

**January 17, 2017**

**Testimony of Howard County Environmental Sustainability Board**

**Mark Southerland, Vice Chair**

The Environmental Sustainability Board strongly supports Howard County's efforts to improve the condition of its waters and restore the Chesapeake Bay. Among these efforts are pollution reduction actions associated with meeting the MS4 stormwater permit requirements that now include septic maintenance. These credits provide a cost-effective means of reducing nutrient pollution and will help achieve the impervious surface treatment goals of the permit. We believe that Septic Savers program developed by the Office of Community Sustainability is an appropriate approach to improving septic maintenance. We also hope that by involving private landowners directly in pollution reduction through this program, the larger community will be better educated on nonpoint pollution issues and more likely to undertake other restoration actions, such as stormwater controls.

While we support Septic Savers, we note that it is not a panacea for eliminating water resource degradation. The flashy stormwater flows that cause streambank erosion and contribute the majority of sediment pollution will not be affected by septic maintenance. Only by controlling both pollution and flashy flows will local county waters be restored. This requires the proper balance of nutrient source management, tree planting, raingardens and bioretention, stormwater wetlands, and stream restoration. The county must achieve this balance to meet its flooding, environmental, health, and economic challenges. Continuous maintenance of our gray and green infrastructure is by far the most cost-effective approach we have for ensuring a sustainable Howard County community.

**APPENDIX:**

**Septic Maintenance for MS<sub>4</sub> Permit Credit: Septic Savers**

**Executive Summary:**

The Maryland Department of Environment (MDE) recognizes septic tank pumping as an alternative Best Management Practice (BMP), claimable against MS<sub>4</sub> permit treatment goals. The Office of Community Sustainability (OCS) has researched several programs across the nation to determine the best approach for its own septic maintenance program, Septic Savers. At an estimated starting cost of \$3,000 per impervious acre managed, this is the most cost-effective known BMP for MS<sub>4</sub> permit compliance. If all septic users in the County participated in the Septic Savers program, the County could obtain approximately 570 acres of impervious treatment credit, or approximately 29% of its 2019 permit treatment goal. OCS has devised advertising and outreach strategies to help increase citizen participation in this program and has consulted key stakeholders at the Little Patuxent Wastewater treatment plant to ensure success of this program. OCS will involve the Department of Public Works and the Health Department in the Septic Savers program.