

Healthy Watersheds, Healthier Communities

Fairfax County Stormwater Planning Division

Minutes Pohick Creek Draft Watershed Plan Forum

Tuesday, July 27, 2010
Sangster Elementary School, Springfield VA

Meeting Attendees	
WAG Members	Fairfax Co. Stormwater Planning Division
Patrick Gloyd, Burke Centre Conservancy	Fred Rose
Chris Landgraf, Fort Belvoir DPW	Shannon Curtis
Kelly Meadows, Lake Braddock Community Association	Chad Grupe
General Public	PBS&J (engineering consultant)
Approximately 30 persons, including two representatives of Supervisors' offices (Rosemary Ryan, Braddock; Marlae Schnare, Springfield)	Laura Chap
	Terry Suehr
	Jeremy Reiderman
	Lindsay Parker
	Jeremy Hassan
	Waterford Inc. (public involvement consultant)
	Beth Offenbacker
	Paul Coelus
	Roger Taylor

The meeting convened at 7:05 pm with welcome comments by public involvement consultant Beth Offenbacker.

Fred Rose (Chief, Watershed Planning & Assessment Branch) offered some introductory comments, then described the background and history of the watershed planning process over the past few decades. He noted that the Watershed Plan is a concept-level document: it represents *opportunities* for the County to make improvements, but funding for any particular project will be competitive and it is unlikely all the proposed projects will be accomplished.

Shannon Curtis acknowledged the important role that the Watershed Advisory Group has played in the plan development. He provided a watershed planning primer to ensure that everyone in the audience understood the basic principles and terminology of watershed planning. He noted that the science of watershed planning has evolved over the last several decades, and the techniques used to manage stormwater today are different than those used, say, in the 1970's.



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Laura Chap (PBS&J) described the process of preparing the draft plan from an engineering perspective, including field investigation, water quality and quantity modeling, and the ranking of subwatersheds within the Pohick Creek watershed and the county overall. Terry Suehr (PBS&J) followed with a more detailed explanation of several project examples. Laura Chap then described the project prioritization process. The draft watershed plan includes 90 proposed projects in the 10-year group, and the team has rank-ordered these based on several criteria.

At the conclusion of the presentation, Shannon Curtis reviewed the several ways members of the public can submit comments on the draft plan, including phone, fax, mail, email, and via a form on the County website. The public comment period will run for 30 days following the date of the forum.

Following the presentation, county staff and consultants fielded questions and comments about individual proposed projects at several stations around the room.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm.

The following is a summary of the questions asked and comments made by members of the audience and the answers provided by county staff and consultants. The identities of the persons asking and answering the questions are not included. This is not a verbatim transcript.

Q: Is there federal grant money available for any of these projects?

A. Yes, and we do look for those funding opportunities. For example, Fairfax County has received some grants for projects on certain dams. However, the grant process is competitive; we can apply for such funding but we cannot rely on it.

Q. Are wet ponds supposed to be maintenance free? Some of the proposed projects have areas (sediment bays) that look like they'll require frequent maintenance.

A. This type of wet pond is actually *designed* for maintenance, but for easy maintenance. The forebays collect sediment, which must be removed, but it's much easier to clean a small forebay on a regular basis than dredge the entire pond.

Q: Given the current budget situation, what's the likelihood of funding all 90 proposed projects [on the 10-year list]?

A: At present, we do not have the level of funding needed to complete all 90 projects, even over a period of 10 years. So it's unlikely they will all be done. Moreover, although the plan provides a priority order for the projects within this watershed, they will compete for funding county-wide. In addition, the funds available for projects will vary from year to year, so it's hard to say when (or if) any particular project might be done.



Q: From the project descriptions, it appears that some of the existing facilities have not been maintained. Where will the money come from to maintain the *new* infrastructure?

A: Since the County has dedicated a penny of the tax rate [\$0.01 per \$100 assessed value on real estate], recently increased to 1.5 cents, the additional funds have allowed us to catch up to some degree on the overdue maintenance. We will continue to use some of this funding for maintenance of existing and new infrastructure. In addition, some of the new projects are lower maintenance than existing facilities, so that will help keep costs down.

Q: Are other counties organized the same way? How much of the planning is mandated by the federal government?

A: Well, every land area comprises one or more watersheds, but each jurisdiction may do watershed planning differently. However, the *modeling* of the watershed, is pretty standard practice in watershed planning throughout the country. The federal government may require that watershed planning be done (for example, as part of the stormwater permitting process) however, it doesn't specify how it is to be done, so individual states and counties may have different processes.

Q: Why is none of the project scoring and prioritization qualitative? And does anyone actually monitor water quality?

A: Both the "benefits" section of the draft plan and the description of individual projects contain some discussion of qualitative benefits. In addition, qualitative results are imbedded in the overall goals. As to monitoring, both the state and private citizens continually monitor water quality. Keep in mind that this is a long-term investment. We arrived at the current state over a period of centuries; it will take time to make improvements. In addition, we're dealing with the variability inherent in natural systems.

Q: If the County accepts federal funds, at what point will there be regulations that control individual homeowner behavior; for example, "you will have a rain barrel" or "you will reduce the size of your lawn."

A: First of all, the amount of money we receive from the federal government is small in comparison to other sources. Second, the draft plan contains nothing at all like the kind of individual mandates you're referring to. Finally, while the government has authority under the Clean Water Act to direct results, it cannot direct the states how to achieve those results.



The notes below reflect questions and comments made at the breakout stations following the conclusion of the formal presentation:

C: [Project No. PC9705] This is a new storage and treatment area. I'm concerned about whether you'll cut down trees to do this project, whether the water will create an area for mosquitoes to breed, and whether it will be a safety hazard to neighborhood children, who walk through this area on their way to the pool and use the slope for sledding in the winter.

Q: [Project No. PC9705] Is a goal of this project water *quality* improvement, or just quantity—that is, controlling flow into the stream?

A: This outfall improvement project is primarily aimed at managing stormwater quantity. The existing structure allows too high a flow rate, which contributes to stream erosion. The proposed project would reduce the flow rate. Indirectly, this also helps improve water quality.

Q: [General] How is subwatershed sequencing incorporated in the plan, or in project rankings?

A: The draft plan does not attempt to do that at the level of individual subwatersheds (or WMAs, watershed management areas). The question of project sequencing—whether one project ought to be done before another—was considered at the watershed level. However, when an individual project is funded, we can review the proposed projects nearby to determine whether sequencing should be addressed.

C: [Projects No. PC9120, PC9118] I'm concerned the pond retrofit will cause pond boundaries to expand, encroaching on properties to the north and south and possibly reducing property values. I'm also concerned about the possible loss of trees as part of the construction process; I hope the county tries to minimize such loss. Finally, please contact us [the local homeowners association] before the project begins.

C: This was very educational. I'm delighted to know the plan is underway, and impressed with the management and organization of the watersheds. Also, I'm pleased to have had the opportunity to get local, neighborhood questions answered.



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