

# Anne Arundel Waterway Restoration Alliance (AAWRA) 24 January 2012 Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, January 24, 2012, Southern District Police Headquarters, 35 Stepney Lane, Edgewater, MD

## Attendance

<b>Crouse, Earl</b>	Lake Placid	<b>Poulin, Bea</b>	AA County Exec. Office
<b>Sarvinas, George</b>	Lake Placid	<b>Penner, Vern</b>	Amberly
<b>Foyer, Charlie</b>	Pt. Field Landing	<b>Rickett, Paul</b>	Broadwater
<b>Harrison, Rhonda</b>	Brady Cove	<b>Salvenus, George</b>	Shore Acres
<b>Phillips, Jay</b>	Duvall Creek	<b>Spencer, Dick</b>	Severn Heights
<b>Whitcomb, Bob</b>	Saefern		

At 7:07 pm, Bob Whitcomb (AAWRA President) brought the meeting to order, welcomed all the attendees, and introduced members of the AAWRA board. The purpose of the meeting is to report on the communications with DNR and maritime associations, discuss position papers with Waterway Improvement Fund (WIF), AAWRA planned 2012 legislative actions, additional lobbying plans for 2012, and election of directors.

## Discussions:

After the officers were introduced, all attendees introduced themselves and stated any concerns. Jay mentioned the progress of the current dredging in Duvall creek and the private pier spurs. Jay also announced the advantages to becoming an AAWA member: public financial solutions to dredging, access to AAWRA dredging manual and BOD experienced counsel on dredging questions such as setbacks. Charlie Foyer of Pointfield Landing discussed and showed a photograph of the large amounts of sediment in the Severn headwaters as a result of Tropical Storm Irene. Bea Poulin, County Executive's Office, is a liaison to the communities and gave updates on the Duvall Creek dredge spoils truck complaints in Hillsmere.

The Waterway Improvement Fund (WIF) is getting less funding proportional to the stagnant economy. It has been a busy 4 months for the AAWRA board, the board responded favorably to the County proposed storm water utility fee, testifying on 11/30/11 in support of it to the County Council, but the bill was pulled before it was voted on. This legislation will apparently be on-hold until the State of Maryland decides on their flush tax actions and budget amounts.

## Election of Board of Directors:

AAWRA has a 9-member Board of Directors. Each individual is elected for a 3 year term. For 2012, AAWRA has 3 board positions open for election. Ed Hausknecht, Rhonda Harrison and Juliet Page positions were up for re-election. Ed is not standing for re-election and President Whitcomb suggested a replacement nominee, Richard (Dick) Spencer of Severn Heights. Dick Spencer has been working with Bob Whitcomb over the past 4 months on our positions for upcoming legislation. A request for additional nominations and discussion was made. The motion and 2nd to elect Rhonda Harrison, Juliet Page, and Richard Spencer was approved unanimously.

## Status of the Waterway Improvement Fund:

Bob Whitcomb and Dick Spencer met with DNR's Bob Gaudette and Olivia Campbell Andersen (DNR Legislative Director) to discuss how to strengthen the WIF. These plans were included in DNR's September

2011 report to the Legislature on the status of the WIF. The AAWRA Board developed responses to that report, and will support four key actions to increase funds going to the WIF (see handout). A paper was passed around diagramming the boating needs vs. available funding. A new financial burden the federal government will no longer dredge their main channels. It is estimated that 61 channels are designated as federal channels in MD. The estimate is \$6,000,000 to keep these federal channels open. DNR currently projects only \$15,000,000 in annual receipts for the WIF versus \$42,000,000 projected annual needs, resulting in a \$17 million gap between the budget amount available and boating requirements.

Currently, the WIF is used for waterway enforcement, maintaining navigational markings, dredging, and upgrades to public water access and public boat ramps. In Maryland, boater registration fees are among the lowest on the east coast. Currently, no money from registration fees is going to the WIF. A DNR proposal is to raise the vessel excise tax from 5% to 6% to match the Maryland sales tax rate and dedicate the increase to the WIF. There are other funding opportunities to get a portion of the slip fees and institute fees for public boat ramps. Even with all of these suggestions, the WIF still struggles to get half-way to the goal to meet the boaters' needs. Only three protected funds are in the state budget: Transportation, Environmental Areas, and the WIF. Two members of the finance committee said they can't protect fenced money from the general fund pressures. Previously, WIF money has been diverted to the general fund for education in other Maryland counties that do not have waterways or marina fuel fees. Another goal is to focus on the out-of-state boaters who do not contribute to the WIF.

Bob Whitcomb recommended that Paul Rickett, VP AAWRA, draft a letter to Senator Bush regarding the reinstating of the 0.3% of all of Maryland's gas tax to the WIF. There are short falls, and promises are not met for balancing the WIF budget. O'Malley was responsible for the decision to open the Conowingo Dam and deal with the resulting sediment environmental issues.

As of 1/14/12, the governor has not released the budget numbers for the new fiscal year. Currently, each DNR recommendation to strengthen the WIF may be a separate piece of legislation. AAWRA will support the following:

- Reinststitute the 0.3% of the fuel tax that previously accrued to the WIF.
- Raise the vessel excise tax to 6%, consistent with the current sales tax rate.
- Increase boater registration fees with dedication of these increased funds to the WIF
- Support the voluntary \$5 registration fee of non-motorized watercraft.

Delegate Bob Costa advised Paul Rickett he cannot guarantee the money would be dedicated to the WIF and could not be behind the legalization this year without AA county delegates support. Mike Bush, speaker, is the key to influence save the bay and working with the marine industry. The AAWRA took the initiative to draft a possible solution and is partnering with DNR to increase WIF revenues. No other organization is making recommendations to make things happen. A suggestion was made to meet with the delegates and senators in the county. Another suggestion was made to not initiate efforts until the politics "shake out". Ron George is the new chair of the delegation. Bob Whitcomb is reaching out to other lobbying organizations, such as Marine trades, the Maryland Saltwater Sportfishing Association, Ducks Unlimited, and Waterman's Association. The State budget is expected April 1, 2012, and the 2012 county capital project budget is expected by April 15, 2012.

The WIF does not fund the 45 foot Baltimore shipping channel. The channel is maintained by the Army Corp of Engineers and the Port of Baltimore. Taxes on huge ships support that dredging as well.

Dick Spencer mentioned the importance of the Watershed Stewards Academy to be involved in the prevention of storm water silting issues rather than the subsequent clean up. Most of the problems with the bay are related to the sediment pollutants. The root cause of the sediment is construction development , and increasing amounts of impervious surface replacing the wooded areas with no provisions to deal with the increase in magnitude of water being diverted to waterways.

The meeting adjourned at 8:38 pm. Meeting minutes will be available at the AAWRA website @ <http://www.aawra.org>, as provided by Rhonda Harrison, Secretary