

**Anne Arundel County
Citizen's Environmental Commission
Annual Report 2023**

Overview

This document fulfills a responsibility of the Citizens Environmental Commission (CEC) to submit an annual report to the County Executive of its activities and also describes its priorities for the next year. The Commission was chartered by County Executive Steuart Pittman through Executive Order 8 on Earth Day April 2019. This Order provides language regarding composition of Commissioners, how public meetings are to be held, governance, and recommended actions. Commissioners are tasked with recommending actions to the County Executive to:

- Protect the County's environmental resources, including, but not limited to: clean air, clean water, open space, forests and wildlife;
- Promote clean, renewable energy solutions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and
- Defend more than 500 miles of shoreline and nearby communities from rising sea levels.

The Commission is to consist of 13 voting members, as follows:

- One representative from each of the nine watershed assessment and planning areas: Patapsco non-tidal, Patapsco tidal and Bodkin Creek, Magothy River, Severn River, South River, Little Patuxent River, Patuxent River upper, middle and lower portions, West and Rhode Rivers.
- Four representatives from environmental, non-profit organizations with offices in Anne Arundel County.
- Each member shall serve two-year terms and not more than four consecutive terms.

Commission Members

- Ammar Hanif – Interfaith Partners of the Chesapeake, appointed July 2019
- Carmera Thomas – Little Patuxent River, appointed July 2019
- Jesse Iliff , Arundel Rivers, appointed July 2019. Currently representing Severn River Assn. Vice Chair through May 2023.
- Jim Lyons – West & Rhode River, appointed July 2019
- Kate Fritz - Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, appointed member and Chair July 2019. Resigned May 2023.
- Kirvin Bonner – Patapsco non-tidal, appointed July 2019
- Sally Horner – Magothy River Assn., appointed July 2019, , elected Chair June 2023
- Steve Miller – Magothy River, appointed July 2019, Secretary and Vice Chair starting July 2023
- Caroline Baier-Anderson, Patuxent Middle and Lower and Herring Bay, appointed May 2023
- Judy Billage, Severn River, appointed February 2023

- Ashleigh Diaz– Citizen member, appointed September 2023
- Scott Eden - South River, appointed February 2023

At the end of 2023, there were vacancies for the Patapsco Tidal/Bodkin Creek watershed, and for the Patuxent River watershed, which had two Commissioners in 2019, representing the Upper River plus the Middle and Lower watershed including Herring Bay.

Erik Michelsen, Environmental Policy Director, was appointed to the position of County Liaison in February 2023.

Governance, Priorities and Committees

The Commission held five meetings in 2023: February, May, July, September and November. At the February meeting, we learned that County staff member Lauren Peterson would no longer be available to take minutes and Steve Miller agreed to do so. In May, Erik announced that Kate Fritz had resigned from the Commission and Jesse Iliff said that he would stay on the Commission but no longer wanted to be Vice Chair. Subsequently, Sally Hornor was appointed as Chair and in July Steve Miller was elected as Vice-chair. The remainder of the Commissioners whose terms were up agreed to resubmit their applications for a second or third term. All of the 2023 meetings have been available to Commissioners as virtual meetings. We attempted to have hybrid meetings in May and July but turnout was small for in person meetings and the sound was difficult for those at home so we abandoned the hybrid format for the foreseeable future.

At the May meeting, the CEC members discussed candidate topics for the Commission to examine in 2023 that included: updates on the progress of implementing the Green Infrastructure Plan, the General Development Plan (GDP), and the Land Preservation Parks and Recreation Plan. Erik Michelsen also proposed giving an update on legislative activity concerning the Forest Conservation Plan. Steve Miller asked if the Commission could also have some information as to what new funding had been added to the County's FY24 Budget to help achieve some of the strategies in the Plans, particularly the GDP.

In September, presentations were given and decisions were made to form subcommittees focused on Homeowners Association stormwater management issues (Steve Miller, chair), expansion of Habitat Protection Areas (Sally Hornor, Chair) and septic to sewer and septic upgrades (Cal Baier-Anderson, Chair). At the November meeting, Commissioner Miller noted that no CEC members lived in communities with Environmental Site Design stormwater management systems and that there did not seem to be great interest among commissioners in pursuing this topic. He recommended, and the members agreed, that the subcommittee be dissolved.

County Legislation

- The County Council passed the Plastic Bag Reduction Bill that takes effect Jan 1, 2024.
- A Redevelopment Bill was introduced but defeated at the Jan 2024 County Council meeting.

Commissioner Iliff provided updates on State legislature actions involving environmental issues in September and November.

Presentations at Meetings

February: Erik Michelsen discussed the County's progress in meeting the 2025 water quality goals for the Chesapeake Bay Program. He described several stormwater stream restoration projects as well as Living Shoreline installations and the Stormwater Strike Task Force. Erik added that he had been appointed to the office of Environmental Policy Director and would work on three goals in that role: completion and posting of the State of the Forests Report, implementation of Environmental Site Design in future development and furthering of a redevelopment process in the County.

July: Michael Stringer of the Office of Planning and Zoning gave a presentation on the purpose of the Green Infrastructure Plan adopted in April 2022, a review of the Network, and an update on the implementation of the Plan. At that time, the County had acquired 29% of the 30% goal for land conservation that was set for 2025.

September: Commissioner Steve Miller gave a presentation on stormwater management issues relevant to Homeowner's Associations. He discussed: 1) how stormwater management has largely been privatized as a result of Maryland's 2007 Stormwater Management Act and how responsibilities for maintaining the systems has transferred to new HOAs and private homeowners; 2) a description of the challenges owners of stormwater best management practices have in finding agencies or boards/commissions who they can address problems to and seek solutions for, and; 3) the need to assess data that have been collected about BMPs as to whether the objectives of the initiative are being realized.

November: Stacy Poulos, State Archeologist, and Michael Stringer of Planning and Zoning gave a presentation on the County Sea Level Rise Master Plan. Stringer said that a study by the County will be out soon that will address risks to infrastructure and provide a vulnerability index.

Each of these presentations were recorded during the meeting and posted on the Citizens Environmental Commission website.

Topics Addressed in 2023

In September, there was a discussion about the coordination between Region Planning and the Green Infrastructure Plan: numerous properties had been recommended for upzoning by Planning and Zoning from Open Space to land available for development. Commissioner Miller agreed to draft a letter to the CE expressing our concern; this letter was approved by the members and sent at the end of November. Other than acknowledgement of receipt of this letter, no further comment was received.

No achievements were accomplished on the extension of Habitat Protection Areas beyond the Critical Area. According to Kelly Krinetz, Planning Administrator for Critical Area, this topic was to be discussed by the Critical Area Commission but no reports have been forthcoming as of the end of 2023.

At the end of 2023, the Septics and Sewer Committee expressed a need to educate the public about the importance of amending septic systems to nitrogen reducing systems in areas where there is no planned service to upgrade to connection to County sewer. We also discussed the

public health aspects of trailer parks in south county releasing untreated sewage to the Patuxent River. This committee plans to continue to reach out to the County Health Dept about this issue and to continue to look for ways to improve this discharge of untreated sewage in 2024. Although we recognize that this area is not under County jurisdiction since these are private small systems, we strongly encourage the County to identify opportunities to work collaboratively to protect public health and water quality, both of which are threatened under the current situation. The Commission will continue to explore opportunities for the County to find ways and means to promote meaningful solutions.

Priorities for 2024

- Expansion of the Habitat Protected Areas into areas outside of the Critical Area. The first step in this process is to map the areas that support spawning of anadromous fish and colonial nesting birds. We understand that this will require the time and expertise of County staff and we will continue to request this authorization.
- Continue to look for ways to educate residents about the importance of retrofitting traditional septic systems to low N systems and to encourage conversion of septic to sewer where feasible.
- Continue to follow updates on the Horizon trailer park sewage issue and to try to find ways to reduce the inflow of untreated sewage into the Patuxent.
- Encourage County to reopen the Stormwater Task Force so that all interested and impacted parties can meet to work on improved stormwater infrastructure, especially in HOAs.
- Continue discussion of siting of solar arrays in the County.