

P.O. Box 2570
Ellicott City, MD 21041-2570
(443-570-2029)
info@mowpa.org



Favorable with Amendments for HB24 - Bay Restoration Fund – Authorized Uses – Connection to Existing Municipal Wastewater Facility

Environment and Transportation Committee,

My name is Eddie Harrison, I am the legislative liaison representing MOWPA (Maryland Onsite Wastewater Professionals Association). MOWPA represents all Maryland professionals in the Onsite Wastewater Industry. Our membership includes: Installers, Pumpers, Engineers, Property Transfer Inspectors, Operation and Maintenance Providers, and Code Officials.

I represent MOWPA as an un-compensated Legislative Liaison, current Vice-President, and former Board President.

My day job is the owner of BAT Onsite, LLC. BAT Onsite, LLC. is primarily an Operation and Maintenance Provider for automated Onsite Wastewater Systems. Including: Advanced Treatment Units (including BAT), Pump Systems, Mound Systems, Drip Dispersal Systems, and pretty much any Onsite Wastewater System that requires electrical/mechanical operation under 5,000 gallons per day. I am currently servicing close to 1,000 units, covering the whole State of Maryland. I have been working in the Onsite Wastewater Industry as an installer, pumper, designer, property transfer inspector, and operation and maintenance provider since 1984.

The Bay Restoration Fund (BRF) is a Very Successful and Valuable Program

The BRF program was set up with an annual fee of \$60 per property to go into a special fund to reduce pollutants going to the Chesapeake Bay and other waterways. This fund has two categories.

- 1) Sewer category** is all properties served by public sewer. All properties that are hooked to public sewer are charged an annual fee of \$60 to be put in the “Sewer” fund. Moneys collected in this fund are to be spent on Municipal Wastewater Treatment Plants for upgrades. Upgrades that reduce nitrogen and other nutrients entering the Chesapeake Bay and other coastal waterways (The Bay). This program has been very successful. During the inception of the “Sewer” side of this program, funds were tight. Many advocates were anxious about the slow start. Today, most all the wastewater plants have been upgraded and the

P.O. Box 2570
Ellicott City, MD 21041-2570
(443-570-2029)
info@mowpa.org



moneys can be diverted to other projects that reduce nitrogen and other nutrients from entering the Bay.

- 2) **Septic category** is all properties served by Onsite Wastewater Systems (OSDS), AKA “Septic Systems”. All properties that maintain their own OSDS/septic system located on the same property as the structure it serves pay their annual fee of \$60 to the “Septic” fund. The money collected for this fund is set aside to pay for OSDS/septic system upgrades. These upgrades utilize “Best Available Technology for the reduction of nitrogen” (BAT) treatment technologies with the purpose of reducing the nitrogen and other nutrients from entering the “Bay”. Each County is awarded a portion of this fund on an annual basis.

This portion of the BRF program, unlike the “Sewer” side, was underutilized in the beginning. It was initiated as a grant program. Private property owners and contractors were slow to catch on to the benefits. As a result of the slow start, legislature relocated some of those early funds for the “General Fund” and designate 40% of the OSDS money to the “Cover Crop” program.

Today, most of the counties use up all their allocated money. BRF funding has become a vital tool to repair and upgrade poorly functioning or failing OSDS/septic systems on difficult sites.

Onsite Wastewater Disposal Systems (OSDS) have only been a “Standard of Living” in the rural community since WWII. Outhouses and minimal indoor water use was the standard prior to that. In the late 40s, 50s and early 60s septic systems were not regulated. They were crude, primitive and “Trial and Error” systems. As a rule, Maryland didn’t do soil evaluations (Perc Tests) until the late 60s, the perc tests were done after the house was built. Soil evaluations evolved up through the 70s, 80s and 90s.

There are a lot of homes in rural Maryland that were built prior to 1945, with no indoor plumbing and no plans to have a septic system. They were built in close proximity to streams and other water sources to save on carrying clean water.

P.O. Box 2570
Ellicott City, MD 21041-2570
(443-570-2029)
info@mowpa.org



Prior to 1970 a large number of homes were built in Maryland with little to no soil evaluation, no consideration for lot size and with an attitude “Dig a hole, it will go somewhere”.

Even more properties were developed through the 70s, 80s and 90s with the evolving soil evaluation techniques and improved odds of properly evaluated OSDS/septic system placement.

All OSDS/septic systems have a life expectancy of between 15 and 30 years. Most systems that are properly evaluated will fail in that timeframe and cost between \$9K and \$15K to replace the drainfield. This is considered “The cost of owning a rural home”. In my experience this would apply to 80%* to 90%* of the OSDS repairs performed today. The Onsite Industry utilizes BRF funding for the 10%* or so systems that can cost a property owner from \$30K to \$70K to repair, due to limiting geography and soil conditions.

*(*These numbers are a guestimate, based on my experience in this industry)*

When professionals from our industry are called to one of these properties the property owner is not the original owner. They have bought this property expecting their OSDS to function properly. A majority of these difficult properties are middle to lower income properties as most larger homes have been built since the 90s. These property owners are facing a \$60K repair on a home worth \$200K to \$400K. There may not be enough equity in the home to get a loan, let alone have that kind of money available sitting around. The BRF grant program does a lot of good work for a lot of Maryland citizens. Adjusting and massaging this program could help so many more.

The intention of this Bill,

As was explained to me by the sponsors of this Bill and conversations with the local approving authority; this Bill was prompted by a specific, moderate sized subdivision (and can apply to any subdivision with a similar situation). Through verbal conversations, I was told the project to hook these particular homes to the nearby public sewer could cost between \$2.5M to \$3M. I was told that the County in question receives about \$2.5M per year that is pulled from the “Septic” side for of all their BRF funded BATs. This will create a huge issue. MOWPA has long advocated the “Septic”

P.O. Box 2570
Ellicott City, MD 21041-2570
(443-570-2029)
info@mowpa.org



side of the BRF needs more money as the need and usage increases. This situation shines a bright light on this. We have advocated that sewer hookups should come from the “Sewer” side of the Bay Restoration Fund. These properties will belong to that side after they are hooked up. The “Sewer” side can absorb the cost with less impact, long range, due to the continuity of the Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrades.

Conclusion

MOWPA feels that there are many properties in Maryland that are in need of assistance for OSDS/septic system upgrades. Most can be repaired with the availability of BAT and innovative dispersal systems. But some cannot. If Public sewer is available, they should receive assistance to be hooked up. There are some out there that sewer is not available, and current technology isn’t good enough. These properties fall to “Holding Tanks” that nobody wants. The OSDS industry would be able to help so many rural, middle to lower income property owners with slight shift of BRF funding.

MOWPA asks that the Committee give a **Favorable report with Amendments to HB24.**
Amendment:

ALL BRF FUNDED SEWER HOOKUPS BE FUNDED BY THE “SEWER” SIDE OF THE BAY RESTORATION FUND.

(This amendment would be supported by many of the local Health Departments that I frequently speak with. It is a common subject matter.)

Thank you for your time
Eddie Harrison
MOWPA Legislative liaison
9608B Fountain School Rd
Union Bridge, MD 21791
410-795-8691
rdsefe@aol.com