

# ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT COMMISSION ON THE ENVIRONMENT

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## 2020 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  
Molly Boron  
Norman Dean

Past Members (during the reporting period)

N/A

Ex Officio members:

Heather Moritz –Health Department representative (attends only as requested)  
Krystal Ayotte -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. Sustainability Awards Program - The Commission announced the inaugural "Green in St. Mary's County" Sustainability Awards Program in 2019. The goal of these awards was to recognize outstanding St Mary's County student/school, restaurants, businesses, non-profits and farms/agriculture for their environmental stewardship, resource

conservation, innovative best practices and pollution prevention. A logo was developed:

- “Green in St Mary’s County” reflective of CoE Facebook site
- Arrow circle indicates the dependency of resources and importance of sustainability
- Maryland with flag depicts the pride of our state
- Sun, plant, soil, water & wind are key natural resources
- The human hand positioned below represents the need for environmental stewardship of natural resources



COE members canvassed over 60 potential sustainability champions in person, and actively pursued program advertising through the Green in St Mary’s County Facebook page, St Mary’s County Times newspaper, Enterprise newspaper and at a County Commissioners Public Meeting.

Seventeen nominations were received. No restaurants had been nominated, but multiple nominations were received recognizing specific individuals. The COE decided to add an “Individual” category and to also make one Honorable Mention. Members of the Commission met to judge the nominees and determine the winners. The winners were announced by the CSMC and received their awards along with individual Facebook announcements on the COE website. The winners were:

- Student/School: The Chesapeake Public Charter School
- Business: Giant Food
- Non-Profit: Friends of St Clement Bay
- Farm/Agriculture: Steven O’Brien Farm
- Individual: Frank and Christina Allen
- Honorable Mention: St Mary’s River Watershed Association

Awards consisted of an engraved tree limb plaque, COE Award Citation and a County Commissioners Commendation. The Green in St Mary’s County Facebook page received over 3k “likes” after announcing the winners, the most “likes” ever received. The COE considered the awards a success and plans to repeat the program for 2020. The nominations are due February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and the winners will be announced around Earth Day.

2. Rain barrel, Compost Bin, and Septic Solutions 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 septic solutions workshop, that took place on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, and 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020, respectively. The Commission assisted the Extension office in receiving a Keep Maryland Beautiful grant that helped fund the

materials for the workshops. The virtual workshops were well attended and we received positive feedback. With leftover materials and the positive feedback, the Commission plans to continue supporting these workshops in the future.

3. **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.

#### 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 plans to present to the CSMC the recommendation to pursue an industrial composting facility based on research from a St. Mary's College student from 2016 along with the successful composting program in Prince George's County, which is now the largest composting program on the East Coast.
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, along with the coronavirus pandemic, the recycling markets have been volatile and the cost of recycling has increased. The Commission will continue to 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. Recent tests from the St. Mary's River Watershed Association indicate that seafood in local tributaries may contain elevated levels of these chemicals due to bioaccumulation. The Commission plans to monitor for updates and provide recommendations.
4. *Air Monitoring Stations:* The Sierra Club has recommended the installation of air monitoring stations in the County. With the large volume of traffic through the County onto NAS Pax River, along with the pollutants from the aircraft tested on the base, the COE recommends that the CSMC support this initiative in order to determine the amount of air pollutants that are present in our area.

5. *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.
6. *Sustainability Awards Program:* The Commission was very pleased with the outcome of the inaugural awards program and would like to make this an annual event.
7. *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.
8. *Woods in your backyard workshop:* The Commission plans to repeat the successful workshop (90 + attendees) held in June of 2015. We have posted a link on our website that provides information to residents.
9. *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.
10. *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.
11. *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. This year, we added the UME Woodlands Resources program link as well as a link to obtain a free radon test for Maryland residents.
12. *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

As with all groups and organizations, the coronavirus pandemic created numerous challenges to COE meetings, operations, and events. We have learned to meet safely and were able to successfully disseminate our inaugural sustainability awards, so we feel that we can meet the challenges that will undoubtedly continue into 2021.

#### 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. Krystal Ayotte has been especially helpful with the increased demand for staff support during the pandemic, and the COE would like to acknowledge her efforts.

#### 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 2020.

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas Brewer, COE President