencies. The Emergency Operations Plan and the Hazard Mitigation Plan are found here: <https://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/departments/emergency-management/emergency-plans>

Presentation by David Bycoffe:

All of our weather events are getting more severe. The Dept of Emergency Management is within the Fire Dept but offers opportunities with stakeholders across the enterprise.

We start by reviewing climate change data and risks associated with increasing and extreme heat; MDH extreme heat definitions (similar to those of FEMA); then we review cooling center information, public information sources, and weather terminology

The average temperature in the U.S. has increased by about 2 degrees F in the last 50 years; global average temperatures is anticipated to increase by 2.5 to 11.5 degrees F by the end of this century depending on how we manage carbon emissions. Since 1880, global mean sea level has increased 8-9 inches. From 1993-2023 global mean sea level has increased 4 inches – half of the 125-yr total occurring in the last 30 years.

Urban heat intensity and heat related illnesses are shown on a map of urban heat intensity for Baltimore County; Baltimore City is worse but its patterns are not shown on the County's map. These patterns are influenced by impermeable surfaces, tree cover and population density. More information is being developed about how we diagnose or calculate heat, using indices such as wet-bulb temperature which indicates how heat feels outside the shade, rather than just using heat index. We can now calculate more accurately. A second map shows heat illness hotspots from 2018-2024 based on reports by first responders; there is clearly more impact inside the URDL and these patterns line up with patterns on the urban heat intensity map. This does not take into account increases in respiratory, cardiopulmonary illnesses etc. Although we don't differentiate between someone in their home and someone working outside the home, there is still a clear relationship.

Question: Water on the East Side of the county doesn't moderate the heat intensity effect?
Answer: No, because there is more industry and congestion and impervious cover and population density there.

The ICF Climate Center calculated the number of days per year that 48-hr average temperature exceeded 86 degrees F (30 degrees C). The increase in days will not be the same throughout the county. This speaks to the issue of equity.

By 2050 Owings Mills will experience 6 days of heat waves that strain transformers, 6 days more than in 2000.

Towson will see 7 days, a 5-day increase since 2000.

Halethorpe will see 12 days, 11 more than at the turn of the 21st century.

Dundalk will see 16 days, 12 more than at the turn of the century.

Strain on electrical grid and rolling power outages are already an issue in Maryland; we see more extreme impact in places like Texas.

Question: Does this take into account the lower tree cover in impacted areas?

Yes, it does show that impact – there is much less tree cover inside the URDL, which is why the county is trying to increase tree cover.

We are starting to map canopy, hoping to increase awareness to identify where there is a need. Using drones and planes we can identify these things clearly.

Another element of heat risk is that a 2-year-old tree planted to replace mature trees cut down for development cannot provide the same shade and temperature benefits when it replaces a 50-year-old tree.

Climate risks:

We are seeing increasing frequency of drought, severe storms, infectious diseases (migrating from lower latitudes), flooding (also an impact of increasing severe heat and loss of natural ecosystem amenities as well as increasing development and loss of tree canopy), increasing migration, political instability, violence (including domestic violence – not seen in data from Baltimore County yet but there are some DOJ data that do show correlation).

Maryland Department of Health definition of Extreme Heat Event: a weather condition with excessive heat and/or humidity with potential to cause heat-related illnesses. It is defined as a day or series of days when:

- National Weather Service (NWS) has issued a heat advisory or excessive heat warning
- Weather or environmental conditions are such that a high incidence of heat related illnesses can reasonably be expected
- At-risk populations have disproportionately higher risk

Heat advisory: is issued within 12 hours before extremely dangerous heat conditions. Maximum heat index is expected to be 100 degrees F or more for at least two days with nighttime temperature not falling below 75 degrees F. NWS issues a heat advisory when the ambient temperature is expected to rise above 100° and heat index is expected to reach 105-110 degrees F. When determining the first Heat Advisory for the summer these thresholds may be lower.

Excessive heat warning: >105 degrees F or higher for at least two days with nighttime air temperature not falling below 75 degrees F. NWS issues an Excessive Heat Warning when the heat index is expected to exceed 110 degrees F or conditions are such as to pose risk to life and property.

Heat advisories also recommend that community members reduce activities that put more strain on electricity demand.

Question: Who can issue a heat index warning?

Answer: The only organization is National Weather Service (NWS). MDH is talking about what thresholds are for implementing different mitigation measures. When there is a severe event we have a state call from NWS.

The county can take action to protect constituents but cannot declare specific categories of weather warning which is done by NWS.

These numbers are static even if weather conditions differ around the country. Need to follow up on that.

Question: What about heat conditions outside the URDL? It may be included in some of those heat events although less often. Sometimes NWS issues alerts covering the entire county, sometimes it is more local. Bowley's Quarters and Edgemere may get some warnings (coastal flood advisory) that don't affect other places.

Hazard Mitigation Planning

Hazard mitigation planning reduces loss of life and property by minimizing the impact of disasters. The County is required to produce a plan every 5 years under the terms of federal grant funding.

We work with a vendor to produce a plan of about 200 pages. This helps identify natural disaster risks and vulnerabilities that are common in our area. It also assists in developing long-term strategies for protecting people and property from similar events.

We are starting to use heat and drought hazards in our planning which will allow use of federal dollars to implement plans.

Flood mitigation assistance (FMA)

- Reduce or eliminate nuisance flooding
- Reduce the risk to building within the National Flood Insurance Program
- Encourages improvements to existing structures
- Can be used to buy homes in affected areas

Opportunities

Building resilient infrastructure and communities (BRIC)
Encourages public/private partnerships
Innovation to develop e.g. flood mitigation projects

Equity considerations are important in underrepresented communities

Cooling Center Information

If you are looking for access to water and bathrooms in a cool environment, residents are encouraged to use public places as havens from the heat such as churches, community centers, libraries, malls, museums, restaurants, and senior centers.

There are often existing services in these locations. Outside of congested urban locations you don't see a lot of cooling centers.

<https://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/departments/health/hot-weather>

There is also a Baltimore County Alert QR code

Stay informed when disasters are occurring

Sign up and receive important notifications via text message. Visit the web site to register.

Social media:

Facebook: Baltimore County Emergency Management

Twitter: @BaltCoEmergency

We are trying to aggregate public messaging across agencies

Understand what alerts mean

Advisory – the weather conditions are likely to occur. Typically used in less severe weather like frost or winds.

Watch – a specific weather condition is possible. Typically spans over a large geographical area for long periods of time. Watch: the ingredients exist in the environment to cause a weather event.

Warning – the weather conditions are occurring or imminent. They span over much smaller areas for smaller, definite periods of time.

Warning: the event has been witnessed

The last of these indicates you should take action.

Contact information:

David Bycoffe, dbycoffe@baltimorecountymd.gov, 410-887-5996

<https://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/departments/emergency-management>

Question: who decides how heat alerts affect county business and county workers?

Answer: Decisions about whether normal county business continues during alert periods are made at the highest agency levels. In heat events workers are given information about taking breaks, getting water, etc. We may ask property management teams to cut grass in the morning instead of the afternoon. But we are still paving roads and providing public safety. For cold weather we have a matrix of weather conditions used in deciding whether to close government, offer delayed opening or liberal leave, etc.

Coastal flooding: if you have an imminent storm surge coming. what do you do?

Answer: This is a huge challenge. Primarily we provide messaging in a way that we hope is effective in translating the real risk. The challenge with the really low-lying areas is these folks are life-long residents in many cases and are very reluctant to evacuate. We can

recommend evacuation and provide opportunities to take shelter. We can tell them we may not be able to protect that community if we can't get there safely. Luckily many of those homes in places like Bowley's Quarters have been rebuilt and have been raised above flood levels. Propane and fuel tanks also have to be elevated. Risk in those communities is such that as climate change continues, the same storm will no longer have the same impact and people who have survived previous events may not understand the change in risk. After Katrina the assumption was that risk was related to poverty, then to race, but one of the other close correlations was having survived Hurricane Irma because after surviving one hurricane, people assume they can survive the next one. As the environment changes, we have to make sure we help people to understand how their risk level is changing. It's all about education and outreach.

People also will refuse to leave pets behind. Most shelters are pet-friendly though we try not to take snakes. We message for people to bring their pets with them to the shelter. Emergency management personnel are well-versed in how to handle pets.

Question/comment: The County just passed a law about cruelty to animals. You may get increased numbers of calls about this.

Last question: have you reviewed the county's resiliency plan with emergency access routes for flood events?

Answer: We have read through it and we will be able to take a lot of those things and relate them to our hazard mitigation plan.

4. Update of CEQ Road Salt report - Kathy Martin, Linda Davis, Brian Fath
- **We need each section to have a 1-2 sentence summary of the main point or points of that section**, which will be used to introduce the section.
 - Executive Summary has been drafted; thank you Kathy Martin.

Brian Fath has started to insert text boxes below each section for these summary sentences to be added.

Otherwise, the report is mostly done. If a comment is directed to you, please do your best to resolve it. The latest edited version has been sent to Linda and Cathy and Carol and then can be shared with the rest of the Commission.

Question: Who are the targeted recipients?

Answer: Usually the Council and the County Executive; and by tradition we send it to the DEPS executive and a courtesy copy to speakers who helped us with presentations.

5. Update on Weed Ordinance (County Code 13-7-401) - Workgroup members Brian Fath, Lois Jacobs, Steve Malan, Carol Newill

Please read this brief summary, and contact Carol after tonight's meeting with your thoughts:

- Report has been posted on CEQ webpage.
- Councilmember Marks plans to introduce legislation to add exception for low-impact landscaping (which was defined in the State law).

- PAI Director Gutwald and Adam Whitlock reviewed a set of photos of managed, Low-Impact Landscaping which was suggested to be used by PAI inspectors to guide fair and consistent evaluation of complaints. The photos were annotated with “Cues to Care” which could be used to indicate that the property is not merely neglected but instead is low-impact landscaping: boundaries (e.g. mowed or mulched); pathways: signage; certifications.
- PAI leadership have indicated that if the Weed Ordinance does add an exception for Low-Impact Landscaping then a different set of photos or diagrams would be needed and the change might be made to apply to a limited array of properties such as large properties. While Low-Impact Landscaping (as defined by the State law) does not restrict the definition to native plants exclusively, members of citizen volunteer environmental advocacy organizations who are especially interested in native plants are developing alternative materials to submit for consideration.

Comment: make sure noxious weeds are not among the plants permitted

6. Update on Oregon Ridge Park - Carol Newill

No information – Carol is not here to report. There was the mowing incident in June which did lead to some changes in policy. (see the [Baltimore Banner article](#))

7. Update on Forest Conservation Manual and Trees - Brian Lindley

The Manual has not been finalized but a version has been placed on the web site and it includes recommendations that were made regarding longer periods of maintenance. There is an extension on finalizing it until sometime next year. The County has some more stringent requirements than the state. We heard about some of the current practices in a presentation in March 2024 – refer back to those minutes for details.

DEPS has a non-regulatory side where they have different maintenance standards. Forest Conservation has its own regulations but DEPS Forest Management will now take over some of those plantings to get a more successful outcome.

Question: Any update on deer hunting?

Answer: Oregon Ridge, Cromwell Valley and Marshy Point are the three locations where we do hunts. We are doubling up on Oregon Ridge because the herd moves through a various times, and if you don't do multiple surveys you don't have a good population estimate and can't come up with the right number to cull from the herd. Cromwell Valley is more consistent and Marshy Point is smaller and has fewer deer.

The Oregon Ridge survey is usually around November and the hunt is around February-March. The hunting contract is through USDA and they have to follow Maryland's laws for hunting – this is more restrictive than it used to be.

Question: Do you keep deer collision data?

Answer: SHA used to, and so do insurance companies. Statistics are highly linked to major highways. Salt also reduces fear of humans.

Question: When is the next tree giveaway?

Answer: This is always in spring because people prefer getting trees then even though

survival is better with fall planting. This year we more than doubled the number of trees given away, ~1300 instead of 600.

Question about our reports: Will they stay online?

Answer: For a while there was a ruling that every two years you had to take reports down, but those reports will now stay accessible on the public website.

Suggestion: We could also append all the minutes of the year to the annual reports. The last annual report posted is from 2022.

8. Minutes of 5/2024 meeting

Brian took some notes and accidentally left them in Austria – he will pick them up in a couple of weeks and write them up after that.

Question: who is keeping track of PFAS?

Mike Ruby says the county is deferring to the state despite the fact [that two elementary schools outside the URDL](#) now have contaminated water fountains because groundwater is contaminated. This is becoming an issue of significant concern. Perhaps CEQ should be looking into this issue.

9. Adjourn

Next CEQ meetings in 2024: 10/23, 12/4.

Addendum: CEQ Greeters Rota for 2024

1/24 Carol Newill

2/28 Valerie Androutsopoulos

3/27 Mahnaz Assadi

4/24 Linda Davis

5/22 Lynda Eisenberg

9/25 Brian Fath

10/23 Steve Malan

12/4 Andy Miller