

Local Government Forum Report:

Looking Beyond 2025

Thursday July 11, 2024

Sponsored By:

Chesapeake Bay Program



Chesapeake Bay Program
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**Local Government Advisory Committee
to the Chesapeake Executive Council**



**Local Government
Advisory Committee**
to the Chesapeake Executive Council

Funded By:

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Prepared By:

**Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay
Local Government Initiative Team**



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FORUM OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

Background

The 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement¹ outlines goals and outcomes that signatories, including the Chesapeake Bay Commission, Delaware, the District of Columbia, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia, have pledged to work both independently and collaboratively to achieve. Many of the outcomes have 2025 as a target date for completion, but as identified in “Charting a Course to 2025”², eleven out of thirty-one outcomes are off course and will not be met within this timeframe.

In October 2022, the [Chesapeake Executive Council](#) (EC) charged the [Principal's Staff Committee](#) (PSC) with preparing ‘recommendations that continue to address new advances in science and restoration, along with a focus on our partnership for going beyond 2025.’³ The PSC delegated this responsibility to the [Management Board](#) (MB), who established a [Beyond 2025 Steering Committee](#) (the Committee) to help meet this charge before the EC meeting in December 2024. The Committee includes broad representation from across the [Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership](#) (the Partnership) and underwent a rigorous process to draft a report for leadership to consider. The draft report was open for public feedback from July 1st - August 30th 2024.

The [Local Government Advisory Committee](#) (LGAC)’s mission is to share the views and insights of local elected officials with state and federal decision-makers and enhance the flow of information among local governments. The Local Government Forum is an annual problem solving meeting hosted by LGAC in collaboration with the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Looking Beyond 2025

On July 1st, 2024, the Beyond 2025 Steering Committee released their draft report for public feedback. On Thursday July 11th, LGAC convened seventy-three local elected officials, appointed officials, senior staff, and local government association staff from around the watershed to discuss the draft report and its possible implications for local governments (see *Appendix A: Forum Attendees*). Through facilitated discussions, the Forum collected feedback to inform LGAC’s recommendations to the Chesapeake Bay Program leadership for their consideration related to the future of the watershed restoration effort. The Forum agenda is available in *Appendix B* and the meeting materials are available in *Appendix C*.

¹ [2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement](#)

² [Charting a Course to 2025: A Report and Recommendations for the Chesapeake Executive Council on How to Best Address and INtegrate New Science and Restoration Strategies Leading up to 2025](#)

³ [2022 Executive Council Charge on “Charting a Course to 2025 and Beyond”](#)

FORUM PROCEEDINGS

Summary of Beyond 2025 Steering Committee Draft Report

The Forum began with an overview of the Beyond 2025 Steering Committee’s draft report titled ‘*A Critical Path Forward for the Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership Beyond 2025*’, which was given by KC Filippino from the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission and a Beyond 2025 Steering Committee member (full presentation is available in *Appendix C: Meeting Materials*). The report begins by outlining a ‘Critical Path Forward Beyond 2025’, including two Executive Council recommendations (pg. 3-4):

- “The Beyond 2025 Steering Committee recommends that the Chesapeake Executive Council affirm its continued commitment to meet the goals of the *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* and direct the Principals’ Staff Committee to propose specific amendments necessary to effectively implement the *Watershed Agreement*.”
- “The Beyond 2025 Steering Committee recommends strengthening the Chesapeake Bay Program by identifying ways to simplify and streamline the partnership’s structure and processes, including potential changes to the Chesapeake Bay Program’s [Governance and Management Framework](#) to ensure that partner commitments can be met.”

The report continues with additional recommendations under three core areas:

- Science (pg. 9 - 10)
 - Optimize monitoring, modeling, and analysis
 - Integrate existing and new science findings in decision making, resource allocation, and communication strategies
 - Prioritize research that addresses knowledge gaps in existing and emerging challenges
- Restoration and Conservation (pg. 11 - 12)
 - Support system-scale conservation and restoration planning and implementation for habitats and communities
 - Review, and where necessary, revise existing goals, outcomes and management strategies to more effectively guide the partnership’s restoration and conservation efforts beyond 2025
 - Improve the Program’s holistic approach to planning, prioritization, progress-tracking, and accountability.
- Partnership (pg. 13 - 15)
 - Adopt a systems approach to streamline governance and structure
 - Enhance capacity building and administrative/technical assistance through local networks
 - Strengthen the program’s capacity to ensure watershed restoration is relevant to all communities
 - Enhance communications and transparency to foster long-term success



Federal and State Perspectives on Beyond 2025

LGAC member, Josh Hastings, moderated a panel of key Partnership leaders: EPA Regional Administrator Adam Ortiz, Maryland Department of Natural Resources Secretary Josh Kurtz, and Virginia Deputy Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources Stefanie Taillon. A full list of panel questions is available in *Appendix C: Meeting Materials*.

Upon beginning the discussion, all three speakers recognized that there has been significant progress in recent years towards meeting the goals and outcomes of the Watershed Agreement, especially related to partnering with the agricultural sector. Both Secretary Kurtz and Deputy Secretary Taillon highlighted the opportunity to utilize conservation and restoration efforts to maximize benefits to people who live, work, and play within the watershed. Regional Administrator Ortiz acknowledged that members of the Partnership are not always on the same page, but commended the states for remaining committed to collaboration in spite of their differences.

Panelists gave their perspectives on the draft Beyond 2025 Steering Committee report, with all three acknowledging the significant work that went into preparing it. Deputy Secretary Taillon highlighted the two Executive Council recommendations as foundational for setting up conversations in the next phase (tentatively scheduled for 2025). Regional Administrator Ortiz appreciated the report's focus on the places where people interact with living resources like streams, riverfronts, and shorelines. Secretary Kurtz stressed how important prioritization will be moving forward and suggested that the report is a good starting point for identifying those priorities.

Moderator Josh Hastings raised multiple questions about the advisory committees' role in the Partnership and how to maximize the impact of LGAC's work. All of the Panelists expressed strong support for the work of the advisory committees and Secretary Kurtz suggested the possibility of Partnership leaders asking the advisory committees for specific feedback on current priorities or initiatives; thereby ensuring that committees' recommendations are actionable and relevant.

The rest of the panel discussion focused on broader themes such as how to bring benefits to local communities (and not just the Bay), the importance of additional local government technical assistance for watershed planning and implementation, and the need for increased and more effective communications with stakeholders. In their closing comments, panelists thanked LGAC members for sharing their time and expertise with the Partnership and emphasized the important role of local governments.

Local Government Discussion on Key Issues

LGAC member Marty Qually facilitated a full-group discussion on six key issues in the Beyond 2025 Steering Committee’s draft report. For each issue, two questions were posed to the group: 1) what has the potential to benefit local governments? and 2) what has the potential to create barriers for local governments? Feedback was collected via screen-shared notes and a live mentimeter poll. Notes included a ‘parking lot’ for important, but off-topic feedback. *Appendix C: Meeting Materials* includes full results of the conversation. Summary of the discussion:

Key Issue	What has the potential to benefit local governments?	What has the potential to create barriers for local governments?
<p>Executive Council Recommendation #1: The Beyond 2025 Steering Committee recommends that the Chesapeake Executive Council affirm its continued commitment to meet the goals of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement and direct the Principals’ Staff Committee to propose specific amendments necessary to effectively implement the Watershed Agreement. (pg. 3)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consistent direction from state and federal leaders ● Build on time and money already invested ● High level of commitment from state and federal leaders could lead to additional resources for local governments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Could lead to more regulations ● New mandates without additional funding
<p>Science 3. Prioritize research that addresses knowledge gaps in existing and emerging challenges (pg. 10)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understanding of where to prioritize limited resources ● Help to tell stories more effectively ● Could help inform local land use planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Could identify problems that local governments do not have the resources to address ● Research needs to be focused on issues that are relevant to local governments
<p>Conservation and Restoration 1. Support systems-scale conservation and restoration planning and implementation for habitats and communities (pg. 11)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Potential for funding for redevelopment ● Potential to drive mixed-use development in urbanized areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Could negatively impact need for affordable housing and economic development

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need more resources to modernize and renovate existing structures • ‘Cheaper’ to build new structures than redevelop areas • This section’s definition of conservation does not accurately reflect community priorities
<p>Conservation and Restoration 3. Improve the Program’s holistic approach to planning, prioritization, progress-tracking and accountability (pg. 12)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could mean a prioritization of local priorities (bottom-up planning) • Climate resilience benefits (flood mitigation, urban heat island, air quality, etc) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local control of land use decisions is essential • Potentially problematic if local governments are told what to do or required to ‘align’ with state/federal priorities
<p>Partnership 2. Enhance capacity building and administrative/technical assistance through local networks (pg. 13 - 14)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual, dedicated funded would lead to consistent support for local governments • Increased grant-writing and management support to local governments that need it most • Model should rely on trusted regional entities to hire staff to provide technical assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local governments need enhanced technical assistance, not capacity building • Local governments cannot hire their own staff to do this
<p>Partnership 4. Enhance communications and transparency to foster long-term success (pg. 14 - 15)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More robust advisory committee engagement • A broader voice for local governments and constituents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recipients have to be willing to listen • Communication should be two-way • Jargon creates barriers for public participation



LOCAL GOVERNMENT ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

After the Forum on July 11th, LGAC members from around the watershed hosted a series of roundtable discussions to gather additional feedback from local officials in their region. Discussions were not focused on the text of the Beyond 2025 Steering Committee Draft report, but instead honed in on key issues identified by LGAC as particularly relevant to that region. A list of the more than 70 local government attendees is available in *Appendix D: Roundtable Attendees*.

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Roundtable (DC/MD/VA) - July 19th

On July 19th, LGAC member Cindy Dyballa briefed her colleagues on the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) Chesapeake Bay and Water Resources Policy Committee about the draft report and summarized the Forum discussion. Committee members, who represent local governments in parts of Maryland and Virginia, and the District of Columbia, weighed in during the virtual discussion with their feedback on the report. Key discussion items included the lack of clarity and accessibility of the report, the challenges of translating broad recommendations into actionable steps, the need to reconsider traditional approaches to land conservation/development and the value of ensuring that diverse communities have a meaningful role in the Program's decision-making.

Lancaster Clean Water Partners Roundtable (PA) - July 24th

On July 24th, LGAC member Leo Lutz hosted a roundtable discussion in partnership with the Lancaster Clean Water Partners and the Campbell Foundation at the West Hempfield Township Municipal Building. The discussion focused on the importance of partnering with local trusted sources, the value of storytelling to highlight successes, the need to prioritize best management practices that are cost effective, the challenges of accessing federal funding without the necessary technical assistance, and interest in regulatory flexibility to drive innovation.

Hampton Roads Planning District Commission Roundtable (VA) - July 30th

In partnership with the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission and with support from the Virginia Municipal League and the Virginia Association of Counties, LGAC members Andria McClellan and Sheila Noll hosted a roundtable discussion on July 30th in Chesapeake, VA. Highlights from the discussion include the need for additional federal funding, the preference for no new state or federal mandates, the importance of sharing success stories, the opportunity to prioritize best management practices that achieve multiple benefits, the need for regulatory flexibility, and the lack of data around development pressures and the costs of regulation.



Shenandoah Valley Roundtable (VA) - August 1st

LGAC member Richard Baugh hosted a roundtable discussion on August 1st in the Shenandoah Valley, in partnership with the Virginia Municipal League and the Virginia Association of Counties. Participants discussed the need for increased federal funding and technical assistance, especially for smaller and under-resourced localities, the desire for no new unfunded mandates, the importance of highlighting and continuing the successes of the agriculture sector in the area, the value of localizing watershed restoration efforts, the need to recognize innovative strategies for water quality improvement, and the opportunity for collaboration across jurisdictional boundaries to allow for resource sharing and a holistic approach to restoration and conservation.

Additional roundtable discussions are tentatively planned for Prince George's County, Maryland (in partnership with the Prince George's County Chapter of Maryland Municipal League) and the Delmarva Peninsula (in partnership with the Delaware League of Local Governments). When available, results from those roundtable discussions will be incorporated into this report.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **LGAC supports Executive Council Recommendation #1** (pg. 3). Local governments need steady guidance from federal and state partners. By affirming their continued commitment to the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement (the Agreement), Executive Council members can ensure local officials have clear and consistent direction around water resources management and offer peace of mind that the time and money they have already invested will not be wasted. Additionally, strategic amendments to the Agreement that have been thoroughly vetted with stakeholders, including local governments, have the potential to improve the local benefits that matter most to our constituents.
2. **LGAC supports a more robust role for the Advisory Committees that includes deeper engagement with state and federal decision makers** (pgs. 13-14). Local governments are essential partners in watershed restoration and protection. Without the buy-in and support of local elected officials, the Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership (the Partnership) will not achieve its vision, as outlined in the Agreement. LGAC remains committed to its role as a strong voice for the more than 1800 local governments within the watershed and stands ready to forge deeper collaborative relationships with state and federal leaders, including, but not limited to, the Principals' Staff Committee. As the Partnership moves Beyond 2025, LGAC and our local government partners continue to need a dedicated seat at the table.

3. **LGAC recommends using plain language in the Report.** LGAC members understand and appreciate the scale and complexity of the Beyond 2025 draft report. A vast amount of information was presented in the compilation of this draft. If the intention of the report is to achieve a broader circulation than the Executive Council and the Principals' Staff Committee, LGAC would caution that the complicated language presented in the report must be simplified and refined to effectively reach the appropriate audience. This could be accomplished through a full rewrite, a plain language executive summary, and/or short recaps under each section. As the Partnership moves into the implementation phase and embarks on broader stakeholder engagement, succinct and approachable language will be more important than ever.
4. **LGAC recommends revising the definition of conservation** (pg. 12). The current definition of conservation in the report, 'protection from development and other land use transitions,' does not adequately balance other local government priorities and is out of line with industry standards. Local governments understand the value of conserving forests and farmland to maximize benefits for current and future generations. However, local officials must also consider other community priorities, like affordable housing, transportation systems and redevelopment. The Partnership should consider convening a group of informed conservation-minded professionals and relevant stakeholders to craft a targeted, easy to understand definition that prioritizes residents' needs. This revised definition for conservation should include 'smart growth' principles that balance development and land preservation.
5. **LGAC asserts the importance of local land use authority.** Local control of land use decisions is a central responsibility of county and municipal governments throughout the watershed, as codified in state code and constitutions. Local self-determination in land use decisions ensures that constituents have a meaningful voice in the future of their community. The draft report suggests 'improving alignment with regional, state and local plans and priorities' (pg. 12). The report is silent on whether such alignment would be 'top-down' or 'bottom-up'. Given local governments' land use authority, it would be most appropriate for regional, state, and federal plans to support local priorities.
6. **LGAC strongly supports the need for more local government technical assistance** (pg. 13 - 14). We have long highlighted the challenge of technical capacity gaps within local governments, including in a [2018 Local Government Forum Report: Filling Gaps to Advance WIP Implementation](#) (2018 Forum Report) and in our [2023 Annual Recommendations to the Executive Council](#). Small, under-resourced local governments continue to have the greatest technical and administrative capacity needs, especially around identifying, applying for and managing new federal funding. Any expansion of technical assistance to local governments should utilize an approach that prioritizes relationships with local

governments through existing trusted networks (like municipal leagues, county associations, council of governments, planning commissions, etc). Whatever term is used for this approach, LGAC wants to emphasize that the key element is ‘a connected individual who possesses a wide range of knowledge and skills related to water resources planning and management, including some capacity related to technical assistance, finance, planning, project management, grant writing, etc. They facilitate implementation through the engagement of local governments and stakeholders and provide credible, consistent, convenient, and cost-effective technical assistance’ (see 2018 Forum Report). As the Partnership moves into the implementation phase, LGAC is eager to consult on the development of local government technical assistance programs and stands ready to support a rollout of these programs, with the goal of utilizing new social science best practices to scale-up our collective impact.

- 7. LGAC strongly supports additional federal and state funding for implementation.** A core challenge is that the scale of federal and state investments is not sufficient to meet the goals and outcomes of the Agreement. LGAC is concerned that this gap could lead to new regulations or mandates for local governments without additional state or federal funding to cover those increased costs. Local governments are ready and willing to support watershed protection and restoration; we simply need the resources to be true partners in these efforts. Increased funding is absolutely fundamental to open the door to partnership with local governments and to scale-up implementation actions.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

In this pivotal moment for the Chesapeake Bay watershed, LGAC was honored to convene a broad group of local officials through the Local Government Forum and follow-up roundtable discussions, to gather their input on the Beyond 2025 Steering Committee draft report and its potential implications for local governments. The recommendations included in this report will be shared with the Beyond 2025 Steering Committee through the public feedback progress. Additionally, since LGAC is part of the Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership and not members of the public, these recommendations will also be shared directly with the Principals’ Staff Committee.

As the Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership looks into its next chapter, local governments remain steadfast partners in water resource management. LGAC looks forward to continuing to be the voice of local governments within the Partnership and to forging deeper collaborative ties with state and federal decision makers.