

Baltimore County Advisory Commission on Environmental Quality
Minutes for 2/28/24

Attendance: Brian Bernstein, Linda Davis, Brian Fath, Stephen Malan, Andy Miller, Carol Newill, Chris Overcash, Dustin Shearer, Brian Lindley, Joel Moore (Towson University Professor), Kathy Reiner Martin (past Chair of CEQ, by phone), Sunny Cannington (Towson University student)

7 pm Welcome.

- Our new procedure for gaining access to this building
- Baltimore County Libraries at Towson and at Cockeysville

Discussion covered various options including hybrid or virtual meetings. One suggestion was the Cockeysville library but several members prefer to stay here even with the inconvenience at the door. We will stay here at least for the next meeting.

7:10 pm Update on the revision of the CEQ Road Salt report of 2009. Linda Davis

Reports on various subsections in process were discussed verbally and several drafts either have been sent to Linda or will be sent shortly. We have the table of who has volunteered to work on which subsections.

Joel Moore pointed out that the reservoir water-quality data have not been updated since 2017 and his graduate student completed a thesis summarizing and analyzing these trends. Linda says someone from the city DPW will make contact with Joel and with Dustin who is also seeking data. Joel has monthly field samples from Loch Raven and Prettyboy from Nov. 2020 through April 2023 with a few gaps.

Linda will collate but won't do the culling of information. She will assemble a complete draft and we will have a couple of iterations of editing.

Kathy Martin took on five sections of the report. Those were environmental impacts – other impacts to private property (not much change); she made notes about some additional and interesting information that may not wind up in the document but should be preserved somewhere – issues like (for example) corroding impacts on metal and relationship to undercoating. She was also focusing on infrastructure; there wasn't a lot of new information but there are updated links to online sources. NPDES – is there an update to the 2009 report? Latest report is 2022 on DEPS web site. She sent 2-3 pages of excerpts from the newest report to match those in the previous report about deicing and property management. Each year has a different amount of snow so it's difficult to draw conclusions from annual reports by themselves except where they have time trends graphed. Last section was public education and outreach in other jurisdictions. This is a behavioral change that we need to address – everyone has always wanted to get out on the road as soon as possible after it snows. She put together an outline about what agencies should be taking the lead on, communications and PSAs, reaching out to the media, spreading word to community groups including PTAs, senior centers, community associations. What do we know about what is happening in other jurisdictions? Linda mentioned examples from the Adirondacks. Kathy mentioned the Izaak Walton League report; they have materials designed for different audiences and

their recommendations about communication. We can see what DPW is doing in the training and practice part, but other inputs are needed for general education. Baltimore County policy on sidewalks says they need to be shoveled but doesn't mention salt; we need to keep an eye on how we communicate about that issue. There is also a group called State Line and one called Route 50 – they collate actions and share practices from state and local governments and Kathy emailed the link to Linda (and Carol?). She gets email alerts based on topics she identifies as being of interest. Joel's database includes some relevant materials not only on the science but also on education and outreach efforts as well as popular web sites that can be used.

Steve Malan – sections on soil, plants and animals. About ¼ of references were still valid so it was a challenge. He was particularly interested in soil as our Ag representative. Wanted to know how beneficial bacteria and fungi respond to this but there has been no widespread salt application to see how flora and fauna are affected. He extrapolated some of what he did find. Some of the fertilizers are “very salt like”. Only 2% of plants are halophytes and it's not necessarily the case that invasive plants will take advantage of higher salt levels. Phragmites and Typha are moving in in high-salt areas and actually remove salt; most noxious plants cannot handle salt. So you wind up with complete loss of any plant assemblage rather than making a pathway for invasive plants.

Animals – he broke them down as aquatic and terrestrial, vertebrates and invertebrates etc. Some of the most significant effects were not only physiological but also behavioral – deer fight or flight sense is altered with high salt concentrations, same for birds. Most fish studies use blue minnows and bluegill. Couldn't find anything with trout. Anything on amphibians? They are particularly sensitive. Growth rates, mating behavior and recruitment are changing. Brian did some research on fish species. He talked with people in Trout Unlimited, DNR, Ray Morgan, and others. A lot of these led to a small number of specific references. What he found was that for trout in particular there was a general reduction in length and weight and breathing and osmoregulation problems above certain concentrations. Ray Morgan's paper suggested declines and losses but also different responses among species. Trout are particularly relevant to the county. Brook trout are less tolerant to salt than brown trout. Observations from coastal habitats with intrusion of brackish and salt water gives key information about the nature of these impacts.

Chris Overcash asked whether road salt could affect concentrations in tidewater; Joel pointed out that the salt concentrations are very high in urban streams but not so much in the bigger rivers. Joel pointed out that the least tolerant benthic macroinvertebrate (stoneflies, mayflies, caddis flies) show the biggest impact from increased

Mahnaz is working on DEI issues; she is out of town. Dustin and Valerie are both working on deicing and application best practices. Linda asked Tony Russell for best practices from the conference he mentioned he was going to in Kansas City. There is a request from DPW about what plants they should put in highway medians that are more salt-tolerant. Carol has put that request out to native plant groups.

We have information on groundwater and well salt/chloride concentrations; impacts on corrosivity and the frequency with which people have to replace hot water heaters is cited in the Maryland Geological Survey 2019 report. Linda suggested that Kathy

include both household infrastructure as well as public works infrastructure in the infrastructure report. The County had a reimbursement program for people with wells containing excess salt but that is no longer an active program. Nobody signed up for road salt practices in the state of Maryland but we do have a lot of information from Tony Russell's presentation. Lois Jacobs signed up for effects on plants but she is not here tonight.

Chris Overcash reported that there is a bill in the Maryland legislature that will require municipalities and governments to track their road salt use on highways. Not sure who proposed it or whether it will pass. After our 2009 road salt report the county council did tell the administration it needed to create a task force, but that never happened and perhaps that can be an outcome of our report.

Lynda Eisenberg has taken on the section on road salt practices and policies at the state level.

Recommendations: can each of us come up with recommendations.

Linda will collate and pass back to all of us for review.

7:40 pm Update on Weed Ordinance (County Code 13-7-401) - Workgroup members Brian Fath, Lois Jacobs, Steve Malan, Carol Newill.

- As requested by PAI Director Gutwald, a set of photos of managed, low-impact landscaping was developed with the help of Kirsten Hoffman from Green Towson Alliance and people associated with their native plant contest; Carol and her husband contributed photos as well and these were passed on to David Marks and Director Gutwald, and Carol suggests these photos be added to the CEQ report on the weed ordinance. Several people said they would like to see the photos and Carol will circulate those.
- Carol talked with David Marks and he will probably propose legislation at the next council meeting. Mahnaz and Chris and Linda will be talking with Wade Kach next week. Steve said he would like to join that meeting. Kach might even be interested in cosponsoring.
- Lynda Eisenberg was going to contact Julian Jones but hasn't gotten through to him yet.
- Lois contacted Izzy Patoka and his senior staff and that went well.
- Karen Wynn was going to contact Todd Crandall and Valerie was going to contact Pat Young.
- Report by Commissioners re contact with their home's Councilmember

7:55 Update on Oregon Ridge Park - Carol Newill, Linda Davis, Brian Bernstein
Ralph Brown (president of Nature Council) sent a report which was sent to us and is appended at the end of this set of minutes.

- Damage to quarry lake hillsides and mature trees by contractor's work on trails; happened again a few weeks later. The head of Property Management said she delegates decisions to her senior staff and this was an emergency repair that unfortunately brought in a contractor who made serious errors and damaged mature trees. They will have to build a whole new trail. Elizabeth Lardner (who created the Master Plan) hired a trail specialist but she is going to have to create a report to address

this situation.

- More information on recommendations in Ralph Brown's report.
- Public meeting 2/1/24 of Nature Council, Rec & Parks director Bob Smith, and landscape architect Elizabeth Lardner. Need for habitat manager.
- Zoning variance request next to Baisman Run on Ivy Hill Road, denied but appealed. Trout Unlimited provided strong testimony to try to protect the stream.
- Placement of 2 benches near Painted Trees (authorized by the senior Rec & Parks naturalist), interfering with use of trail. There is now a pause in putting in new benches.

8:05 Update on Forest Conservation - DEPS will present information re DEPS followup on their commitments from the Forest Conservation discussions in 2022.

3/27 - DEPS findings and steps forward

4/24 - New Baltimore County Forest Conservation Manual

8:10 Shall we have an Interim Commissioner if an absence of 3 months or more is anticipated? Shall we create an Emeritus position if a long-term Commissioner steps down but is willing to be available for consultation and input?

We were running late so we will pick up on this at the next meeting.

8:20 New thoughts or opportunities? Meadows to improve environmental quality and resilience to extreme storms? Other?

Steve Malan is chair of the Baltimore County Animal Services Advisory Commission - they manage efforts to prevent mistreatment of animals and he is circulating a petition asking the county council to provide more funding for running the county animal shelter which brings in seizures and surrenders. He says this is a critical problem.

8:25 Minutes of 1/24/2024 - Correct and approve.

Unanimous approval.

Adjourned at 8:52.

Next CEQ meetings in 2024: 3/27, 4/24, 5/22, 9/25, 10/23, 12/4.

Appendix:

for CEQ 2/28/2024 re Oregon Ridge

from Dr. Ralph Brown, President of Oregon Ridge Nature Council

The County has sworn off doing any work of their own on the trails. Figuring out a new trail plan to get around the County's butchery has been tasked to Elisabeth Lardner. I think her recommendation is to fill in the foxholes and use a different route. Her trail consultant has been in the park several times and has been acceptive of Keith Rosenstiel's input. No complaints on that front. Public input still to come.

(Rec & Parks Department Head) Bob Smith seems to recognize the need for a trained ecologist and has urged the nature council presidents to make that request to Johnny O. at the town hall budget meetings. That is what I asked for at the District 3 meeting.

The variance appeal took place in January. I and Renee Hamidi spoke in opposition. The plaintiff had a knowledgeable lawyer this time around. We have not been informed of the board's next step. I'm not optimistic.

(Note: Trout Unlimited submitted a letter in opposition to allowing the variance based on water quality in the clean, Class A trout stream that goes directly into Loch Raven reservoir.)

The 2 benches were authorized to be placed in the area of the painted trees. The head naturalist allowed the donors to choose the location. The donors picked that spot. The naturalist did receive Linda's letter but stated the whole bench program is on hold until further notice from Rec and Parks. I plan to talk to the naturalist in support of Linda's request.

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 Jennifer Langford

12/4 Andy Miller