

SPARKS-GLENCOE COMMUNITY PLANNING COUNCIL



Preserving our rural heritage

Spring 2010 Newsletter

Dear Neighbor,

After a winter like ours, we're all glad to see the coming of spring. This newsletter brings you some tips for how to get ready, including articles on native plantings and what you can do to keep your lawns, gardens and fields friendlier to our waterways.

We also hope you will attend our annual spring meeting. For the first time, we will host a moderated discussion among several candidates running for public office – see the details on the back page. This is your opportunity to ask questions before your representative is elected. We hope to see you there!

Please don't forget how important your support is to us. We need your involvement as community members who attend our meetings, and we need your financial support. We hope you find the work we do not just worthwhile but critical to the quality of life we all enjoy in northern Baltimore County.

The SGPC Board



COMPROMISE MADE ON RUN-OFF RULES

Decades of rapid development and suburban sprawl throughout Maryland have stressed the state's rivers, lakes, reservoirs and coastal waters with increasing amounts of polluted storm water run-off. To address this mounting threat to our waterways, the state enacted the Maryland Stormwater Act of 2007, requiring the use of Environmental Site Design (ESD), to reduce run-off from all development and redevelopment projects.

The goal of ESD is to keep storm water on site rather than allowing it to carry pollutants into nearby waterways. For new development it means using nonstructural best management practices and better site design techniques such as maintaining the natural contours of the land, preserving existing soil, vegetation and tree cover, minimizing impervious surfaces, and using wetlands or vegetated stream buffers to absorb run-off. For redevelopment projects, the principles of ESD require the restoration of natural features by replacing impervious surfaces with vegetation or permeable pavement.

Unfortunately, there will be a delay in its implementation. A barrage of complaints from developers has caused a compromise in the rules by allowing a transition period for projects already in the planning 'pipeline.' As it stands now, projects with preliminary approval would be exempt from the requirements of the Act if they get final local approval within three years and start construction by 2017; otherwise, they will fall under more stringent rules. In addition, redevelopment projects in certain growth areas with less than 40 percent impervious surface would be eligible for breaks on how much storm water would need to be controlled. SGPC has urged state officials to implement the strongest possible protections to preserve and restore clean water for future generations.

GO NATIVE WITH YOUR GARDEN



No matter how small or large your yard is, you have the ability to positively affect the environment and help regenerate many of the native species that are slowly dwindling in population.

When contemplating replacements for the garden this spring, consider the value that native trees, shrubs and groundcover have to offer: little, if any, maintenance, striking seasonal color, exceptional wildlife value, innate hardiness, and cost-effectiveness.

If you are looking to replace a tree damaged by the harsh winter, the American red maple (*Acer rubrum*) which produces brilliant burgundy flower buds, is a wonderful choice, as is the American holly (*Ilex opaca*), which, at this time of year, may be covered with robins hungrily devouring berries. The red fruit of Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) attracts cedar waxwing and mockingbirds. Another hearty choice is the Blue beech (*Carpinus caroliniana*), characterized by smooth, hard gray ripples on its bark. This small tree looks delicate but is very strong. Consider also the Cherry-bark birch (*Betula lenta*). As the weather warms, the capsules on it will burst open releasing microscopic nutlets, a buffet for the bluebirds. Black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*) also attracts wild life. Soon, honey bees will be gracing its small, creamy flowers; the female tree will yield dark blue fruit for brown thrashers and woodpeckers.

If you are after flowering trees, consider these: Fringetree (*Chionanthus virginicus*) waves lace-like blooms in the warm, spring breeze. And the Blackhaw (*Viburnum prunifolium*) and Arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*) are filled with masses of white flowers that rival any “snowball bush.” Native flowering dogwoods are an excellent choice, particularly the Eastern dogwood (*Cornus florida*) with its broad white petals, and the Pagoda dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*) whose multi-colored fruit will provide food for the birds in your garden.

Some tips: be careful not to disturb the Partridgeberry

(*Mitchella repens*), creeping along the ground. This tiny but mighty native groundcover can survive the harshest of conditions, and animals such as the towhee, northern bob-white, and red fox are grateful. And remember to arrange your native plants in groups: plant trees, shrubbery and groundcover in odd numbers - this looks natural and is visually appealing.

Most of the species mentioned in this article do very well in sun or shade, and withstand dry or moist soil (preferably amended with organic matter such as peat moss). *Ilex opaca* and *Cornus florida* are the exception as both prefer well-drained soil. All are native to Northern Baltimore County. With some careful thought and planning you will have an environmentally friendly and aesthetically pleasing landscape.



Information for this article comes from Sue Dieter, the owner of Heartwood Nursery, Inc. which specializes in native trees, shrubs, and ground-covers of the Eastern Piedmont and Transitional Regions.

For upcoming events, visit www.heartwoodnurseryinc.com.



Volunteers Needed Saturday, April 10

Project Clean Stream (PCS)—an annual stream and shoreline clean-up—takes place Saturday, April 10, 2010, beginning 9:00 AM to 12 Noon. Sites range across Central Maryland and the Eastern Shore in urban, suburban, and rural settings. Volunteers are needed to lead clean-ups as Site Captains and to help as general crew. Choose your own site or pick one from the Project Clean Stream list (see link below).

Gloves, bags, first aid supplies, and site signs are provided by the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay. In 2009, over 2,600 volunteers turned out at more than 150 clean-up sites to remove 250,000 pounds of trash!

For more details, contact the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay at 410-377-6270 or vstinson@acb-online.org. Additional information is also available at <http://www.alliancechesbay.org/cleanstream.cfm>

WIND TURBINE UPDATE

The Baltimore County Planning Board held a second public hearing on the wind turbine issue January 7, 2010. The hearing room was packed with individuals and community groups offering opinions ranging from unregulated support to stringent restrictions. Six members of the SGPC Board attended, with President Kirsten Burger and Wind Turbine Committee Chair Sharon Bailey offering testimony. Our recommendations were as follows:

- Only one 60' wind turbine be allowed as of right on a lot of three acres
- A special use permit be required for turbines over 60' with a maximum height of 120'
- Setback requirements be 150% of the height of the turbine
- The legislation should contain the same view shed protection language as the County cell tower legislation
- Property owners living within 1,000 feet of a proposed turbine should be eligible to protest the erection of the turbine
- Notice of the proposed turbine should also be posted on the property.

The issue remains controversial. Although most residents are in favor of clean energy, the US Department of Energy rates the wind resources in Baltimore County as generally poor. In addition, there are significant concerns about noise, danger to wildlife, shadowing and affect on property values.

While other Maryland counties have enacted legislation that allows wind turbines of up to 150 feet, the Baltimore County Council has not yet made its determination. The Council has scheduled a hearing for Monday, April 19th, at 7 pm in the Council Chamber Room. Sign up is at 6 pm. SGPC members will attend this meeting in Towson to advocate for regulations along the lines of our recommendations to the Planning Board. We urge all interested residents to do the same.

CELL TOWERS LOOM

A giant silo may soon tower over the landscape at Belfast Road and 1-83. The Zoning Commissioner approved an 87 foot cell tower proposed by Verizon on Belfast Road and directed that it be hidden inside a silo, attempting to fashion a compromise between the need for improved communications and the desire to preserve the rural character of the area. Many local residents testified that the proposed location would detract from the beauty of the area and reduce property values. Since the proposed location is within the Belfast Valley National Register Historic District, the tower is required to meet a higher standard to prove that it will blend in with the surrounding area. This site is also very close to lands that have been protected by preservation easements, purchased with public funds. Sparks-Glencoe opposed the placement of an 85 foot "tree" tower, which was originally proposed for this site, as being dramatically higher and out of character with the other trees in the area. We have decided that the silo design was an acceptable compromise and will not appeal the decision. Other parties have appealed, however, so the status of this tower is not final.

Another cell tower has been proposed by AT&T on Wesley Chapel Road. This proposal has not yet gone to hearing. At our January meeting, representatives of AT&T described the design of the tower - a basic monopole, 123 feet tall, with three sets of antennae attached on the outside to allow other carriers to co-locate. Like the Belfast Road tower, the location of this proposed tower is inside a National Register Historic District, My Lady's Manor, necessitating stringent criteria to be met governing visibility and impact on the surrounding area. The proposed location is also within the Monkton local historic district, and is in very close proximity to several other historic sites, such as the Monkton United Methodist Church, an African American cemetery, and historic houses. While the rolling topography and surrounding woods will reduce the visibility of a tower at this location, a test balloon demonstrated that the tower could be seen from Shepperd Road, a designated scenic byway. The Maryland Historical Trust concluded that the tower would not have an adverse impact on the historic character of the area. Sparks-Glencoe is continuing to investigate this proposal.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PROTECT WATER QUALITY



Raingarden watered by diverted downspouts. Photograph courtesy of Diana Gutierrez.

Storm water run-off is not only the problem of farmers. In fact, farmers have long been instructed through soil conservation districts on how to use best management practices to reduce sediment and nutrient run-off into nearby waterways.

Now, it is the property of the average homeowner which constitutes the fastest growing nutrient load source into the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

Among the major waterway pollutants are fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides, all of which can be found in the lawns of homeowners who seek to rid their lawn and gardens of pests and promote growth. Happily, maintaining healthy, attractive lawns and gardens can be done without overloading the soil with nutrients that are not only detrimental to the bay but may negatively affect the health of humans and their pets.

The following are some recommendations to improve the quality of your lawn and garden while reducing the amount of pollution run-off into our waterways.

- **Test your soil** to find out what lawns need. Master gardeners in Baltimore County will be happy to assist you. Ask for organic recommendations, use natural, slow release fertilizers and make adjustments in the ph of the soil to take care of sparse growth and weeds.
- **Set lawn mower blades to high** and mow less frequently. If you have a composting mower, allow the shavings to remain on the lawn: they provide nutrients to growing grass. Also, taller grass out competes weeds.
- **Use native plants.** They require less water, fertilizers and pesticides and provide nectars and habitats for wildlife.
- **Turn off the spigot.** Water slowly and deeply in the morning. Established native plants need less water. Better yet, consider a rain barrel to collect rain from your house's downspouts.

- **Imitate nature with a rain garden.** These are gardens constructed in a soil depression and have absorbent soils that temporarily collect rainwater then percolate it into the soil. They provide flood control, groundwater recharge, filter for pollutants and wildlife habitat.

- **Reduce the size of your lawn.** Plant native pachysandras and native sedges.

- **Take responsibility for pet waste.**

Following these simple steps can help you create beautiful lawns and gardens, help keep the environment safe for your family, and create an ecological balance with wildlife. Keeping rainwater on your property helps to fill aquifers feeding your well. For more information on this subject, please visit our website and connect to "Resources."

Coming up at our May 13th Meeting 7 pm, Sparks School

Presentation by **Theaux Le Gardeur**

Theaux is an SGPC board member and owner operator of Backwater Angler, a fly fishing shop and guide service in Monkton.

Theaux will be speaking about the Gunpowder River from a fly fisher's perspective and will give a short video presentation that will highlight insects, fish and hatches along this nationally recognized stream. He will also talk about invasive species such as Whirling Disease and Didymo and treatment methods for both angler and boaters.

Theaux is a Maryland licensed fishing guide and believes that fish don't read the same books we do.



GOALS

- Educating residents and land use representatives about the natural resources in northern Baltimore County;
- Encouraging the protection and preservation of the rural, historical, and agricultural environment of northern Baltimore County;
- Promoting responsible community planning which maintains the rural character of the area;
- Advocating growth in keeping with the level of public services available in the area.

**SGCPC
Community Meetings
are held on the
2nd Wednesday of the month,
Sparks School
Belfast Road
at 7:00 pm.
Please join us!**

SGCPC BOARD 2010-2011

***Slate of Officers and Directors
Elections to be held at the April 22 meeting***

Kirsten Burger
President

Wendy McIver
Recording Secretary

George Rew
Vice-President

Nedda Evans
Corresponding Secretary

Rena Olver
Vice-President

Additional Directors

Lee Bishop

Lawrie Deering

Ty Young
Treasurer

Theaux Le Gardeur

Laura Rew

Carmen Buccini
Assistant Treasurer

Bob Stanhope *

Laura Wilke

* Our newest nominee to the board: Bob Stanhope, retired chief naturalist for Baltimore County at Oregon Ridge and Marshy Point.

Officers and Directors may be contacted at our website:
www.sgcpc.org at info@sgcpc.org.



We need your support to carry on our mission of protecting our rural environment. We are a tax-exempt organization, so your contribution beyond the cost of membership is tax-deductible. Please be as generous as you can! **Remember: we accept matching contributions from your employer.** Our tax ID# is 20-3888970.

*** BE A MEMBER OF SGCPC ***

Basic membership: ___ (\$35) **Family** (2 adults in the same household): ___ (\$50)

I wish to make an additional donation of: ___ \$50 ___ \$100 ___ \$200 ___ Other

Please make check out to SGCPC and mail to: P.O. Box 937, Sparks, MD 21152

If you'd like to get more involved with our work, choose a committee that interests you:

_____ zoning; _____ land preservation; _____ membership & fundraising;

_____ communications; _____ web site; _____ monitoring county hearings,

or let us know how you can help: _____

Name _____

Telephone (day) _____ (eve) _____

E-mail address _____

Street address _____

City, state, zip _____

Thank you for your support!

***Hear the Candidates
On the Issues!***

County Councilmen **Joseph Bartenfelder** and
Kevin Kamenetz, running for County Executive

County Councilman **T. Bryan McIntire** and
Mr. Todd Huff, running for County Council,
Third District

Moderated by radio personality and local resident
Marc Steiner

at the

**Sparks-Glencoe Community Planning Council's
Annual Meeting**

Thursday, April 22, 7 pm

Sparks Elementary School, Belfast Rd.

*If you have a question you would like the candidates to answer,
send it to: info@sgcpc.org, or to
P.O. Box 937, Sparks, MD 21152.*

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