

Greenspace Equity Advisory Board - Introductory Meeting Minutes
March 11, 2024, 1:00pm

An introductory meeting of the Greenspace Equity Advisory Board (GEAB) was held via Google Meet on Monday, March 11, 2024. Margaret Lashar, the Local Grants Supervisor for the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in the Land Acquisition and Planning (LAP) unit called the meeting to order at 1:02pm. Ms. Lashar announced that the meeting is being recorded and asked if any of the members objected to being recorded. Hearing no objections, the meeting proceeded to the Agenda.

Ms. Lashar announced that the meeting is open to the public pursuant to the Open Meetings Act. The public may observe the meeting and, at the specified time on the agenda, the board will receive public comments if there is anyone present who wishes to speak.

Staff introduced themselves, followed by roll call of the members and the sector that they represent. The following members and staff were in attendance:

Greenspace Equity Advisory Board Members:

Robert (Bob) Branham – Calvert County (County Park and Recreation)
Carolyn Muller – City of Gaithersburg (Municipal Park and Recreation)
Keith Colston (Maryland Environmental Trust)
Katie Lautar – Baltimore Green Space (Land Trust)
Mxali Davidson-Roberts (Resident)
Suzanne Ludlow (Resident)
Savannah Winston (Resident)
Mandela Echefu (Resident)

Absent:

Senator Karen Lewis Young (Senate)
Delegate Jackie Addison (House of Delegates)
Yuri Borovsky (Resident)

Staff:

Hillary Bell, DNR, LAP Director
Judd Vickers, DNR, LAP Deputy Director
Carrie Lhotsky, DNR, LAP Associate Director of Grants, Easements, and Stewardship
Margaret Lashar, DNR, LAP Local Grants Supervisor
Michael McQuarrie, DNR, LAP Local Grants Administrator
Kate Woods, DNR, LAP Local Grants Administrator
Molly Pickel, DNR, LAP Natural Resources Planner
Rodney Vese, DNR, LAP Surveying and GIS Manager

Other Attendees:

Jessica Leys
Kate Patton
Carlos Estin

Katie Lautar asked a question about the required number of community members per the legislation and thought that there should be seven.

Margaret Lashar answered that it is five [community members] and four of the five are present.

A PowerPoint presentation prepared by staff was shared with the GEAB, with Local Grants staff going through each slide. The presentation provided an overview of the Greenspace Equity Program, including its purpose, who's eligible, types of projects and costs eligible, the general application process and related information about the program.

Katie Lautar asked a question about why a governmental agency is required to be co-owners in acquisition projects. She mentioned this is not required by the legislation since during drafting of the legislation, it was supposed to mirror the Rural Legacy program and allow urban land trusts to have the same access to funds for acquisitions.

Margaret Lashar answered that the consideration for a local government to be a co-owner is so that the land can be maintained for public use in perpetuity. Hilary Bell added that LAP will double-check the final language of the legislation and noted that for Rural Legacy, the easements cannot be solely held by land trusts, they have to be co-held by a government entity to ensure that the easement is held in perpetuity.

Margaret Lashar then shared a view of the Greenspace Equity map to show the delineation of the overburdened, underserved, and adjacent census tracts. Rodney Vese explained that the data is obtained from the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), who is in the process of reviewing their data, and LAP will update our map accordingly after we receive the updated data from MDE.

Jessica Leys asked via the chat about the availability of the presentation and the map. Margaret Lashar responded that LAP is in the process of developing our webpage for the Greenspace Equity Program and we will post the information as soon as we are able.

Margaret Lashar opened the meeting up to public comments.

Kate Patton, Director Emeritus of the Lower Shore Land Trust (LSLT) asked a question about the 3% administrative fees, whether that includes both the admin and any stewardship or is there a separate compliance fee like Rural Legacy. Margaret Lashar responded that the details are still being worked out but believes that there is a factor that can be added for the stewardship component.

Carlos Estin, tree steward with the Maryland DNR program and program coordinator for the City of Cambridge and watershed advisory board member echoed concerns about non-governmental organizations having access to this funding. Margaret Lashar responded that non-governmental entities are eligible to apply, but there might need to be a partnership in terms of acquisition projects because of the perpetual stewardship for the land.

Suzanne Ludlow asked via chat if there could be a discussion of when the next meeting will be and a sense of timeline on the grant process. Margaret Lashar responded that we will schedule the next meeting and consult with the Board Members at that time about the timeline for the grant process after we put more information together.

Kate Patton added via chat that as a land trust that works with many easement projects, the compliance and stewardship 1.5% fees are also critical for ongoing stewardship, maintenance, and enforcement in perpetuity. Margaret Lashar noted that we will take that comment and work that into the discussion for the overall implementation of the program.

Katie Lautar asked if there is a sense of the outer limit or range of funds that the applicant can request. Margaret Lashar responded that it would depend on the final budget and the project applications we receive. Hilary Bell added that since this is our first year, we do not have a sense of the types of project or the amounts so we will need more information, which hopefully this first round will help provide and we can fine tune requirements for future years.

Margaret Lashar asked if there are further comments or questions. Hearing no additional comments or questions, Ms. Lashar moved onto the next agenda item and proposed that the next meeting be held around late April/early May. LAP will send out an online poll to the Board Members to determine the best date and time. Ms. Lashar then thank the members of the GEAB and concluded the meeting. Ms. Lashar asked for a motion to adjourn. Keith Colston motioned to adjourn, second by Carolyn Muller. Hearing no opposition to the motion, Ms. Lashar ended the meeting at 1:36pm.