

August 27, 2024

The Hart-Miller Island Community Benefit Steering Committee – HMI@Baltimorecountymd.gov
Mr. Paul Brylske – Brylske@kennedykrieger.org
Councilman David Marks - Council5@Baltimorecountymd.gov
Councilman Todd Crandell – Council7@Baltimorecountymd.gov

RE: Hart-Miller Island Community Benefit Steering Committee Meeting on August 22, 2024

I would like to make a few comments regarding the meeting of the HMI CBA meeting on August 22, 2024. I was troubled by the format and content for the following reasons –

1. Format was geared to interested (but non-Community) parties in telling how they were going to use HMI funds –
 - a. Mr. David Riter, Baltimore County Department of Environment and Sustainability, advised that they hoped to use a portion of the funds to cover the cost of dredging boat channels in surrounding creeks for the placement of “beneficial dredge” on HMI as approved in HB343. It seemed apparent that Mr. Ortt, representing DNR, was not aware of Baltimore County’s intent and that it would have an impact on their plans for HMI as DNR would have to issue the permits. Baltimore County plans should be made in collaboration with and with the approval of DNR. The perception could be that Baltimore County is diverting funds meant for the benefit of HMI to cover costs that should already be provided for elsewhere in the County budget and that this use was established without knowledge and advice of the Steering Committee.
 - b. Tradepoint Atlantic presentation reiterated the same facts presented at the initial meeting.
2. There was no discussion given to public comments submitted via the website, they were simply read to the group –
 - a. Baltimore Bird Club and one other Organization’s positions and comments were not shared publicly, but only briefly mentioned as being submitted and that they would be passed on to the committee with no discussion of content.
 - b. Most of the time was spent on the presentations in 1 above – not the public or the Steering Committee.
 - c. Very little time was given for public comments at the end of the presentation and there were no answers or discussion regarding the comments.
3. The meeting was held via WebEx on 8/22/24. As of today, 8/29/24, the meeting is not posted on the County You Tube station and there is no reference to the meeting on the “Past Events” page of the HMI CBA Steering Committee webpage. Some other thoughts about the meeting:
 - a. We were promised that the presentation materials would be available after the meeting on the Webpage – they are not there.
 - b. It would be helpful to have a list of attendees. It is not possible to see who else was in the WebEx meeting and this information would be useful to other attendees and I assume the Oversight Committee as well.

- c. It would be useful and transparent if all the comments submitted were open to the public and available to see in real time (e.g. posted on the Webpage.)

The process feels extremely rushed and the public is simply being given “lip service” in the County’s attempt to push this agreement through by year end. The Legislation was signed by the Governor on May 16, 2024. Why was it only August 1, 2024, before the Steering Committee was selected? Two months of valuable planning time was lost in the interim. What was the reason for the delay? Such an important decision seems to warrant careful planning and input, not a push to be completed in six weeks’ time. Mr. Brylske mentioned at the meeting that it is also extremely difficult to draft the Community Benefit Agreement without any idea of the funds provided by such an agreement – a fact that most can agree is true. It may be months before that amount can be quantified.

The Baltimore County Master Plan 2030 (the Plan) was adopted by the County Council on January 16, 2024. It is of note that “*Harmony with Nature*” is listed as the second guiding principle of the Plan. The Plan also sets forth goals, objectives, policies, and programs to address specific issues related to a particular community and references adopted community plans. One of these community plans is the “**Lower Back River Neck Community Action Plan.**” While this plan was adopted in May 2010, many of the principles included are very similar to the issues of today. There is a section of the document that deals with Hart-Miller Island (Pages 26 – 28.) I suggest that everyone involved, most notably the “stakeholders” read this plan.

<https://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/files/Documents/Planning/communityplans/lbrncommunityactionplan.pdf>

Many of these facts and imperatives were included in the Baltimore Bird Club’s comment paper that was submitted to the Committee (remarkably without reference to this document.) The Community Action Plan deals with the restoration of HMI to include mudflats, shallow wetlands and open water to protect nesting island habitat. It discusses the fact that HMI is one of Maryland’s unique bird habitats. It outlines the social benefits provided by the HMI State Park. Finally, describing it as “*A Nature Showcase and Treasure*” and concludes – “*The retention of these areas in their most natural state would provide people throughout the country the opportunity to see the many diversities and beauties of nature and to provide areas of study and education that are of national significance. Proper preservation of these areas would insure the perpetuation of numerous species for future generations.*”

The key to this plan is contingent upon funding to implement it. If TPA passes all the environmental and permitting tests allowing the placement of dredged material at HMI, funds received as determined by HB 343 should first go to the restoration and maintenance of the Island as it was intended. Only after that restoration is completed should funding be utilized for other benefits. In other words, **restoration is the first priority.**

I am hoping that this meeting was simply a step in the process and that future meetings will include more committee discussion and public interaction. Considering that there are only two future meetings scheduled, I can only request that they be more inclusive and directed to their stated intent of leading open discussions with core members and other stakeholders.

Thank you for your consideration and I would welcome and appreciate any feedback that can be provided.

Kathy Kahler Lambrow
1857 Cape May Road
Essex, MD 21221
410-733-5837