

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Al Tucker



The first newsletter of the New Year offers the opportunity to reflect on the accomplishments of the past year and to project CEPA's plans for environmental advocacy for the upcoming year. During the past year we concentrated our efforts on three main topics:

(1) CEPA Forum: "The Unsustainable Spiral of Growth"

(2) PST-Harwood Landfill: Obtaining commitments from MDE to hold WMI accountable for maintaining wastewater discharge quality and for mitigating toxic contaminants emanating from the landfill.

(3) Alliance For Livable Communities: CEPA took a leadership role in the establishment of this steering group that will advocate for growth regulations that promote sustainability in Anne Arundel.

The forum was held last October 16th at the Anne Arundel Community College; over eighty participants attended. There were three expert presentations: new paradigms for Smart Growth in Maryland, the economic impacts of growth on ecosystems, and planning for sustainable growth.

Prof. Gerrit Knaap of the University of Maryland told participants that demographics and new transportation technologies are rapidly changing how people will live in the future. He stated that voluntary incentives for smart growth have had little impact on growth patterns in Anne Arundel County. Communities that have had success with smart growth have had to resort to regulations to institute measurable change.

Dr. Elliott Campbell from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources used results from the new research area of ecological economics to show that Anne Arundel County receives over \$330 million dollars per year in ecosystem services from forests and wetlands.

And Kimberly Brandt from 1000 Friends of Maryland discussed the role that citizen advocacy in Charles County had on radically changing that county's growth to a more sustainable future. These presentations engendered a lively discussion among the participants.

At the forum I announced that CEPA, along with five other organizations, would form an advocacy group, the Alliance for Livable Communities, which would participate in the revision of Anne Arundel County's General Development Plan.

With respect to the PST Harwood Landfill, operated by Waste Management Inc. (WMI), CEPA has actively monitored the groundwater contamination issues for more than seven years. This is the largest unlined landfill on the east coast. As we have reported to you in the past, several toxic chemicals have been found in the on-site groundwater monitoring wells. The potential to contaminate the nearby aquifers is high. The Aquia aquifer, the main drinking water source for southern Anne Arundel County, lies only a few feet below, separated only by a layer of clay. Propagation of contaminants in groundwater can take decades, but once an aquifer is contaminated, it becomes almost impossible to remediate. We have worked with the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to enforce existing regulations. At a CEPA Board of Trustees meeting, Ed Dexter from MDE stated that WMI would be held responsible for mitigating the toxic exceedances in the landfill. Subsequently, MDE issued an order for WMI to submit a plan for remediation. WMI tried to argue that the exceedances were from natural causes, but MDE held that even if they were, the landfill disturbance was the cause and therefore WMI would be held responsible for mitigation.

With respect to population growth and land development, the CEPA Board of Trustees is convinced that the current patterns of development are leading to an unsustainable economic future and hence an unacceptable loss of environment. In Anne Arundel County the current practice is to charge developers only 80% of the estimated impact cost for new infrastructure. This fee by law must be spent for new infrastructure to support new development. Thus, from the start, new development creates an unfunded mandate to all county property owners. The current large, unfunded backlog indicates that the county also does not account properly for the maintenance and replacement of existing infrastructure. This pro-development attitude results in an unfunded, unreported structural deficit. If this issue is not recognized, suburban sprawl will continue its unsustainable course. This realization was the impetus for CEPA to join with others to form the Alliance for Livable Communities. In order to protect the environment it will take considerably more than awareness of environmental losses to save our environmental assets. We hope that the Alliance, which represents a broad cross-section of county citizens, will generate public advocacy to move toward a more sustainable future.

Looking forward to the new year, we planⁱ to continue the above efforts. However, we have not forsaken one of our signature issues, namely promoting the sustainable use of source water in Maryland, particularly groundwater. We were dismayed to find out that MDE has discontinued the Groundwater Protection Program Annual Report to the Maryland General Assembly due to lack of funding. This report

provided valuable insight into the state's groundwater resources. It outlined issues such as saltwater intrusion into coastal and riverine aquifers, nitrate contamination of aquifers, water depletion and availability issues. Without this report both the general public and our legislators will be blind about the state of pending water issues.

Several jurisdictions now face water availability issues. Charles County, for example, will not have sufficient groundwater to sustain the estimated population growth without finding alternative sources of water. In Western Maryland, the fractured rock aquifers can only support 1.5 dwelling units per acre, thus requiring communities that exceed this density to seek external water sources. More than 53 Maryland water supply plants now remove nitrates from their drinking water, indicating source contaminationⁱⁱ.

Without the annual report, we will have no insight into the impacts on water supply due to climate change, increased air and water temperatures, changes in precipitation and runoff, severity of droughts, sea level rise, and more frequent and intense storms. The majority of Maryland counties rely on surficial aquifers for their sourcewater. These aquifers depend directly on precipitation for recharge and are the most susceptible to contamination from fecal bacteria, nitrate and stormwater run-off, and impervious surface from over-development. CEPA will raise this issue with policymakers to insure that the public has access to this information.

For a small non-profit that relies on all volunteers for support and operation, CEPA has had a productive year. Our hope is that we will be able to rely on your support to carry on the mission to keep you informed about critical environmental issues that are not being addressed by other organizations.

ⁱ The 2017 annual CEPA plan should be posted on our website shortly.

ⁱⁱ I recommend you read the Bay Journal article on drinking water nitrate contamination in Pennsylvania and the Delmarva Peninsula (Jan/Feb 2017, v26 n10).
