

**Maryland Sierra Club ~ Catoctin Group Questionnaire
2014 Frederick County Council Election**

Name: Jessica Fitzwater

Office seeking and district number (if applicable): County Council, District 4

Chesapeake Bay

1. What is your position on the storm water utility fee?

We in Maryland are blessed to have the nation's largest estuary mostly within our borders. It is one of the many things that makes Maryland special, but with the Bay comes the responsibility of ensuring its legacy for our children. Although I would like to see the storm water utility fee apply to all Maryland counties, I support the Storm Water Management-Watershed Protection and Restoration Program. This program requires nine counties, including Frederick, to adopt a storm water remediation fee and establish a local water shed protection and restoration fund to ensure that funding to address these issues is available. While some, including our Frederick County Commissioners, have made light of our responsibilities to deal effectively with storm water runoff and its effects on the Bay's health, it is a responsibility I understand and take seriously.

Frederick County has historically funded storm water upgrades from the general fund with an average of \$2.5 million per year. The county's own projection of funding needed to meet the requirements of the MS4 permit is \$112 million. Clearly, the \$5.35 million currently proposed in the FY2015 budget is inadequate to retrofit surfaces in urban areas with storm water management facilities. Considering these numbers, it is difficult to understand why the current BOCC established a \$0.01 cent fee that generates less than \$500 per year to meet our future obligations. Having failed to adequately protect the Bay in the past does not excuse us from our obligation to protect our water shed and preserve the Chesapeake Bay for the future.

I would like to see Frederick County investigate using a similar approach to Howard County with two rate structures for the storm water fee: a tiered, flat-rate system for residential properties and an individually-tailored fee based on square footage of impervious surfaces for non-residential properties. We should also make sure businesses are aware of the many credits and rebates available to business owners if they make improvements to their properties that help mitigate polluted runoff.

Climate Change

2. Do you have any ideas on how to make the county government a leader with regard to climate change initiatives and climate change adaptation?

Experts with the National Resources Defense Council suggest that “climate change is the single biggest environmental and humanitarian crisis of our time.” Local governments that are not making climate change initiatives central to their planning, decision-making, and vision for the future are not only adding to the global problem, but causing serious damage to our communities.

Many of the initiatives discussed in this questionnaire directly demonstrate the important role climate change must play in our decision-making. Smart growth is a climate change policy. Walkable communities and public transit are climate change solutions. Taking steps to enable or incentivize alternative energy is another. Recycling, composting, and other waste reduction efforts are climate change policies. These have not been priorities during the current administration and it is my position that they should be.

Currently, the county government has adopted two of the three state goals required to participate in the Maryland Smart Energy Communities Program. I would like to see the county also undertake the third goal of establishing an electricity consumption baseline and developing a plan with the goal to reduce per-square foot electricity consumption of county owned buildings by 15% within 5 years of the baseline year. We can reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and encourage the development of renewable energy by purchasing from green power sources such as wind and solar. This is one specific way we can make sure we are doing our part in working to solve global warming.

Frederick County should also be taking a stand against Maryland’s current designation of waste-to-energy as a renewable energy source. Converting resources to ash and air emissions is not renewable in any normal application of the term.

Development

- 3. Please explain your position and ideas on promoting sustainable redevelopment and smart growth development in Frederick County.*

Frederick County needs to get serious about smart growth development. The term is often abused by developers and elected officials alike when, in reality, only one or two smart growth principles are in place. True smart growth is a complex mindset that requires broad-based planning and action.

I would suggest that Frederick County make growth decisions using the EPA Smart Growth Network principles that were developed by looking at the experiences and successes of communities around the nation that have used smart growth approaches to create and maintain great neighborhoods. The principles are as follows:

- 1) Mix land uses
- 2) Take advantage of compact building design
- 3) Create a range of housing opportunities and choices

- 4) Create walkable neighborhoods
- 5) Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
- 6) Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
- 7) Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities
- 8) Provide a variety of transportation choices
- 9) Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective
- 10) Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions

This is not an isolated set of policies, but rather an approach to growth that directly and substantially overlaps with other important issues such as economically efficient services, affordable housing, and appropriate school construction.

Frederick County should especially work with its municipalities to look at revitalization downtown areas and rundown commercial areas as potential growth sites. Revitalization of these areas can help prevent the “suburban sprawl” we are already starting to see and provide more homes near our existing jobs, shopping areas, and public transportation.

a. Do you offer any progressive and/or novel ideas?

I think that making these smart growth principles an integral part of our future planning and development would be a progressive next step. This is not an overnight change to our approach, but would require a serious shift in focus and vision. I am also open to other novel approaches to growth in the county.

Transportation

4. Please explain your position and ideas on increasing public transportation within Frederick County.

Because public transportation is a daily necessity for many Frederick County residents, we need to keep it widely available and affordable. At the same time, an integrated public transportation system should be a key component of the County’s overall environmental sustainability plan. As bus equipment ages out, we need to invest in replacement vehicles that burn clean fuel.

With approximately 40% of Frederick County residents commuting out of the county each day, public transportation for commuter services should be a specific focus area. We have already made the investment to bring MARC commuter rail service to Frederick, but we need to investigate express service that will shorten commuting time to D.C., advertise MARC service more effectively, and have an on-going dialogue with commuters to improve the service and build more significant ridership. The county government should work with the City of Frederick, which currently operates the fee lot at the downtown station, so that more commuters will board there. This is one of the only fee lots in the MARC system. I would also like to look into whether expanding Meet-the-MARC shuttle bus service to cover more areas of the county might help build MARC ridership.

The MTA bus service to Shady Grove is very popular, and we should investigate its expansion, both to Shady Grove and possibly other locations in the metropolitan area that might warrant service.

Tied to the effort to increase public transportation is planning growth in a way that complements our existing and growing public transportation options. That means using smart growth principles, developing walkable communities, and building mixed use development that support economically viable public transit options.

a. Do you offer any progressive and/or novel ideas?

I support the idea that has been raised to improve the shoulders on I-270 to enable buses to circumvent traffic jams. If drivers are regularly watching buses speed by them as they sit in traffic jams on I-270, they may be more motivated to use public transportation.

b. What improvements could be made to MARC?

Many MARC commuters emphasize the need for reliability (on-time schedules) and flexibility (more departure times in the morning and evening). That means investing in up-to-date equipment. And that's why we need to expand ridership with express service to and from Frederick. More ridership will permit us to expand service, for example, offering mid-day service. We also need to draw drivers off the road by providing adequate free parking, especially at the downtown Frederick station.

c. What is your position on the Corridor Cities Transitway?

Although its initial components are based in Montgomery County, many Frederick County commuters who work in the I-270 corridor will benefit from these improvements. In addition, the Corridor Cities Transitway is a component recommended by a larger study that also lays out improvements to I-270 and on U.S. 15 all the way to Biggs Ford Road. It is imperative that we make progress on the Montgomery County elements and keep that momentum going north.

In the meantime, we need to strongly support MARC service in order to expand ridership and convince state leaders that these public transportation improvements make sense and are warranted.

Solid Waste

5. Please explain your position and ideas on how to handle solid waste issues in Frederick County.

I support expanding our county single-stream recycling program. While implementing single stream to homes was a great step, the county is still at less than 50% recycling, and other communities (in Maryland and across the country) have shown that a county like ours could be a lot more successful in our recycling efforts. I believe the county needs to set specific and ambitious targets, such as exceeding 70% waste diversion and reduction within 10 years, by

expanding single-stream collection to multi-family units and non-residential properties, considering the option of volume-based pricing options (pay as you throw) that would reward people and businesses for reducing waste, and examining both commercial and household composting options. We should also work to lock in strong long-term contracts and prices for the out-of-county hauling that will continue to be a part of our waste management picture.

a. What is your position on the proposed waste-to-energy incinerator project?

I am opposed to the waste-to-energy incinerator. The economic model under which the incinerator was approved was highly flawed from the beginning. The model used many uncertain variables and projected narrow, optimistic numbers for at least thirty year period. In the years since it was approved, and before ground has even been broken on the project, we can already see how bad the numbers are.

In the original model, population growth projections were too high and the assumption was made that average household waste generation would continue to increase. The model assumed the county would never exceed a 60% waste reduction rate during the lifetime of the facility. An unrealistic facilities capacity was expected; only possible by importing large amounts of out-of-county waste. The assumption was also made that others would be willing to pay us to take the waste. In addition, it was assumed that we would receive income levels from electricity sales based on rates that are much higher than what the market offers today.

The waste-to-energy incinerator is a huge financial risk that locks us into one dominant solution to our waste management while locking us out of many other emerging strategies and technologies.

b. Do you offer any progressive and/or novel ideas?

I would like us to keep a close eye on Howard County's pilot composting program and look to implement something similar in Frederick County. If we provide the tools and education to our residents, I think we would get substantial buy-in. This will only help us in our efforts to increase our waste diversion and reduction rate.

Water Resources

6. What should be done to improve the water quality of streams, rivers and lakes in Frederick County?

Water quality of our streams, rivers and lakes is proportional to the health of the watershed and the introduction of pollutants as the waterways head to the Chesapeake Bay and on to the Atlantic Ocean. Pollution enters our streams from air, land, and manufacturing and processing facilities. Airborne toxins are generated by incineration of municipal solid waste, coal fired power plants, and burning of automobile tires as tire-derived fuel. Surface toxins enter our streams from ineffective and antiquated storm water management practices and additional

nutrient stressors come from runoff of fertilizer used on lawns and farms. We can improve the quality of our rivers and streams by following some simple rules, such as:

- 1) Adopt land use policies that ensure adequate buffers on all stream banks.
- 2) Adopt storm water management practices that prevent, to the extent possible, direct runoff of surface water.
- 3) Use alternatives to incineration for solid waste disposal.
- 4) Eliminate or reduce the use of tire-derived fuel.
- 5) Ensure industrial pretreatment of waste, to the extent possible, before discharge into the storm water and sewer systems.
- 6) Employ best management practices to eliminate raw sewage discharge into rivers and streams.

Although these actions are not cheap and cannot be accomplished quickly, we need to start developing an action plan now to address the water quality of our streams and rivers for years to come.