



Dr. Mark Southerland
Chair

<https://www.howardcountymd.gov/Departments/County-Administration/Community-Sustainability/Environmental-Sustainability>

April 9, 2018

2017 Annual Report Environmental Sustainability Board

To the County Executive and the County Council:

The primary responsibility of the Environmental Sustainability Board (ESB) is to advise the County Executive and County Council on matters related to environmental sustainability. Each year we produce an annual report that summarizes our activities and suggests priorities for the future. This year we also revisit the original topics considered by the ESB and propose a way forward under the heading Retrospective.

2017 ACTIVITIES

In 2017 we addressed various areas of concern through (1) information gathering from the government and the public, (2) activities of board committees, and (3) discussion and recommendations.

Information Gathering

The ESB had discussions with the following Howard County institutions to assess sustainability goals, progress toward those goals, and needs for the future:

- Howard County Public School System (HCPSS), Oliva Claus
- Howard Community College (HCC), Robert Marietta
- Department of Recreation and Parks (DRP), John Byrd
- Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ), Val Lazdins
- Office of Transportation, Clive Graham

HCPSS agreed to follow up on the lack of maintenance of school raingardens through the PTAs. HCC is starting a Green Professor program. Howard County DRP said that they do not plan to disturb the ecosystem on the north section of Blandair Park. Howard County DPZ said that a goal of the Long Reach Village Center master plan is to make it a statewide sustainability model. The Office of Transportation described the goal of the Central Maryland Transit Development Plan as to improve service so users would see transit as a choice and not an option of last resort.

The board also engaged with citizens and other organizations on the following topics:

- Sustainability outreach by Ann Draddy of the Baltimore Office of Sustainability
- Invasive species by Mike Naylor, Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Benefits of healthy soil by Keith Ohlinger, farmer
- Climate change by Christine Conn, Maryland DNR
- Practical solutions for sustainable communities by Margo Duesterhaus, Transition Howard County
- Consensus building through scenario building by Tim Lattimer, Social Convergence advocate
- Ecosystem services by Elliot Campbell, Maryland DNR

The Baltimore Office of Sustainability is sending 125 ambassadors into the community to inform their sustainability plan through an equity lens. Maryland DNR's goals for invasives control in Howard County include (1) educational signage, (2) preventing live bait, and (3) limit boat use among lakes. Keith Ohlinger said that raising the organic content of soils dramatically increases water retention for stormwater control. ESB suggested that DNR meet with Howard County government to discuss the 40% by 2030 reduction plan for 2016 Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction Act. Transition Howard County works in many areas to raise awareness of sustainability and implement simple solutions such as the Repair Café to reduce waste, retrain, and build the community. The ESB endorses Tim Lattimer's concept of Social Convergence: Scenario Planning to Solve Complex Problems. Maryland DNR has an Accounting for Maryland's Ecosystem Services application that can be used for evaluating the return on investments such as conservation, restoration, tradeoffs with green and gray infrastructure, and climate change mitigation strategies. ESB suggests incorporating this tool into the County's Green Infrastructure Network.

Board Committees

One of the major activities of the ESB is the formation of committees, drawing upon both board members and outside members. These committees may be self-generated or mandated by executive or legislative request. In 2017, the following committees were active:

Energy Task Force. This task force was created by the ESB and co-chaired by board member Ed Wilson and Rizwan Siddiqi. The task force made 21 recommendations including creation of a Director of Energy. Other recommendations included designating energy liaisons in each department, dedicating 5% of energy spend for efficiency projects, having each department pay for its share of energy spend, evaluating renewable projects with an incremental 10% for societal benefits, promoting community solar projects, considering commercial and residential incentives, considering a pilot micro-grid, assessing backup power for vulnerable populations, and creating education partnerships. The ESB sent a letter to County Executive Kittleman supporting the recommendations and creation of a Director of Energy position.

Bird Building Collision Task Force. Board chair Mark Southerland convened this committee to address the 1 billion birds that die from collisions with building glass each year in the United States. Board members Nancy McAllister and Tom Paxton participated on the task force along with several members of the public. The task force has a three-pronged approach: (1) advocate for legislation and governmental action, (2) support adoption of bird safe solutions by facilities and developers, and (3)

educate and engage partner organizations and the public. The task force recommended inclusion of bird safe features points in the Howard County Green Neighborhood program. Dr. Southerland drafted the Maryland Bird Safe Building Act of 2018 that was co-sponsored in the House and Senate during this session of the General Assembly. The activities of the task force were transitioned to a new non-profit, Safe Skies Maryland, a subcommittee of the Maryland Ornithological Society. Safe Skies Maryland is very active espousing the bird safe building message and is facilitating bird safe window treatments at the National Aquarium, Maryland Science Center, Fort McHenry, and Howard County Conservancy.

Sustainability Award Committee. Board members, Georgia Eacker, Ann Strozyk, Ed Wilson, Tom Paxton, and Sonia He comprise this committee. They are investigating the value and feasibility of creating a sustainability award for teachers and perhaps others within Howard County.

Plastics in the Environment Committee. During the ESB retreat, the problem of plastic waste was assigned a high priority. Board member, Ann Strozyk, is convening a committee and seeking a speaker for 2018.

RETROSPECTIVE

In August 2007, the Commission on the Environment and Sustainability produced a blueprint for a sustainable Howard County that included creation of an Office of Environmental (now Community) Sustainability (OCS) and an Environmental Sustainability Board (ESB). The Commission also produced 100 recommendations for sustainable actions organized into eight issue areas:

- Water quality
- Air quality
- Health
- Energy
- Green building
- Open space and land preservation
- Education and outreach
- Governance

Over the last ten years, the County has made significant progress, completing many actions and identifying new ones. The following recommendations indicate where the ESB believes the County needs to go in the future.

Agriculture

The ESB has increased its focus on agricultural sustainability in recent years. Similarly, the OCS added an agricultural position to help the County with its agricultural and food policy and programs. The Roving Radish program has been an unqualified success and continues to expand.

- The County should manage land use in the western county to accommodate both working farms and other residents, while enhancing the green infrastructure network

Water Quality

The ESB advised and the County adopted a watershed protection fee that helped accelerate the pace of stormwater controls and watershed restoration. The Office greatly expanded stormwater education and outreach critical to progress toward meet MS4 permit and TMDLs.

- The County should implement pilot stormwater projects on private land and other recommendations of the Commercial Stormwater Solutions Work Group
- The County should revise regulations to increase the protection of forest buffers, native meadows, and sensitive landscapes that contribute to water quality
- The pending update to development regulations should include strengthening protections of watersheds and reducing availability of waivers in stream and wetland buffers

Air Quality

The County has undertaken bikeway and complete streets planning that will increase active transportation and reduce automobile emissions adversely affecting air quality.

- The County should increase commitment to pedestrian, biking, and transit development to further reduce automobile dependence

Health

The Bikeway Express and similar active transportation initiatives will also provide health benefits to County residents

- The County should pursue other initiatives to increase healthy lifestyles that reduce stress, obesity, and other health problems

Energy

The County completed several energy studies and initiatives, most recently resulting in the recommendations of the Energy Task Force. A greener fleet and many energy conservation measures have been implemented. An energy manager position within OCS is about to be filled.

- The County should pursue the other recommendations of the Energy Task Force
- The County should participate fully in the state's 40% greenhouse gas reduction planning

Green Building

At the recommendation of the ESB, the County approved legislation requiring LEED green building standards for government (LEED Silver) and private (LEED certified) construction. The County also created a Green Neighborhoods program.

- The County should consider raising the LEED certification levels

- The County should update the Green Neighborhoods program to include points for bird safe building standards and consider other bird safe regulations

Open Space and Land Preservation

At the recommendation of the ESB, the County created a Green Infrastructure Network (GIN) map of the best remaining natural lands in the county. OCS is embarking on an education and outreach program so the general public understands the benefits provided by protecting the GIN.

- The County should pursue extra protections for the GIN in the update to the development regulations, zoning, and other policies, including incentives for protective easements on private lands
- The County should revise the Forest Conservation Manual to adopt the increased protections under consideration by the Maryland General Assembly

Education and Outreach

The OCS has been an important tool for education and outreach on sustainability throughout the county. GreenFest has been a great success at creating partners and reaching citizens throughout the county.

- The County should better engage the business community as a partner in sustainability efforts
- The County should consider an annual summit on sustainability to engage partners and recognized achievements

Governance

The ESB and OCS model adopted by the County has been a success and a model for other jurisdictions.

- OCS should be expanded, perhaps with personnel detailed from County departments to better institutionalize sustainability
- OCS should be given a lead role in working with other jurisdictions and institutions to address cross-boundary sustainability issues.

Thank you for your interest in these matters.

Sincerely,



Mark Southerland, Ph.D., Chair

Olivia Farrow, Vice Chair

Chein-Chi Chang

Christine Conn
John Dove
Georgia Eacker
Kelly Hensing
Nancy McAllister
Tom Paxton
Ann Strozyk
Chris Tsien
Ed Wilson
Sonia He, Student Representative