

## **Baltimore County Advisory Commission on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Minutes for Meeting of October 23, 2024**

**Attendance:** Carol Newill, Linda Davis, Stephen Malan, Lois Jacobs, Brian Lindley, Dustin Shearer, Andy Miller, Gregory Strella, Della Leister, Mike Ruby

Excused: Karen Wynn

7 pm **Welcome.** Thank you to Brian Lindley for unlocking the building's door for CEQ at 6:45 pm, and to Steve for serving as Greeter tonight. Andy will be the Greeter on December 4. Brian Bernstein has agreed to take over the responsibility of organizing the Greeters program for 2025; thank you, Brian!

Appreciation of Valerie Androutsopoulos' many contributions to CEQ during her 11 years as Commissioner. Her insight into recycling, including large-scale commercial recycling, and the complexities of practical issues in the context of many concerns in the area of environmental quality has been especially helpful.

7:10 pm **Speaker:**

**Della Leister, RN, Acting Health Officer and Acting Director of the Baltimore County Department of Health,** will speak on the Health Department's plans including public messaging - a short list of Hot Weather Tips, as well as a list of locations to seek "water and bathrooms in a cool environment." She will update us on the department's plans for further management of heat emergencies. Ms. Leister has been employed by the Health Department for well over 25 years, and has been instrumental in a variety of emergency response planning activities within the Department. (Dr. Lucy Wilson was confirmed as new Director by County Council on Monday night.)

Agenda –

Impact of climate change on human health

Impact of heat

Data from last summer

Responding to heat

Available resources

Climate impacts many areas, not just heat – asthma, respiratory allergies, viruses, insects, flooding and other impacts. We will focus tonight on heat impacts.

You have heard about heat warnings. "Heat index" references how hot it feels. A heat index of 90 or above is considered hazardous. Heat stroke is the most serious consequence – body temperature of 106 F or higher and can cause permanent impairment or fatality. Heat exhaustion – headache, nausea, weakness. Heat syncope (heat-induced fainting or dizziness); heat cramps, muscle pain.

Some people are more adversely impacted than others. This is particularly true for older adults, often on medications that change heat regulation systems and have other medical problems. Other vulnerable groups include those in low-income communities who don't have resources or cooling opportunities; children with different physiology; communities of color; people with chronic conditions; and people who work outdoors (MD recently passed a new rule in the aftermath of the death of a city DPW worker). There are new rules on shade, how much water people should drink, rest breaks, temperatures at which special measures have to be provided, monitoring of employees for heat illness, training of staff; and a heat plan for employees. Baltimore County has a draft heat plan.

In the Baltimore County Health Department a request is usually put in to EMS in June for information on any calls related to heat. We get EMS reports from EMR system of their runs with time and date. We have a plan in place to check in case of reported or anticipated high heat. From June to August there were 219 reports, the highest number was on June 22 (101 degrees maximum temperature). Other days showed temperatures ranging from \_\_\_ to \_\_\_. There are heat related deaths in MD in the summer; the State Medical Examiner classifies both hypothermia and hyperthermia by specific criteria although these are not always identified as a direct cause of mortality. Some people with significant heat issues also have issues with alcohol and drugs. Heat-related illness frequencies are broken down by gender and age group. 55% were identified as priority level 3. Most calls are not "emergent" but there are some priority 1 and priority 2 transports. A small percent are not coded. Fortunately not as many priority 1 calls are related to heat and those often have other contributing health issues. Most common was heat exhaustion. Over 1/3 are at private residences; 8% had alcohol or substance abuse as a factor.

To build resilience you need your population to be informed. The forecast may be ignored, but people need to pay attention to anticipated heat index; safety tips; hydration; most of all stay informed and have a buddy system – check on neighbors and others. Caseloads in the health department include a lot of vulnerable clients and there is a protocol for calling them to check in.

The next thing is stay hydrated. People think they drink enough water; but drink even if you're not thirsty; limit sugary and alcoholic drinks and caffeinated drinks.

Third – wear appropriate lightweight, loose clothing; stay indoors in air conditioning where possible. In homes without air conditioning try to avoid turning on the oven.

Don't leave people or pets in cars, wear hats, avoid hot and heavy meals, wear sunscreen.

Use window reflectors, add insulation to keep heat out, have a whole-house fan but be aware they don't cool your body temperature.

If you are eligible, sign up for an energy assistance program. You have to apply and be eligible but don't wait until it's hot before signing up.

Cooling centers – Historically we have encouraged people to go to a cool spot. In Baltimore County we are fortunate because we have malls, faith-based institutions, libraries; libraries are often not open on Sundays but this past year they did open on a Sunday at the request of the health department. Senior centers and other locations are available. Our experience with

cooling centers is we make them available but often no one comes. In order to be opened these have to be staffed. When you have a significant heat event at the beginning of summer and people have not yet built up tolerance, people are more likely to make use of cooling centers. We open cooling centers especially when we have a combination of heat and power outage. We also worry about people who depend on power availability to go to a place that will have power restored more quickly after outages caused by storms. We promote existing sites but when individuals cannot get to them we talk about how to get people to them.

A couple of tools are really interesting. The CDC has a recent development: you can plug in your zip code, and it will give you the heat risk for that day. We used this a lot in summer 2024. The National Weather Service also has a heat risk forecast that goes 4 days ahead and has a key to tell you what the colors mean.

In summary – getting your community to be resilient involves education informing people, making sure you watch out for the most vulnerable groups.

Q: what about cold?

A: The response to cold is really for unsheltered individuals. (True for heat as well). Monitor outdoor temperatures and wind chills and open shelters for cold weather protection. Heat worries in summer are more for people who live alone and don't have a support system and may be elderly and have health issues.

Q: Are the Florida/Arizona plans more aggressive than we need to be?

A: can't speak as an expert about other states. Ours is probably where it needs to be. There are other communities that have acclimated to that heat. But when this is combined with a storm, high humidity, etc., that exacerbates the problem.

We also look at air quality in general because all factors affect public health.

Q (Carol Newill): The Montgomery County Planning Department put on a program about resiliency to climate change. They emphasized the actions of "block" and "reflect" heat – This is based on the idea of building into your environment some strategies that help protect you, like saving energy with automated turning off of lights when nobody is moving in the room. Anything that blocks or reflect sunlight (e.g. trees, reflective surfaces, shades, awnings) will help decrease the impact of increased sunshine and heat.

A: Office buildings may have highly variable temperatures depending on what is happening in each room.

Our education at the Heath Department is mostly targeted at senior citizens. But kids can also be at risk.

Q: Is fire or police response ever limited by high temperature?

A: I haven't ever seen that happen.

Q: Does the education system coordinate with the health department when they close schools

due to heat?

A: That doesn't happen in Baltimore County because schools have A/C, but we do work with schools in situations like air quality warnings (such as Canadian wildfires in past years).

A recommendation by the Baltimore County Board of Education about 10 years ago was to install A/C in schools, but recommendations don't necessarily tell you how to make your building inherently cooler or to provide shade on playgrounds or school bus waiting lines. It is true that new buildings need to be LEED certified, but many buildings are older. There may be some inexpensive ways to make buildings cooler. Most schools have large turf areas that do not have trees. And artificial turf gets way hotter than natural surfaces.

Q. Do we track the number of heat alert days per year? Can we see it increasing?

A. We don't track it, but we can go back and look at those data.

One thing we do monitor is cold days. That has a significant impact on some of our populations as mentioned earlier.

The forestry team for the County does do reforestation on school grounds. There are approaches for increasing tree canopy on school properties. We want to make sure some of the hotter surfaces are being shaded more effectively. Schools do have setbacks for open areas that should not have trees e.g. affecting visibility on athletic fields.

Bus stops – This is an interesting extension of the idea of shade and cooling infrastructure. You can also shade crossing guard locations and also public locations with pedestrian walkways that could be designated as shade corridors where tree planting should be prioritized.

Q: How do you coordinate with the Office of Sustainability, DEPS, other agencies?

A: Things like parking lots are historically handled by other agencies. We do meet regularly with EPS on other topics that are related to health, maybe not so much on shade. We do have parking lots with bus shelters but covering them is a challenge. (Some do have solar panels though.)

BC Stat did an in-depth heat analysis based on geography and presence/absence of tree canopy. So that is an available resource that can be used for planning purposes. The County is looking at heat and what resources we need to bring to the table to deal with the resilience issue. Often natural resources play an important role.

Q: Are people able to get to senior centers or cooling centers if they don't have cars? Are facilities located in the same places with the biggest heat challenges? How do we get people to them? How do we get people to want to use them?

A: Those are not easy answers and those issues are the subject of continuing discussion.

Q: Is monitoring of heat calls limited to a 90-day period?

A: We go from Memorial Day to Labor Day, but we do need to capture weather outside that.

Q: What is the process of opening libraries on Sunday in summer?

A: There are discussions of disaster preparedness and sustained heat is part of those discussions. It didn't take an executive order to open libraries during heat waves; it was on a recommendation from the Health Department which the libraries were willing to implement because they had already prepared for this kind of situation during non-emergency periods. Department of Aging is a critical part of those conversations too. They also have a referral line for people in distress to call.

Q: What would you ask for if you could wish for anything on this issue?

A: There are a lot of interventions that may be needed. The most difficult issue is people not being connected to other people. Emergency Management can use things like Amber Alerts for emergencies; this could be considered for other purposes, but people have to sign up for those alerts. There was infrastructure built for a reverse 911 system, but many people no longer have a land line. Residents have to participate in a notification system that knows their location. We can use social media posts but there are 15% who don't want anyone to interact with them. Libraries are one of our best resources.

7:50 pm **Final call for input to the Road Salt Report.** Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the report. Brian Fath is incorporating final changes.

To suggest any further changes, please do so this week by using the "suggesting" mode (found in the upper right-hand corner). The default is editing, but the drop down can be changed to suggesting. Thank you.

8:00 pm **Update on CEQ Workgroup on Baltimore County Weed Ordinance** (County Code 13-7-401) Interested members of the environmental volunteer community are developing a more explicit description of that is meant by "low- impact landscaping", consistent with the definitions in the MD State law and reflecting the ordinances that have been passed already in multiple jurisdictions. They plan to present this version to Councilmembers Marks and Ertel, as well as to PAI leadership, for feedback.

The native plant community is upset that no change has yet been proposed to the weed ordinance. David Marks and other council members received CEQ's recommendations in the spring. But apparently PAI objected to sample photos that were included in our report and wanted clearer objective criteria. There seems to be some confusion about what is being requested, and of course the inspectors need to know.

The question is whether there are clear and simple criteria that are easily implemented by regulators. This needs to be resolved. There are probably other places that have a rule we could easily implement here.

8:10 pm **Update on Oregon Ridge Park.** The Trails Master Plan was presented at a public meeting at the Park Lodge on 10/19. Frustrations were voiced by attendees about prioritizing a new, 1.6 mile pave loop trail, said to be for disabled visitors but also for runners, over the correction of the environmental degradation that has occurred by Baisman Run stream or even

even over the creation or renovation of the multiple walking trails that were the primary request of the public at previous sessions. The speaker said the Trails Master Plan has a 30-year timeframe, which was met with dismay as the trails were to be the primary, first area to be addressed. Questions were raised about whether foresters and ecologists from DEPS were involved in the planning, about preservation of trees, as well as about why only one Environmental Manager will be hired to work on several large parks rather than on this one large, complex nature park. Carol asked the Rec & Parks Director to schedule another public meeting to follow up on these concerns.

8:20 pm **Minutes of 9/25/24** - Correct and approve.

8:25 pm Next meeting 12/4: We continue our series on Baltimore County's resilience to the risks imposed by increasingly frequent and severe episodes of extreme heat. **Baltimore Social-Environmental Collaborative (BSEC) leaders will speak on the environmental challenge of extreme heat in our region.** "The BSEC's mission is to create a truly community-centered urban climate observatory—based not just on theory but in real neighborhoods—to contribute to climate action plans that make environmental justice a priority." While the collaborative is based at Johns Hopkins University, faculty from additional universities are participating including Dr. Andy Miller.

**Please suggest other speakers**, from within Baltimore County leadership, or other counties or municipalities that are developing strategies and plans, or others.

**Need: A volunteer to draft a report** summarizing what we have heard in this series, with recommendations.

Mention regional water governance for next meeting

**Next CEQ meetings:** 12/4/24, 1/22/25, 2/26, 3/26, 4/23, 5/28, 6/25, then summer break.

Adjourned 8:53 pm