

**Baltimore Commission on Sustainability**  
**July 23, 2013 Meeting Report**

**Date: Tuesday July 23, 2013 from 4-6 pm**

**Location: 417 E. Fayette Street, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, Baltimore, MD 21202**

**Subject: Commission on Sustainability July 2013 General Meeting**

In Attendance: (Commissioners) –Cheryl Casciani, John Ciekot, Dana Cooper, Fran Flanigan, Earl Johnson, Gerie Okwesa, Cindy Parker, John Quinn, Scot Spencer, Lynn Heller

(Staff) - Beth Strommen, Alice Kennedy, Kristin Baja

Meeting called to order: 4:02 pm

Topics addressed:

- Minutes approved June 28, 2013 meeting. John Ciekot moves and Lynn seconds.
- Chair Report
  - August- DP3 Vote in August
  - September- Briefed Approve Urban Ag Plan
  - October- Planning
  - Tonight's Agenda
    - Discussion of Polystyrene — Amendments made to Bill
    - Disaster Preparedness and Planning Project (DP3) Briefing
- Staff Report
  - DP3 – Posted online for public review and changes. Town Hall will be July 30<sup>th</sup>, 6-8 pm at War Memorial
  - Urban Agriculture is moving forward
  - Presentation to State Commission on Environmental Justice — (State Commission from this Commission)
  - Upcoming Climate Summit; visit [ClimateChange.Maryland.Gov](http://ClimateChange.Maryland.Gov) for details
  - Call for organizations to support the CIF.
- City Council Bill #12-0104 Food Establishments – Polystyrene Products Food Packaging Institute
  - Do not have someone from CM
  - Commission discusses merits and intent
    - Supportive to remove PS waste
    - Several points needed to be added
    - Presence of different trash in the waste stream
    - Impact on businesses
    - Important: Larger context consumer education around trash
    - Baltimore has a trash problem
  - Baltimore Office of Sustainability had no objection to legislation at that time
  - Amended bill
  - Lauren Poor from Blue Water Baltimore provided comment about trash and the Healthy Harbor program
  - The atmosphere around us is in a different place regarding trash than it was a year ago
    - The previous intent was not to be a force to stop the bill
    - Supportive of intent but needed to take a larger look at the issue

- It was made clear that this was not a hearing — the Commissioners need to get more information, with plenty of time for questions which would provide further information. The discussion was not to be rushed.
- The Office of Sustainability received letters from business owners, most were in opposition.
- Eliminating litter is just one item of concern, as stewards of the Baltimore Sustainability Plan
- Mike Levy presented information from the American Chemistry Council. He provided a view on the sustainability issue regarding waste and recycling, noting similar goals with the Sustainability Plan. The change needed is sustained environmental, economic, and social conditions.
  - Noted polystyrene products as being valuable for many businesses, but are unfortunately littered. There was a need to approach experts, recognizing that the root cause of litter is behavior. Noted the Keep America Beautiful campaign.
  - Noted that cities which have passed bans generally have not experienced a decrease in litter, only a change in litter composition.
  - The SP Blueprint is predicated on meeting current environmental standards. The Proposed ban doesn't meet any of the three needs.
  - Alternatives are paper and plastic. Foam to paper — recycling program investment.
  - Paper food service recycling.
  - Foam products are 97% air, 3% “stuff.” They are lighter, and there is less solid waste; few emissions — overall, these products have a lower footprint.
  - DART worked to get drop off location at Sisson Street. It is expensive adding polystyrene to curbside pick-up, but this is a preferable alternative to some than a ban.
  - Food service is not a large part of the waste stream.
  - Foam has a higher heating value, which helps to burn other trash.
  - The economic reasoning used is popular; in certain applications, foam is better. Foam products work best to keep items hot. Being 97% air, it is extremely inexpensive. There would be an economic impact from a ban on this product.
  - Small businesses would be forced to increase menu prices.
  - There is also an associated sanitation aspect, as foam products keep bacteria levels low. In 50 years of being recycled, there are few, if any, cases of individuals getting sick using foam or polystyrene.
  - The social impact is the most difficult. Litter is an issue, the Commission agrees with Kraft. Whether foam or any other product, getting trash under control will require new partnerships.
  - Commitment is required from the government; there are a lot of programs out there. Met with the Mayor's office, looking at what they have done with DPW. The Clean Community Competition, funded by Waste Management, cleans neighborhoods. Felt consistent with what they have already done without bans; noting that 21 neighborhoods all approach this differently.
  - The amount of visible polystyrene litter is 1.25%
  - Safety aspects — been around chemicals product is safe, not a big issue.
  - Continue to not support the ban. Ban on this product would not achieve a more sustainable food service network — not pushing to ban the other products.
  - Litter is not going away overnight. Businesses would rather be a partner in this process.
  - Take a hard look and see if the amended bill would achieve the identification of a more sustainable food service product.
- Councilman Kraft addressed the Commission

- Apologized for not being able to join the Commission last year, for he felt the issue would have been resolved earlier.
- This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> time the Bill has been introduced.
- In 2006, it did not move forward. Mayor Dixon was asked to hold it.
- This most recent proposal has 12 co-sponsors; and the effort began last summer.
- The chair mentioned it was not the intent of the previous report to kill the Bill; unfortunately, the Commission's report had done so. The Bill lost 2 of the required 8 votes due to a lack of support from this Commission.
- When this proposal began, it was an outright ban on Polystyrene products. Discussion of a fee began.
- Concern is that it is the most visible item in the waste stream.
- The Bill addresses means to fund the stormwater utility and education. Money from Styrofoam is going to grants for stormwater projects in communities.
- There was tremendous push-back, in opposition of an outright ban or proposed fee.
- The Baltimore City Harbor is trash impaired. 85% of the mass of trash in the Harbor is polystyrene cups, plates, etc. People will purchase a drink, or other item, and throw the polystyrene container in the gutter, where it is washed into the stormdrain and into the Harbor.
- This Bill focuses only on those containers. Recognize existing alternatives: Safeway's salad bar uses recyclable containers. This can't be done with polystyrene products unless they are rinsed and driven to Sisson Street. Cups from businesses like Panera or Starbucks are a heavier paper, or lined cup. Many other items can be used and are recyclable.
- This amended Bill is different. It simply redefines polystyrene and what disposable food service ware is; does not include meat trays, or other containers for pre-prepared food. The new Bill prohibits City use completely.
- The Bill being reviewed by the Committee was the Bill as it currently exists.
- The Commission's report was strongly needed.
- Councilman Kraft presented comments to Mr. Levy:
  - The industry is committed to dealing with litter, which was applauded. However, Mr. Levy noted it is difficult to continue these efforts if a ban is initiated. The industry is willing to work together as long as it's not being hurt.
  - Kraft noted that not all products are banned, and that consumers may still purchase their own polystyrene products.
  - Kraft noted Polystyrene is lighter, it floats and appears to be all over the place. There are existing partnerships with the business and development communities. People do not want to open a business or build homes in a dirty neighborhood, tourists to paddle boats through trash. Can't keep telling people to put their litter away doing that for 300 years. There is a difference between metal, plastic, polystyrene. Polystyrene is crushed. Already hospitals use corn fiber; schools use recyclable and have moved away from polystyrene to plastic and created jobs for parents who help with recycling.
- In Washington, Illinois, Georgia lobbyists go around.
- 50 Years since Silent Spring was published. In Baltimore, the City passed a smoking ordinance. No one can smoke in Baltimore restaurants, and restaurants are still in business.
- In the Baltimore Sustainability Plan, the first goal is Cleanliness, with the action "Eliminate litter throughout the City." This requires taking certain products out of the waste stream. Green Economy strategy #4 aims to "Raise Baltimore's profile as

a forward-thinking, green city.” Kraft noted that no other major city on the East Coast has pursued something this big, suggesting that Baltimore could be a leader.

- Kraft noted that this was his official request for the Commission.
- John C. questioned if the industry was successful in marketing biodegradable packaging vs. non-biodegradable. Biodegradable does not degrade if it in a landfill.
  - In food service, it doesn’t make much sense to use degradable products; certain people will buy them because of personal satisfaction.
  - Biodegradable requires additional money to prepare using chemicals.
  - The 6-pack soda can rings can now be made photo-degradable, but they’re still present as litter.
- The national average of polystyrene in the waste stream is 1.5% . Of food service waste, it’s 2-3%.
- Councilman Kraft noted a study at the outfall in recent months to evaluate the water wheel, which broke down due to volume. In 8 months in 2008, the Jones Falls collected a volume of 300,000 lbs of litter.
- Anna Episbonis, who has worked 34 years at Cross Street Market, recognizes that trash is the problem. The cost is a major problem for small businesses. Consumers may leave the alternative items in the gutter. Behavior is the issue. Something positive is need, not just a ban on litter which would only create different litter. Lynn Heller asked her to demonstrate the economic impact. Anna Episbonis provided a cost sheet. There is little help for small businesses in absorbing costs. Recent laws have created significant hardship. She considered alternative, positive programs. Drew attention to lack of recycling bins, absence of recycling program at Cross Street market.
- Eric Simms, Oliver Community: asked how this ban would affect prices in local carry-outs. Noted that there would still be an issue of trash, so how would trash bins be affected?
- Kraft noted that litter bins on streets are inappropriately used as garbage cans for personal trash. The litter bin becomes another problem.
- Scott: thanked the Commission for the information; noted a lot of this concern was a behavior issue. Asked if any City agencies have tried to practice this? How much would it cost to put it into action.
  - Kraft noted he couldn’t say if any City agency had done it. Most aware that some schools had put it for City to do.
- Discussion of impact made by legislators; when Housing Codes are changed, it is not necessary to look at the costs; only at the best interests for citizens of Baltimore.
- Lynn Heller notes stormwater and clean-ups in the Harbor. Was curious to talk about small businesses. Healthy Harbor, Styrofoam is clearly an issue. People will continue to through trash on the ground.
  - Lauren Poor notes that during neighborhoods cleaning and greening efforts, a lot of trash is Styrofoam, plastic bottles, a lot of litter sources. To overall reduce amount of litter going into waterways need to make policy changes to do it. Support changing litter streams.
  - Fran Flanigan notes that a more comprehensive strategy to reduce litter is needed; cutting one or another will not do. Need behavior change.
  - To effectively educate, we have to start with children. This is tough to modify that behavior. Though 100,000 Believe trash cans were distributed, can’t find many today.
  - Trash issue should be addressed in as many ways as possible. Education has not been ignored. The 1+1 Program, the passed stormwater bill is both

successes. Baltimore spent more time on the stormwater utility bill than the other 9 jurisdictions had combined.

- Information needs to be available regarding Sisson Street acceptance of Styrofoam.
  - Community member asks how a lower-income community that relies on carryout for food can adjust to cost?
  - Alan Cohen asked about data to demonstrate impact on city ad amount of pollution decreased. Kraft notes that other cities have banned polystyrene primarily because of litter issue. The foam products were removed, but the items were being replaced.
  - TMDLs are not unique to Baltimore. LA has dealt with the issue, does not substitute items, addresses issues without product bans through education, Friends of the LA River, Stormwater fees, law enforcement, etc. In order to ensure a continued reduction in litter, must take comprehensive actions year after year.
- Kristin Baja presented DP3 Information
    - Briefing presented, vote on the full plan in August.
    - Review of hazards, process, strategies and actions.
      - The Process involves impacts, vulnerabilities, and risk assessments, as well as plan development.
    - The plan demonstrates some examples so as to make real some of the possible projections. Global climate problem requires government attention, currently insufficient.
    - The plan is intended to be viewed by various audiences, and should provide a resource for individuals who hope to know how they, specifically, might prepare. It is working intently to ensure appropriate translation throughout.

Meeting Adjourned: 6:10 pm

**Upcoming Events:**

- 2014: changing from the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday.