

ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT COMMISSION ON THE ENVIRONMENT

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2019 Annual Report

This Annual Report covers the period of January – December 2019 and is submitted by the current members of the Commission on the Environment (COE) to provide a summary of significant tasks that the COE has undertaken during the timeframe stated above.

I. Current COE Membership & staff support

COE current members and their respective offices are as follows:

Thomas Brewer – President
Mike Thompson – Vice President
Melissa Rodriguez
Kristen Whitesell
Steven Woodburn

Past Members (during the reporting period)

Jacqueline Dyson
Peter Neus
Nick Colvin
Jerry Frank

Ex Officio members:

Heather Moritz –Health Department representative (attends only as requested)
Ben Cohen -Department of Land Use and Growth Management (staff support)

II. Purpose and Mission Statement

The purpose of the COE is to provide the Commissioners of St. Mary's County with advice and assistance concerning the protection and preservation of the county's natural resources and environment. The COE broadly interprets the word "environment" to include land, air, and water and how the actions of humans influence the habitat in which we live. The mission of the COE is to:

- Gather environmental concerns from local residents and research related topics, utilize available public and private resources, and advance appropriate concerns and suggestions to the Commissioners of St. Mary's County;
- Work with appropriate groups and organizations to support the successful implementation of worthy initiatives;
- Develop and deliver educational resources and outreach activities; and
- Work with civic organizations and the general public to improve, enhance, and preserve the natural resources of St. Mary's County.

III. Summary of Specific Tasks

Significant tasks the COE has undertaken in fulfillment of its purpose and mission statement:

1. Rain barrel, Compost Bin, and Healthy Shorelines for Healthy Waters Workshops- The Commission coordinated with the University of Maryland Extension office to plan and execute three workshops, a rain barrel workshop, a compost bin workshop, and a

Healthy Shorelines for Healthy Waters workshop, that took place on June 2nd, 2019. The Commission used funds to assist in the purchase of backyard compost bins and worked with the Extension office to collect a registration fee at half of the cost of the materials, meaning that residents obtained the materials at half cost. The workshops were well attended and we received positive feedback. With leftover materials and the positive feedback, the Commission plans to continue supporting these workshops again in the future.

2. Sustainable Maryland Municipalities program- The Commission worked with the Leonardtown Town Council to initiate Leonardtown in the application process to become a Sustainable Maryland municipality. Sustainable Maryland is a certification program for municipalities in Maryland that want to become more sustainable. Once certified, Leonardtown will gain access to further sustainability opportunities, including grants for further projects. The Town Council passed the motion to pursue the certification. The COE remains in the process of pursuing certification.
3. Public Outreach- The Commission participated in the Leonardtown Earth Day on the Square event on April 14th, 2019; we set up an activity for children as well as adults to test their ability to determine what was recyclable, compostable, or trash based upon what was learned from the Materials Recovery Facility tour in 2018. We also provided educational material regarding composting and recycling and answered any questions that residents had regarding the environment and sustainability.
4. Sustainability Awards Program- The Commission announced the inaugural “Green in St. Mary’s County” Sustainability Awards. The goal of these awards is to recognize outstanding St Mary’s County students, restaurants, businesses, non-profits and farms for their environmental stewardship, resource conservation, innovative best practices and pollution prevention. The nominations are due February 28th, 2020 and the winners will be announced around Earth Day.

Future Study and Action Topics

1. *Composting*: The Commission plans to continue to educate residents and work to increase opportunities and ease of composting for residents, schools, and businesses. Our research has led us to the position that a composting operation sufficient for both residential and commercial organic waste would be beneficial to the county. The Commission offered the recommendation to pursue a covered, aerated pile approach based on research from a St. Mary’s College student from 2016, and that recommendation remains.
2. *Recycling*: The Commission will continue to investigate and make recommendations to increase recycling efforts in the county, and develop outreach and education programs. With the 2018 National Sword policy in which China restricted the import of mixed paper and plastic recyclable material, the recycling markets have been volatile and the cost of recycling has increased. The Commission will research recycling options in order

to provide recommendations.

3. *Largest negative contributors to the environment:* The Commission plans to continue to identify the largest negative contributors to the local environment, and work to identify suggestions for the Commissioners of St. Mary's County. The recent discovery of PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) as a source of drinking water contamination around industrial sites and military bases has caused concern in our area. NAS Pax River has tested above the recommended levels for PFAS, but there does not seem to be enough drinking water testing performed to provide proof of safety for residents. The Commission plans to monitor for updates and provide recommendations.
4. *Environmental programs and stewardship in Public Schools and community centers:* The Commission will work to make sure that environmentalism remains a focus in public schools despite the elimination of Green Schools program funding. Our recommendation to the Superintendent's office was that some or all public schools participate in the Trex recycling competition. This low maintenance competition involves schools collecting plastic bags and film packaging that do not belong in single stream recycling, weighing the collection monthly, and delivering it to a retail drop-off location. We feel that teaching environmentalism to students is an effective way to also teach parents. The Commission also recommended to the Public Schools that they initiate a composting project, and will revisit the subject with them next year.
5. *Sustainability Awards Program:* The Commission plans to evaluate the outcomes of the Awards Program to determine whether or not to replicate this in future years.
6. *Sustainability workshops for residents:* The Commission plans to replicate the rain barrel workshops and backyard composting workshops co-sponsored with the University of Maryland Extension office. The Commission plans to coordinate with the Master Gardener Program to offer a backyard vegetable gardening workshop for residents. The Commission also plans to coordinate with the local 4-H to offer backyard poultry workshops for residents interested in raising chickens.
7. *Woods in your backyard workshop:* The Commission plans to repeat the successful workshop (90 + attendees) held in June of 2015.
8. *Environmental Summit:* St. Mary's County held these summits in the past, and the Commission will determine whether hosting future Environmental Summits would be of benefit to the County.
9. *Participation in Community events:* The Commission will provide displays regarding a broad range of information and ideas that County residents can implement at home to "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" in an effort to use less energy and produce less waste in their daily lives at one or more of the following events: St. Mary's River Watershed Association's RiverFest, Earth Day on the Square in Leonardtown, Juneteenth, Bay-to-

Bay Service Day, Clean the Bay Day, and the St. Mary's County Fair.

10. *Website development*: The Commission plans to develop the county website and the Facebook page to provide more resources for residents to access regarding environmental subjects in the county.

11. *Community Gardens*: The Commission plans to work with other organizations to establish community gardens in areas of the County that may benefit from seasonal produce that can be grown locally. The Commission plans to seek grant funding for this and other projects for the benefit of the County.

IV. Challenges

The COE had four members, Jacqueline Dyson, Peter Neus, Nick Colvin, and Jerry Frank, resign their memberships to the Commission. We have since filled the vacancies.

V. Acknowledgments

The COE acknowledges that many citizens and professionals have provided assistance and information to the Board. We thank:

- Paul Waxman, former member of the Solid Waste Advisory Committee who attends a majority of our meetings and continues to provide us with a wealth of information regarding recycling and solid waste management issues,
- Nicole Basenback who has been regularly attending our meetings and has provided information on the newly established Watershed Stewardship Academy and water quality initiatives in the County,
- And Department of Land Use and Growth Management Director, Bill Hunt, for his regular participation in our meetings and for bringing items of interest to the attention of the COE,

Finally, we thank the Commissioners of St. Mary's County for providing the staff and financial support for activities of the Commission.

VI. Membership and Meeting Information

As a reader of this annual report, if you are interested in becoming a COE member (<http://www.co.saint-marys.md.us/howdoi.asp?div=Apply>) and/or would like to attend a meeting as a concerned County resident, please join us on the first Tuesday of every month at 6:30 pm in the conference room of the Patuxent Building, located in the Leonardtown governmental center.

Please visit our website for more information: <http://www.co.saint-marys.md.us/boards/groups/default.aspx?board=13>

VII. Conclusion

The COE is pleased to submit this report for the period of January– December 2019.

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas Brewer, COE President