



Howard County

Internal Memorandum

Subject: Council Bill No. 3-2015; County Council Questions Raised at February 17, 2015 Public Hearing

To: Mary Kay Sigaty,
Council Chairperson

From: Lonnie R. Robbins,
Chief Administrative Officer

Date: February 25, 2015

The administration received two questions from County Council members on February 20, 2015. I am providing answers to these questions below.

Question #1:

Please share the Administration's research on sustainability offices in Frederick County and Baltimore City.

The administration researched initially how surrounding jurisdictions in Maryland defined sustainability as a government practice. The definitions are diverse as are the departmental makeups of comparable agencies. The administration's goal was to develop as comprehensive a definition as appropriate to recognize the growing movement in sustainability cited by literature, academics, and sustainability professionals. The administration found Frederick County and Baltimore City as the most emblematic of the model being envisioned for Howard County. For this reason, these jurisdictions were highlighted in testimony presented on February 17, 2015.

Frederick County's Sustainability and Environmental Resources Office emphasizes an intersection of economics, society, and the environment. It focuses on protecting the environment, conserving energy and living sustainably. Key work areas include promoting sustainable resources and initiatives to the government and community, expanding watershed management through pollution prevention, educating the public, and assessing current societal conditions.

Baltimore City's Office of Sustainability develops and advocates for programs, policies, and actions by government, citizens, businesses, and institutions that improve the long-term environmental, social, and economic viability of the City. The City also integrates sustainability



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into its government's operations as a management practice. Links to websites for both agencies are provided below.

Frederick County: <http://frederickcountymd.gov/3535/Contact-Us>

Baltimore City: <http://www.baltimoresustainability.org/>

While evidence on best practices from around the state, particularly the two jurisdictions discussed above, is valuable, the administration researched how sustainability is treated in academic circles. Multiple Maryland colleges and universities offer environmental science programs, and reviews of their curriculum show an emphasis placed on statistics, economics, government, and business coursework. Nationally renowned universities such as Harvard, Columbia, Stanford, Johns Hopkins, and the University of Michigan have graduate programs dedicated to sustainability management and systems. These programs are designed to help students and professionals master a richer understanding of what makes for a sustainable environment. The coursework is interdisciplinary, qualitative, quantitative, management-oriented, and policy-driven.



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Question #2:

Please provide a timeline for the implementation of this reorganization (with more detail of how you expect the transition to unfold within the office).

The administration's goal is to have OCS's work plan in place and ready for implementation on July 1, 2015, the start of FY2016. The administration has taken a number of steps toward this objective. First, the Acting Director of the Office of Environmental Sustainability (OES) conducted a staff review of all personnel funded within OES and by other county agencies, and with funds from partner organizations. The approximately 8 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions that report to the OES director encompass a variety of talent, skills sets, and education. They have over 27 years of collective experience working in Howard County government, 90 years of professional experience overall, collegiate and post-collegiate degrees in science, business, and engineering from well-respected institutions both within and outside Maryland.

The administration gave careful consideration to needed qualifications and capabilities as they relate to OCS' new mission, and how the office should be structured as a policy arm of government under County Administration. A multidisciplinary sustainability office should be designed to incorporate a variety of subject disciplines that can research, analyze, and respond to initiatives important to policymakers, elected officials, and the broader community. As is the nature of relying on collective input, sustainability goals may change periodically as federal, state, and county priorities change.

A review of the resumes for existing OES staff indicates previous academic exposure to environmental, agricultural, and economic policy. In addition, the types of projects upon which these professionals have embarked over the past eight years indicate practical work experience in these fields. Given the successful implementation and outcomes of many of these programs, the administration is confident in their ability to conduct a variety of intersecting research projects that consider environmental, agricultural, and economic assessments simultaneously.

Second, the administration looked at how OCS and the Environmental Sustainability Board (ESB) would function best in county government. Councilperson Ball and Councilperson Terrasa touched on this issue in their questions about the role the Environmental Sustainability Board (ESB) would play when advising the new office on non-environmental policies.

The administration concluded the new office would work with many agencies, boards, commissions, and communities in Howard County to ensure that future business growth, environmental protection, and agricultural improvements are executed in a sustainable manner.



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For example, in its development of program initiatives OCS would rely on relevant Howard County government agencies, boards and commissions whose employees/members are subject matter experts in their fields, and whose insights would contribute to comprehensive proposals the County Executive considers tasking departments with implementing.

This is not dissimilar to how OES has operated over the past eight years. As has already been done for certain projects, OCS would form committees with appropriate agency staff to develop policy recommendations and program implementation models that support the agency's work. For example, OES established the Stormwater Subcabinet to aid in the development of the watershed fee, improve the County's MS4 permit program, and monitor the effective use of the Watershed Protection Fund. The subcabinet comprised both department heads and bureau chiefs who 'touched' stormwater management as part of their organization's mission.

The administration intends to assemble similar groups for most new and existing initiatives. For example, OES is currently reviewing the prospect of engaging with private entities on the financing and development of new stormwater projects, which is a timely endeavor as the County must soon seek to remediate stormwater runoff on private land. To Councilperson Weinstein's question at the public hearing, the value of public-private partnerships in environmental management is a perfect example of the type of research the new office would conduct.

Finally, it is envisioned representatives from the following boards and commissions would meet quarterly: Agricultural Land Preservation Board, Planning Board, Design Advisory Panel, Economic Development Authority, Transportation Board, Environmental Sustainability Board, Recreation and Parks Board, Public Works Board, and the Soil Conservation District. The administration met with the chairs from each of the boards listed above in preparation for the new office's inception. As a result, it is the administration's opinion that it is unnecessary to alter or condense any of the County's boards and commissions whose duties encompass sustainability.

Cc: Jon Weinstein, Council Vice-Chairperson
Calvin Ball, Councilperson
Greg Fox, Councilperson
Jennifer Terrasa, Councilperson
Jessica Feldmark, Administrator