



## SBCI Monthly Meeting Notes – August 20, 2015

**Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 1:04 p.m. by Laura Ogar.

**Please Note:** *SBCI meetings are currently committing a block of time towards organizational support discussions for the Partnership for Saginaw Bay Watershed, the designated Public Advisory Council tasked with advising state and federal resource agencies on local priorities for restoration the Saginaw Bay and Saginaw River Area of Concern (AOC).*

**Introductions were made around the room.**

### **Public Advisory Council (PAC) Grant :**

John Riley with Michigan's Office of the Great Lakes (OGL) provided a brief update on the PAC grants available to Public Advisory Council's (PAC). Currently the Partnership for the Saginaw Bay Watershed, the PAC for the Saginaw Bay and Saginaw River Area of Concern (AOC) has submitted a proposal request for grant funding and Riley and Bill Wright, President of the Partnership, have been working out details on the proposal.

The Partnership is in need of administrative support and has applied for the grant for this purpose. Riley mentioned the need for adequate detail in the proposal to outline the roles and duties of the administrative staff being requested under this grant. Riley suggested the PAC to provide more details and be clear on their expectations for the administrative support being requested.

### **General Discussion of Common Goals:**

General discussion of the common goals of the PAC and SBCI took place. Laura Ogar provided a brief review of the history of the SBCI, organized with encouragement from the OGL in 2005 due to the seemingly lack of local stakeholder participation in many of the very same issues of the AOC. Ogar described that it had not been Bay County's experience that there was a lack of local engagement, more so at the time, there was a lack of opportunity for locals to engage since the Partnership was not having meetings. The SBCI was initiated to serve as a forum for collaborative meetings to actively work on solutions to those environmental problems shared by the communities around the Saginaw Bay, such as beach closings, high nutrients/muck on the shoreline, and inadequate access to the bay. Basically these are 'beneficial use impairments' common to and impacting the AOC communities of Arenac, Bay, Tuscola, and Huron counties primarily, but of significant concern by others within the broader geographic region and the 22 county watershed as well.

The SBCI has looked at local issues through workgroup structure and worked towards addressing some of those issues through reviewing Combined Sewage Overflow (CSO) /Retention Treatment Basins (RTB) quality data and was able to make important changes to the statewide reporting practices, created a draft Regional Septic Code, worked toward lawn use Phosphorus bans, etc. However, since the SBCI is not the official designated PAC by the DEQ, and the DEQ OGL has in the past only wanted to hear from and recognize the PAC, it's been hard to move forward on some projects. However this approach does seem to be changing with more reception to local stakeholder concerns.

### **Bacteria and Beach Closing Discussion:**

Clark Elftman, Commissioner from Huron County, described some frustration with advancing some of broad solutions to on-going problems. Commissioner Elftman mentioned some surface water areas in Huron County that locals were aware of high bacteria levels, but he said he didn't know of any work being done to address it. Audrey Schwing from DEQ was in attendance and described that there was a substantial amount of work being done to address that particular problem. Commissioner Elftman said if there is, the local folks don't know about it. He said as elected officials, it would be nice to be informed of what is happening so he can relay that information to his constituents. There was discussion about the obvious need for better and more frequent communication in order to inform local leaders on what is happening for improvements, but also for local leaders to inform resource agencies on the local needs. There was discussion on bacterial beach testing and the new (QPC) testing equipment that can discern if ecoli is from humans or cows. There is QPC Testing can test DNA and there is a lot of interest on where it's being done, and what the results are. Audrey Schwing and John Riley said they would help try and get some information back to better inform and update on the sampling results.



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There is definitely an information gap between the State and Local groups which is creating some frustration. It's important to communicate and work on closing the gaps. Locals are feeling frustrated because there seems to be a lack of direction and they bump up against resistance when they try to move forward with projects being told "you can't do that". Ogar mentioned Phragmites control along the shoreline as an example. Communication is key to filling the gaps and sharing information on all levels is crucial. Over the last year, the Partnership and SBCI have been working together and this seems to have helped somewhat in building a better understanding of what is happening.

### **Phragmites:**

There are a lot of things happening with Phragmites and there's now funding to get some of the work done in regards to treatment. In the beginning, homeowners were not allowed to cut down, treat, or burn the Phragmites on their property. There were stiff penalties in place, including jail time, for homeowners that did any sort of grooming or treatment of Phragmites on their property. That has now changed and the State is supporting and funding Phragmites treatment efforts. However, homeowners are afraid to do any treatment because they don't want to break the law. The State hasn't clarified what sort of activities are acceptable for Phragmites treatment. There needs to be better education and communication so that the homeowners feel comfortable and well informed about Phragmites Treatment.

### **Next Meeting:**

Phragmites Treatment along the shoreline and bacteria at Beach Closings continue to be the main two issues with greater stakeholder concern. John Riley mentioned the need to have the right people at the next meeting, people that are experts in these areas so we can have some well-informed discussions. We should also include a community update that provides an overview, history, and information about where we're going with regards to these issues.

### **Action Items:**

**John Riley/DEQ-OGL** – Contact Tami Sivy, David Karpovich, and Sharron Briggs to see if any of them can speak at the next SBCI Meeting.

**Laura Ogar/EACD** – Health Department Contact including Huron/Tuscola, Arenac/Iosco, and Bay Counties.

**Laura Ogar/EACD** – Follow up with Brad Jensen regarding AmeriCorps to see about getting administrative support for the SBCI/Partnership.

**Katy Hintzen/MI Sea Grant** – Organize Public Outreach Meeting to address Phragmites Treatment.

**SBCI** - Identify any other people that should be at the next meeting for the Phragmites Treatment and Beach Closings discussions.

**SBCI** - Work on getting a list together of contributing "waters" to the Saginaw Bay and the issues for each of these bodies of water (stream, creek, river, etc.).

As there was no further business, the August 20, 2015 SBCI meeting was adjourned at 2:48 p.m.

The next SBCI Meeting will be on **Thursday, September 17, 2015** from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the Bay County Building, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Old Chambers, 515 Center Avenue, Bay City, Michigan.