

Appendix D: Results of Focus Group Interviews

During the summer of 2013, eleven local jurisdictions, all located in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, provided information for the manual. On July 23, 2013, twelve local officials, representing nine boroughs and townships located in Lancaster County, PA, gathered at the Warwick Township Offices and participated in a focus group interview about stormwater management in their jurisdictions. Officials from the City of Lynchburg, Virginia and the Town of Bel Air, Maryland participated in similar interviews on July 30, 2013 and August 6, 2013, respectively. The names and affiliations of the officials who were interviewed are shown on the final page of this report. Philip Favero facilitated the meetings for the Environmental Finance Center.

Almost all of Lancaster County, PA – with a population of about 520,000 people located in 18 boroughs, 44 townships, and unincorporated areas of the county – drains into the Chesapeake Bay Basin via the Susquehanna River Watershed. Lynchburg, a municipality of about 50 square miles and 77, 000 people, is located on the banks of the James River near the geographic center of Virginia. Bel Air, a municipality of approximately 10,000 people, is the county seat for Harford County, located northeast of Baltimore City, and was developed, in part, because several streams run through the Town, and these offered potential for water-powered industry in the late 1700s.

During the interviews, participants provided answers to eight questions. At the beginning of the meeting, the facilitator provided the questions on a handout. Questions were then considered, one-by-one: the facilitator asked the officials to write their answers and led a discussion about how the officials had responded. During the discussion, the facilitator took notes and, at the end of the interview, collected the handouts containing written answers.

Responses to questions provided during discussion, as summarized by the facilitator, are shown below in regular type, interview by interview. Answers written by participants, but which were not included in the discussions, are shown in italics. To improve clarity, while at the same time preserving content, the facilitator edited some of the respondents' written answers, adding modifier words for explanation, and spelling out full names for acronyms.

Q1 What are the major stormwater issues or concerns in your jurisdiction?

Lancaster County, PA: Issues and Concerns

- a. Our township is now including “stormwater quality” – e.g., sediment-loading – as well as “stormwater quantity” – e.g., management of dam facilities – to the set of services for which it is responsible. This change in services implies significant additions to management complexity and budget expense.
- b. Even though, as the permit holder, we are ultimately responsible for stormwater services, we are coping with a “fragmented system of implementation,” which involves multiple homeowners associations (HOAs) that have responsibility for maintaining stormwater control facilities. This fragmented system requires much staff time and financial outlay on our part, including time for education because of the high turnover rate of the people responsible for the HOA facilities.

- c. Given changes in the set of stormwater services we are providing, we must respond to many questions and concerns from citizens, as well as from our elected officials.
- d. *I am concerned that we work with our neighboring municipalities but without knowing the age or condition of their stormwater infrastructure.*
- e. *Not having the support of the board of supervisors to manage the costs of stormwater systems.*
- f. *The need for more education; manpower to handle the issues; and how to persuade developers who do not want to “think outside of the box” that green stormwater management ideas will yield results that will be to their own benefit.*
- g. *Roadway flooding, maintenance of private facilities, and stream-bank restoration, especially in agricultural areas.*
- h. *Financing and education about financing for both residents and public officials.*
- i. *The attitude “my cost, their gain.” Poor soils. The need to envision a holistic approach.*
- j. *Aging stormwater infrastructure and the lack of public awareness about it.*
- k. *The quantity of stream-bank restoration we face; these are big projects that cost a lot of money. Also, addressing developers vs. agricultural properties.*
- l. *We are without a holistic approach to stormwater; the township engineer, only, reviews proposals. I’m also concerned about how we will find the staff time needed to manage overall stormwater systems in the township.*

Lynchburg, VA: Issues and Concerns

- a. An important concern is increasing the environmental awareness of how we live, for everyone in Lynchburg, and how we operate, for elected officials and city employees.
- b. Another concern is meeting the need for water quality improvements in the city.
- c. We must comply with mandates – e.g., the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer (MS4) permit – and meeting goals – e.g., the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP).
- d. A long-term issue is that of maintaining and improving the stormwater infrastructure.
- e. *Obtaining adequate funding.*
- f. *Hiring sufficient staff.*
- g. *Coordinating interdepartmental operations.*

Bel Air, MD: Issues and Concerns

- a. At this point in time, the Town knows it must comply with state and federal regulations, including Phase II NPDES Permit requirements and WIP requirements for the Chesapeake Bay, but it is unclear what specific actions will be required of the Town. We are hoping to receive more guidance from the State of Maryland.
- b. As an urbanized place with very little open space available, the Town will be challenged to find areas sufficiently large enough to treat stormwater on an efficient scale.
- c. In Bel Air, home owner associations (HOAs) are legally responsible for maintaining all of the private stormwater BMPs in Town. When an HOA does not perform its maintenance responsibilities, the Town must intervene to do the work; and when we do so, we bill

individual property owners in the HOA for their portion of the cost. Some property owners are resisting paying the fee; that results in a lien on their property and, ultimately, a tax sale of the property. Likely, those resisting paying their bills do not realize there will be significant legal costs to retaining their property when it is included in a tax sale.

- d. *We are concerned about where the revenues will originate to begin projects.*

Q2 How did those issues get on your jurisdiction’s agenda for action? (In particular, what role did staff officials have in the process?)

Lancaster County, PA: Agenda for Action Process

- a. Staff is critically responsible for identifying issues. A major effort involves meeting with HOA representatives; we feel responsible for having HOAs be proactive and take preventive actions.
- b. We want to avoid a “screaming meeting.” To do so requires staff efforts, with the board, to orient and educate our elected officials and to demonstrate that they need to care about stormwater issues.
- c. State permit requirements and fines imposed for noncompliance have gotten the attention of elected officials and citizens.
- d. The discussion about the budget provides an important opportunity for getting stormwater management on the agenda; the staff has been successful in encouraging a slight increase in funds for stormwater services.
- e. *Public Works staff members evaluate projects and gather pricing information, which is then taken back to the Public Works Commission for recommendation and onto elected officials for funding. Sometimes these projects take a back seat, however, to other programs.*
- f. *Manager and staff get complaints, monitor systems, and address problems.*
- g. *We issue violation notices after trying to speak with property owners regarding maintenance problems.*
- h. *The MS4 Permit renewal brought many stormwater issues into the forefront with staff and elected officials. Staff needed to be educated, to educate the board and public, and to begin the technical work.*
- i. *Usually issues arise because of problems in the municipality; note: this is a reactive, not a proactive approach.*
- j. *Stormwater services play a significant role among the services we provide but must compete against other public issues for action.*
- k. *The increase in costs for capital projects to address stormwater management gets these services on the agenda during budget discussions. MS4 regulations have been a wakeup call for everyone and made stormwater management a priority.*
- l. *Continued updates through participation in the Lancaster County Clean Water Consortium and the Environmental Finance Center.*

Lynchburg, VA: Agenda for Action Process

- a. Work on the MS4 permit goes back for a decade, but in 2009 the Water Resources Department concluded that stormwater management was an increasing administrative and financial challenge, and we started to “do our homework” to gather more information.
- b. We began a series of briefings of the elected officials, initially during a City Council retreat, to provide council members with information.
- c. We also created a stormwater advisory committee (SWAC), made up of 25 citizen stakeholders, who represented a cross section of the community.
- d. And, we began to increase our public outreach to all citizens through the media.

Bel Air, MD: Agenda for Action Process

- a. Primarily, changes in stormwater services are being driven by state legislation.
- b. We also have some citizen groups at the county and regional level who are advocates for stormwater services to serve environmental values.
- c. And we attempt to coordinate our work with Harford County officials.
- d. Although we are in a time of uncertainty, the Town staff brief our elected officials to inform them, as best we can, of state and federal regulations, guidance for compliance from state authorities, and our local options to treat stormwater and pay for those services.

Q3 How was information gathered to support action?

Lancaster County, PA: Process for Gathering Information

- a. We gather information from the Internet, where we can view what other jurisdictions are doing.
- b. Stream monitoring data, using data loggers (HOBOS) to monitor water conditions such as temperature and the presence of chemicals, are important tools. HOBOS can be used to create a local and credible data base which offers proof of problems and “without-with” test results for stormwater control devices. (At least one government represented in the interview provides its data base to the public via its website.)
- c. Public and private organizations have provided information and conducted studies. (Organizations mentioned during the discussion and included among written answers were: Lancaster Clean Water Consortium; Lancaster County Conservation District; Lancaster Farmland Trust; Lancaster County Planning Commission; private engineering and environmental firms; and watershed groups.)
- d. *By listening to citizen complaints.*
- e. *By field observations.*
- f. *By consulting with internal experts, e.g., the Public Works Staff and the Borough Engineer.*
- g. *Sharing data among neighboring local governments, either by visiting neighbors directly or through public meetings, forums, and seminars.*

Lynchburg, VA: Process for Gathering Information

- a. We strengthened our internal database by drawing on our in-house expertise and collecting additional data, e.g., by gathering data on the types and areas of land parcels contributing to stormwater runoff in the city.
- b. We looked to the experiences of other jurisdictions. (Being involved in statewide committees and associations – e.g., groups concerned with stormwater management in Virginia and with the Chesapeake Bay cleanup – not only provided information about state policies and about what other municipalities are doing, it also strengthened our credibility with city decision makers.)
- c. We employed a private consulting firm that had provided advice, previously, to other jurisdictions regarding stormwater management and asked them to review existing services and costs.
- d. We incorporated citizen input to our data base for decision making.
- e. *We gathered information from various sources, including: previous studies of stormwater services in Lynchburg; the Virginia Municipal Stormwater Association; agencies of the Commonwealth of Virginia; stormwater utilities in other jurisdictions; our SWAC; and the Virginia Stakeholder Advisory Group for the state’s WIP.*

Bel Air, MD: Process for Gathering Information

- a. At this point, we are seeking additional guidance about stormwater service improvements from the State of Maryland. Hopefully, we will be able determine the scope and costs of projects prior to being required to assess fees.
- b. The science about the effectiveness of BMPs for reducing stormwater pollution seems thin.
- c. Our recently developed sustainability plan includes multiple actions we will take that will reduce stormwater pollution through: the conservation of water resources; a water stewardship effort for Winters Run (the Town’s major source of drinking water); natural resource conservation for Town parks and facilities; and reductions in environmental impacts by the reducing the use of motor-vehicles.
- d. *We have received some printed materials from the state and been involved in webinars, but we are seeking, from the state, more information about solutions to the problem.*
- e. *The Town has the potential to study its stormwater needs by using GIS technology to determine which geographic areas have treatment, which have partial treatment, and which have no treatment. We could then overlay watershed areas onto treatment areas to target projects for service upgrades.*
- f. *We lack the funds to conduct studies in the Town about what would work best to reduce stormwater pollution.*

Q4 How was that information communicated to decision makers and the public?

Lancaster County, PA: Communication Methods

- a. We bring in speakers, i.e., credible experts.
- b. Signage for public observation is important. For example, a sign can explain what the stormwater Best Management Practice (BPM) at a project site is.

- c. A recent “Watershed Expo” was helpful. It was a “family affair” marketed via the Internet, newspaper, and word-of-mouth; the Expo included various presentations and demonstrations, including one popular among children about the relationship between stormwater and living creatures. Also, the Expo was located near a stream, which provided a “teachable opportunity” for participants.
- d. We realize we are interdependent with neighboring jurisdictions and seek to convey a consistent message across jurisdictions.
- e. *Township staff has to continue to get out in front of the stormwater program and bring the board along.*
- f. *We communicate through: newsletters; inserts in trash bills, flyers; involvement in the Lampeter Community Fair; a logo for EFC project on township vehicles; public meetings, reports, studies, e-mail messages, phone conversations, websites, tours, and a float in a parade; one-on-one with residents by explaining projects; on-going incorporation of stormwater into land development plans and building permits; partnerships with local watershed alliances; and by providing decision makers with regular updates, reminding elected officials that stormwater management is not going away.*
- g. *We are applying for grants to educate and bring about behavioral change.*

Lynchburg, VA: Communication Methods

- a. Working with the SWAC, we helped the committee to reach a general consensus, after which the committee made a presentation to the City Council. Included in the committee’s recommendations was that the city should create a stormwater utility.
- b. The Water Resources Department followed with its own recommendations to the council, which seconded the recommendations made by the SWAC, with the exception of a revenue gathering mechanism. (The SWAC recommended gathering revenues for stormwater services from a combination of property taxes and fees; the Department recommended the use of fees only.)
- c. *The public was kept informed during the decision-making process in various ways: radio; newspaper; bill stuffers; and through interactive TV/the city website.*
- d. *SWAC meetings were public, and information about them was made available on the city website. Public meetings and hearings were interactive and broadcast on the TV/city website.*

Bel Air, MD: Communication Methods

- a. The Town is communicating with both decision makers and the public through individual conversations, group meetings, and outreach methods such as the Town website and newsletter.
- b. *We briefed our elected officials during a recent retreat, where stormwater was emphasized, and also have provided briefings at several of the Commissioners’ work sessions.*

Q5 How was political support for action by decision makers developed?

Lancaster County, PA: Developing Political Support

- a. Careful listening is important.
- b. Political support is enhanced by having “homegrown information,” e.g., HOB0 data from local streams, to make your case.
- c. The permitting requirement and threat of being fined is the “hammer that opens the door,” but that is inherently negative and should be followed up with positive messages.
- d. A powerful positive message is to identify stream improvements as assets to the community for recreation, trout fishing, for example, historic preservation, and tourism and other forms of economic development.
- e. To gain the support of elected officials, make a success story look like it was their idea.
- f. The various methods of communicating, as shown in responses to Q4, provide answers to Q5 also.
- g. *Proposing changes to the budget gets attention.*
- h. *Public support can be developed through demonstrated action.*

Lynchburg, VA: Developing Political Support

- a. The Water Resources Department did its homework and communicated honestly and consistently with decision makers.
- b. Our communications were primarily about the city’s needs, current and future, and about what consequences the city could expect from inaction. (The City Council eventually approved the stormwater utility by one vote.)
- c. Implementing a credit/rebate program for the stormwater utility will have significant political appeal.

Bel Air, MD: Developing Political Support

Negative reactions, including reactions by some in the business community, to Harford County’s compliance with Maryland House Bill 987, which requires the imposition of a stormwater fee, imply there is not strong local political support for stormwater fees.

Q6 How have you organized in your jurisdiction to implement policy and program decisions?

Lancaster County, PA: Organizing for Implementation

- a. It is important to have a comprehensive program; every department has a relationship to stormwater management; staff should become aware, commonly, of that fact, and it should become a shared mindset.
- b. The shift in thinking that is needed should be from reacting to stormwater problems to preventing them, thus making problem sharing part of problem solving.
- c. Stormwater management should involve public-private partnerships whereby private landowners become engaged because they see it is to their advantage to do so; they see

stormwater management as a way to increase the value of their property; and both parties share information and thereby build trust.

- d. *We have involved key staff members – Public Works, Building and Engineer – to work with EFC to compile data, prepare a MS4 Plan, establish implementation goals, and write a plan for Board adoption. We have also checked with efforts being done by other agencies and townships.*
- e. *We are trying to link all aspects of the township together – stormwater projects, zoning permits, oversight of development, administrative “paperwork,” grant-writing and volunteers. A comprehensive, systems approach.*
- f. *Working with staff, consultants, and our neighbors to establish policies that will benefit our community.*
- g. *FCC – Flood Control Committee – Council Subcommittee is appointed; make sure it gets funded.*
- h. *With a small staff, it is important that the manager, zoning officer, and public works department all have ways to help implement: enforcement of rules, outreach to community, physical improvements with projects, etc.*
- i. *Show private property owners the data; get them excited as to why they need to spend money – marketability for developers, for example.*
- j. *Working on adopting a new stormwater ordinance. Comprehensive watershed management is our goal.*

Lynchburg, VA: Organizing for Implementation

- a. This is a work in progress. The challenge is how to coordinate stormwater services and standard operating procedures involving stormwater across all city departments. City employees should know not only what, but why certain practices create stormwater benefits. We have formed a working group of stakeholders from all of the affected departments so that everyone’s concerns can be addressed.
- b. Included in the working group are: Assessor; Billings and Collection; City Manager’s Office; Communications and Marketing; Community Development; Economic Development; Finance; Fire; Information Technology (particularly GIS); Parks and Recreation; Public Works (particularly representatives from services involving streets, leaf collection, and infrastructure maintenance); and Water Resources.
- c. *An organization that we realize should be more integrated into the city’s stormwater management effort is the local public school system.*

Bel Air, MD: Organizing for Implementation

- a. We have begun with some actions that are incorporated into our officially-approved sustainability plan.
- b. If funds were available, we would like to conduct a GIS study of treatment and watershed areas and of the preferred locations for BMPs.
- c. We also want to study alternative technologies for how to treat stormwater in an almost fully built-out community with not much open space.

Q7 From your professional experience, what has been the most significant stormwater-management challenge you have had to overcome?

Lancaster County, PA: Most Significant Challenge

- a. How to pay for services is paramount.
- b. Data management is essential.
- c. Turnover among HOA personnel who are responsible for stormwater controls is frustrating.
- d. For some people in Pennsylvania, the Chesapeake Bay is commonly viewed as “downstream.” It is important, thus, to focus on local benefits.
- e. A highly individualistic (“It is my private property”) attitude among landowners can be problematic.
- f. I’m challenged to make room for stormwater management among my day-to-day responsibilities. I attempt to avoid having other demands on my time that crowded-out stormwater management and put it on a back burner.
- g. Getting elected officials to embrace it is a challenge.
- h. *Making stormwater a priority for work flow and policy makers.*
- i. *Educating the public and elected officials on the importance of stormwater and the watershed. Changing the behavior/habits of the public.*
- j. *Budget, data management, staff time.*
- k. *Communicating with residents who have specific stormwater facilities on their properties and for which they are responsible.*
- l. *Money. We have been challenged in figuring out cost-effective ways to manage and treat stormwater, especially in how to integrate it into public works projects.*
- m. *Regulatory agency support and guidance.*
- n. *Getting coworkers – township employees – to understand the importance of why we are spending funds to clean up streams and stormwater facilities. Why don’t they care about water?*

Lynchburg, VA: Most Significant Challenge

- a. Creating a utility billing system, including designing the mechanism for collection, has been a significant challenge; we have successfully implemented what we believe to be a good system, but we realize we need to continue to improve it; for example, calculating impervious surface areas and auditing of the system for data errors are continuing challenges.
- b. (Some positive qualities of the billing system for the City of Lynchburg stormwater utility were mentioned in response to the question.) Those qualities included the following items:
 - The city has authority to cut-off the water supply to properties that have not paid their stormwater fees. This authority has contributed, likely, to a high collection rate, almost 100 percent of fees assessed; this rate is well above what some comparative communities are achieving.

- Many properties that contribute to stormwater service needs, but which are exempt from paying property taxes, are being assessed fees for the utility. Such properties include, for example, colleges and universities, hospitals, and churches.
- c. The city is also investigating, as nudges to behavioral improvements in stormwater management by property owners and managers, the use of credits and rebates of utility fees.
- d. For the long term, data management – particularly the integration of data sets, auditing the system for errors, and backing up all components of the system – is and will continue to be a large concern for the department.
- e. Although the problem in Lynchburg is not of the same magnitude as it is in some other jurisdictions, we face the challenge of communicating with those people in HOAs who have responsibility for maintaining stormwater management systems. In some cases it is difficult to locate the maintenance agreement for purposes of using it as an enforcement mechanism.

Bel Air, MD: Most Significant Challenge

- a. The most significant technical challenge is treating stormwater effectively in an urban area that does not provide open spaces to install facilities and where some soils are poorly suited for infiltration.
- b. How to maintain BMPs located on private properties – e.g., residential developments with HOAs – is a real concern.
- c. *Getting HOAs to take proper ownership, including financial responsibility, of stormwater facilities in their communities.*

Q8 What has been the most important lesson you have learned?

Lancaster County, PA: Most Important Lesson Learned

- a. We cannot effectively manage stormwater alone. It is a multiple jurisdiction, watershed-wide issue. We all are interdependent with our neighbors.
- b. People are interested; they do care; the key is education.
- c. *We need to have consistent and persistent actions and messages.*
- d. *Getting more people to take ownership of the program makes them be invested in the outcome.*
- e. *Teamwork makes it easier and offers surprising results.*
- f. *Real impact comes only from a comprehensive approach to watershed management.*
- g. *Stormwater matters.*
- h. *It takes community buy-in to make a stormwater program successful.*
- i. *You can do anything with the public's support.*

Lynchburg, VA: Most Important Lesson Learned

- a. The lesson would be that understanding how to create an effective billing system is complex beyond expectations.
- b. We need to hire people who are passionate about stormwater.
- c. *Communicating often and with accurate information is critical.*
- d. *Everyone contributes to stormwater; therefore, everyone should pay to help manage it.*

Bel Air, MD: Most Important Lesson Learned

- a. The public is poorly educated about the need for stormwater service improvements.
- b. The state is pushing regulations, but the science behind stormwater treatment methods is thin.
- c. *Retrofitting for stormwater treatment is costly; we are paying dearly for mistakes made twenty years ago.*
- d. *Statewide, if we are going to make progress in stormwater management, we must do a better job at education on all levels.*

PARTICIPANTS

Lancaster County, PA

- Cathy Rathman, Engineer, East Cocalico Township
- Dan Zimmerman, Township Manager, Warwick Township
- John Haldeman, Public Works Director, Rapho Township
- Joellyn Warren, Director of Community Development, West Lampeter Township
- Justin Evans, Director of Community Development and Public Outreach, Penn Township
- Mark Heister, Township Manager, East Cocalico Township
- Phil Mellot, Assistant Public Works Director, Manheim Township
- Ron Youtz, Township Manager, West Hempfield Township
- Sara Gibson, Township Manager, Rapho Township
- Stacie Gibbs, Zoning Officer, Borough of Mount Joy
- Sue Barry, Borough Manager, Borough of Lititz
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Lynchburg, VA

- Erin Hawkins, Water Quality Manager, Water Resources Department
- Greg Poff, Assistant Director, Water Resources Department
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Bel Air, MD

- Chris Schlehr, Town Administrator
- Kevin Small, Director of Planning and Community Development
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