

**Open Work Session**  
**Discussion on Draft Water and Sewer Master Plan**  
**October 19, 2021**

Ms. Katherine McAllister, P.E. with George, Miles, and Buhr, came before Council and said she will start off by noting that the overall purpose of this plan is to provide a plan to look at the County's existing growth areas to see where there are failing septic issues. She said she wants to emphasize that they developed a plan that is fluid and maps that are fluid, but, if they are going to address these onsite systems that are failing, this just hopefully gives them an idea of where to start.

Ms. McAllister said she will address a couple of questions that came up regarding discussion on the twelve areas identified in the study. She said there are two areas they have not prioritized, and one is the Delmar east community. She clarified, these areas are all based on the County's Comprehensive Plan and the growth areas they have designated. She said, on the east side of Delmar there is a town transition area that is identified in the Comp Plan. She said they met with the Town of Delmar and reviewed this area, and there is just not a lot of growth or a lot of existing communities in that area, so at this point they did not consider that as one of the top priorities that the County would probably pursue to serve with central water or sewer.

Ms. McAllister said the second area out of the twelve is right between Willards and Pittsville where, again, there are no existing larger communities. She said they are not aware of many failing septic systems, and they talked to both Willards and Pittsville, and they also did not see this area really becoming a growth area even though those two areas are identified in the Comp Plan as growth areas. She clarified, they may be in 20 or 30 years, and at that point the maps can change, but at this point they just did not anticipate those being large growth areas.

Mr. Dodd said it was stated at the last meeting that they had not talked to all of the towns yet, to which Ms. McAllister responded, they have, though it has probably been over a year since they talked to most of them. She clarified, they have not talked to them since this plan has been published. She said she thinks at some point either the Executive Office or the Public Works Department will talk to them again, but they talked to all of them, and they all felt they had identified their growth areas, they invested in their water and sewer, and they were all willing to partner wherever possible.

Mr. Cannon asked if the low density areas represent the 5,000 houses Ms. McAllister was referencing, or just part of those 5,000, to which Ms. McAllister responded, all of these areas combined represent the 5,000. She said she thinks in total there were about 18,000 onsite septic systems they are dealing with right now, and about 6,000 of those are within an existing town or city's municipal growth boundary, and then the remaining 4,000-5,000 would be within these areas they have identified right now.

Ms. McAllister said the other comments made were regarding the fact that there needs to be a lot of open communication and public discussion. She said, again, this is a plan that hopefully is just to provide an overview and give the County a starting point, and the next steps, which they discussed in the presentation, she thinks are very important. She said, if they look at step one, even from the management side, the County would approve the Master Plan and fund a Water Division, and she thinks the technology side is very important, so the next step would be to continue to do studies. She said the County will need discharge capacity, and that requires some very detailed modeling of the hydrology of these areas, looking at the nutrient loads, and doing detailed technology studies on that. She said, if the

County can get discharge permits from the State, that is when they can start looking at what type of funding they get and start looking at user rates, but that is step one.

Mr. Holloway said they hear a lot about failing septic systems, and the area that is not identified on this map is where they have the biggest problem, which is the area east of Salisbury, and that is where the problems are. He clarified, he is not saying there are not problems elsewhere, but there are homes in that area right now that are not even allowed to put septic in and have to have their tanks pumped out periodically. He then asked Ms. McAllister to explain that, to which Ms. McAllister responded, she will refer back to the map of the existing municipality growth boundaries. She said, from a technical standpoint, they do not want to duplicate services. She clarified, they do not want existing pump stations and sewer mains to be in the road and then have the County come through on the other side of the road and put more in. She said these boundaries are, from their knowledge, the existing towns and cities growth boundaries, and under this plan they did not recommend the County put duplicate services within those existing municipal boundaries.

Mr. Holloway asked if Ms. McAllister is saying that the City of Salisbury should service those areas, to which Ms. McAllister responded, maybe there could be some type of collaboration where the County may assist with grant funds, but, as far as how they are served, from a political standpoint and how that works, they did not get involved in that, but, yes, from a technical standpoint, they believe that anybody within a municipal growth boundary should be served by that municipality. Mr. Holloway said the problem is, as of right now, the City does not do that without annexation, to which Ms. McAllister responded, they heard that from all the municipalities they talked to with the exception of the Town of Delmar, which was open for urban services, but that was the only one.

Mr. Holloway said he has been told that someone does not have to be annexed unless they want to. He clarified, in other words, a city cannot just come along and annex someone, to which Ms. McAllister responded, she does not believe so.

Mr. Mitchell clarified, in order to be annexed, a certain percentage of the people living in the area, who do not even have to be owners, can upset that. Mr. Holloway said what he is getting at is that they are not going to be able to get City water and sewer services unless they agree to be annexed, to which Ms. McAllister responded, that is a question he would probably need to talk to the municipality about. She said their recommendation is for the County to get into the water and sewer business, have an operations division, and serve folks who are not currently within any boundary of a municipality. She said, as the County moves forward, they may find other alternatives as far as working with municipalities to help share some of the burdens, but at this point, starting in the water and sewer area within a municipal growth boundary may not be advantageous, but, again, the plan is fluid. Mr. Holloway said they understand that, and they are just starting out, but when they start annexing and moving the water and sewer out, they are also moving their boundaries out, so where does it end? Ms. McAllister asked if Mr. Holloway means where would the municipality end, to which Mr. Holloway responded, as she said, if it is annexed out, they get to the point where they have annexed out so far and have water and sewer, so why not just keep going? He asked, where does it end?

Mr. Dodd said that is his question as well because, if somebody lives outside the boundaries and then that boundary is expanded a certain distance, they could say the same thing Ms. McAllister just told them about duplicating services, so where does it end because it is going to just keep expanding.

Mr. Hastings asked if Mr. Dodd means municipally or the County, to which Mr. Dodd responded, municipally for the services. Mr. Hastings said the question is whether or not the municipality wants to be a part of that area. He said it is not financially advantageous for some of the municipalities to do the growth they might be imagining. He said, for the County, they are trying to fill in the gaps.

Ms. McAllister said there is another map in the report that shows Salisbury's boundary right next to the recommended County boundaries, and they meet perfectly. She said, in the Comp Plan, there is a map that really needs to be referenced frequently. She said it was updated in 2017 by the County, and this is the boundary they see replicated on the Water and Sewer Plan maps. She said anything colored is considered a growth area by the County and she believes also by the Maryland Department of Planning. She said anything in white is where they have not shown as served with public water and sewer, and there might be large communities that border some of these colored areas and they find that providing them public water and sewer is advantageous and they need it because they have failing issues. She said the gray area is the City of Salisbury and there are a lot of County colored areas within that, and that is where it is just very hard from a technical standpoint to show the County economically serving them with public sewer. Mr. Dodd said these gaps are surrounded by the City, to which Ms. McAllister responded, yes, but the yellow areas are the communities they have identified.

Mr. Holloway said he wants to go back to the east side that is close to Salisbury and getting them to serve that. He said they have a section off of North Salisbury Blvd. that is basically in the middle of Salisbury that they do not even serve because it is not financially advantageous for them to do that. He said this is the area that has the most problems right now, so do they go after that area first, or do they go after the areas that are not having as much of a problem and let that escape. He said he agrees that they need to work on water and sewer, but they need to work where the most problems are presently.

Ms. McAllister responded, she would say that there are multiple problems throughout the County, granted maybe some of those area have been hotspots and the most discussed, but there are other areas in the County. She then referred to a map and said this was recently updated by the Health Department of where they are struggling, so there are a lot of areas here that the County could address and focus on while they also simultaneously have discussions with municipalities to determine what the best options are in the other areas. Mr. Holloway asked if the red areas on the map are Health Department hotspots, to which Ms. McAllister responded, red and pink are the Health Department hotspots. She said, while a lot of them surround Salisbury, there are a lot on the outskirts as well. Mr. Holloway asked if there is an overlay map to show those hotspots compared to Ms. McAllister's map, to which Ms. McAllister responded, she could definitely provide that because that would be pretty easy. She then referred to an area on the map as the Coulbourn Mill community, which they have identified, and said they also identified areas along Old Ocean City Road in the Parsonsburg community. She said, again, that area is fluid, and she could see them coming right up to where other public services stop because that has been a major problem. She said Whitehaven has failing systems, the area by Bivalve, Nanticoke and Tyaskin, and there are areas in Mardela that are all areas where the Health Department is really struggling to find solutions, and she feels it should be recognized that the County may be able to economically serve these areas sooner rather than later. She said, as they are developing their Water Department, the County may find that they can partner in other areas that are near other municipalities.

Mr. Dodd said at some point soon before they really get started they are going to have to hire the Operations Department and an Operations Director. He then asked if that would fall under the Public

Works Department, or would that be a separate Department, to which Ms. McAllister responded, the study recommends starting a Water Department, which would start underneath Public Works. She said there could be a Director of Public Works who has experience, or even somebody who would be the Director of the Water Department. She said, as they grow, and if they grow beyond even the 5,000 future homes, they might find that the Water Department would move out of Public Works and have its own Department, similar to the Sheriff's Department or Board of Education. She clarified, to start, they can share resources, such as the accounting system, versus developing all of their own, but at this point it would stay under the Public Works Department. Mrs. Acle said they probably need to have a Public Works Director before they get started.

Ms. McAllister said these are the steps from the management side. She clarified, adopting this plan that they want to move forward with does not mean they are adopting every single map as is, but they are adopting the idea of starting a Water Department, and then one of the next big steps is aligning the Water and Sewer Plan maps with where they want to serve because State and grant funding are not available unless everything aligns properly with the Maryland Department of Planning.

Mr. Cannon asked, before going through the process where they begin creating a Department, does Ms. McAllister think it would benefit the County to first do some type of a study with the public in general to know what their needs are, or what they assess as to how accepting they are going to be of this whole process? He clarified, they could create the entire Department, fund it, and get the buildout, but then they could have people rejecting this and saying they do not want to pay for this, or they do not want to be annexed, so that is his concern. He said, even with what they may have learned from Morris Mill, there were residents who still were pushing against anything to do with being acclimated to the water and sewer system. He then asked what would happen in Wicomico County if they have 5,000 households and 4,000 say they do not want to start getting charged until the septic is coming up into their living room, to which Ms. McAllister responded, she would say she thinks they need to do multiple steps simultaneously. She said they need to have these public meetings, whether it is through a study or however they handle that, but at the same time they really need to do the feasibility of doing discharge permits and the science part of monitoring the hydrology because with changing their maps, they can figure out what type of funding they are getting. She said a lot of folks are going to say it sounds great, but then ask how much they will have to pay, and they will not know how much they are going to have to pay until they have designated the fact that they are willing to serve them. She said, by mapping them in an S2 in the Water and Sewer Plan, that means they are planning to serve them, but it does not mean they are putting their foot down and have said they are serving them, it is just saying they intend to serve them if everything aligns properly. She said, until it is mapped and until they have the discharge capacity and know where they are working, it is very hard to come up with a cost.

Mr. Cannon said he asks that because, except for the areas that may be involved with the municipalities, anything the County may do independently is all about numbers, to which Ms. McAllister responded, yes, it is. She said, in order for the State to tell the County what they will give them, all of the Planning Departments have to be on the same page.

Mr. Holloway said Mr. Cannon is talking about pushback, and the Council already heard something this morning from the folks who made the public comments that it is going to create growth in these areas, such as Tyaskin or Whitehaven. He said those are small, quaint areas, and if they put in septic and water, there could be a spurt of growth because they have water and sewer in that area. He said that is going

to be just part of it, and then the other part is how much people are going to have to pay to get hooked up and do they want to be served, and do they want to be annexed into the City of Salisbury, or do they not want to be annexed into the City of Salisbury, or do they want water and sewer but not be annexed in, so those are the things they need to find out.

Mr. Cannon said he thinks it is important to say that they recognize this is the absolute highest priority and it needs to be done. He then asked if there have been further thoughts as far as any incentive programs, such as reducing costs for the first five to ten years, to which Ms. McAllister responded, she would refer back to Mr. Bozick about that from his past experience. She said she thinks they could find other examples of Counties that have gone through this, and USDA might offer some type of program to help folks who have trouble connecting. She said, in addition to what the County puts in, each home will need to connect to the public system, which has a cost, and there are probably programs out there that will help.

Mr. Dodd said the County will not be hooking people up for free, so there is going to be a fee.

Mrs. Acle said she had a townhall in Whitehaven about a year ago regarding failing septic systems, and MDE was there and they mentioned a grant program they had that would waive the cost if they tied in. She said she cannot remember what the program was, and she does not even know if it is still available, but it may have just been for the priority areas. Ms. McAllister responded, she can look into that.

Mr. Hastings said a couple of years ago there were Bay Restoration funds available and they created a State definition of areas of public health concern based after rural communities in Talbot County, which are areas of high concentration of failing septic systems. He said the red and pink dots on the map are only because there are homes that have said they have had issues, but the truth is that it is all over the County. He said he thinks there are definitely options, and he thinks the State and federal government are focused on that now. He said there is money available now, and the more they can strike while the iron is hot, the better chance they have. Ms. McAllister responded, this is only going to keep getting worse with the people who do not have the room to replace their septic system or drain field.

Ms. McAllister said, if the County wants to move forward with this, she thinks the next steps are important. She said, as they said in step one, those steps include trying to find discharge capacity and trying to find what kind of grants and loans they can obtain to do it.

Ms. McAllister said she knows one public comment was regarding growth, but she will say that the State will only fund existing homes. She explained, they will only fund people who are already there who have failing systems, so they are not going to get grant funding to build in twice the capacity, they are just not going to get the funding. She clarified, if the County chooses under local dollars to do some additional capacity, that is fine, but the grant funding will only fund existing homes.

Mr. Holloway asked, what about infill development? He clarified, if there is a pipe running down the road and there are five empty lots and then there are more houses, would they get the grants for that, to which Ms. McAllister responded, they took that into account in the study and the cost they provided includes the infill. She clarified, just the parcels that are already there that are vacant, but growth needs to pay for growth, so if there is any development, they will have to come through and pay for that.

Mr. Holloway said he looks at how Somerset County handled this. He then asked if that is similar to how they would handle it for Tyaskin or Whitehaven, to which Ms. McAllister responded, she is not familiar with that.

Mr. Paul Wilber, County Attorney, then came before Council in response to Mr. Holloway's question. He said they have water, but they do not have sewer, so they just pay their quarterly water bill. Mr. Holloway clarified, he was talking about the cost of running it and manning it, and how they got it there, to which Mr. Wilber responded, that was before his time.

Ms. McAllister said she thinks that is all built into the user rate monthly charge. She said they make sure that whatever money they are collecting pays for their operations costs.

Mr. Holloway asked, when Ms. McAllister said the State will not pay for undeveloped, but then they have this infill situation after the project is completed, do the people who hook up to that have to pay the State back, to which Ms. McAllister responded, they would pay for their own infrastructure, obviously. She said, if there is no discharge capacity, there is no discharge capacity, so they need to take into account how they discharge their flow, or how they pay the County to increase their discharge, whether it is land application or other alternatives. Mr. Holloway said he does not think Ms. McAllister understands his question, to which Ms. McAllister responded, the State is only going to pay for existing homes, and any other capacity built into that is paid by the County locally, so the developer would be paying the County back. Mr. Holloway said, if they have water and sewer running down a road and there are five empty lots, and then five years later somebody comes along and builds, does that mean they can or cannot hook up to it, to which Mr. Mitchell responded, if the five homes take 100,000 gallons a day, that is all the State will finance, but they will have some infill lots. He said, if they only pay for the 100,000 gallons, there is no capacity, so the County would have to pay for the extra capacity if they are going to hook into the system. He then asked if that is correct, to which Ms. McAllister responded, yes.

Ms. McAllister explained, there will be some capacity for infill to a degree that is reasonable, but they are not going to have a 100-home community come in and there will be capacity for that because that is considered growth, and that would be changing the existing zoning and the makeup of what is there already, and that type of development will have to pay for itself. Mr. Holloway said he knows they have to pay, but Ms. McAllister is saying there would not be the capacity because the State only will have financed enough capacity for what is there.

Mr. Dodd asked if that can be changed, to which Ms. McAllister responded, if Whitehaven, for example, had 30 homes and the County wanted the State to fully fund a treatment plant and they were given an 80 percent grant, that would cover those 30 homes, and they would just build their plant at that flow. She said, however, if they choose to increase that flow to allow for future growth, they can do that from day one, but that funding would have to come from a local share. She explained, they can add to the treatment system in the future if they want to, but it would be paid for from local share or the developer. She said there is also the fact they would need additional discharge capacity and land application options, which would have to be negotiated with the State, and that would have to be covered by that developer.

Mr. Dodd said he does not think they are getting a full answer on a lot of these questions they are asking, so it is kind of confusing, to which Ms. McAllister responded, if they look at the plan, it looks at the existing issues and existing concerns, and that is what they are addressing.

Mr. Dodd said he thinks, personally, he would like to see all of the answers before they jump in and approve this document.

Mr. Holloway said they have already heard a concern this morning about future growth when the systems go in, so they have to address that to some point.

Mr. Hastings said he knows this is a moving target and a lot depends on what is available, what the developer puts up, what State money is there, so there are a whole lot of question marks, but he thinks they are moving in the right direction, which is a positive thing.

Mr. Hastings said he has heard a couple people question why the list of communities that was put up so far seems to not be places where people of color are at. He said there was a meeting put together about saving San Domingo, and the question is where San Domingo is going, and will it continue to become more and more dilapidated, or is it a future area of growth. He said he thinks the answer to that is in the Comprehensive Plan or growth plan, and places like that may not be in the growth area. He said he knows there are a lot of folks who have a lot of expertise to answer some of these other questions regarding the growth tier mapping. He then asked if any of the current plan as it is put together only includes tiers 1 and 2, or do they go into tiers 3 and 4, to which Ms. McAllister responded, they included the growth tier maps for the existing municipalities. She said these growth maps are pretty consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, so that is what they followed. She said, once the County is in the water and sewer business, there will be more options in the San Domingo area. She clarified, they could partner with Sharptown and serve San Domingo via Sharptown, or, if Mardela has a system, they could partner with Mardela, or if they find the package systems on their own are economically feasible, they might put a package system in there. She explained, that is what they mean when they say the maps are fluid. She clarified, as they start developing the Department and getting into the water and sewer business, they will have a lot more options as far as who they serve and how they serve them.

Mr. Hastings asked if they test the wells throughout the County, to which Ms. McAllister responded, she knows the City of Fruitland tests their wells quarterly because they are the ones that bordered that plume that they found in Morris Mill. She said the Health Department could probably answer whether they are testing other local wells, but, if a municipality tests, it is probably up to the municipality. She clarified, the City Fruitland chooses to do that test. Mr. Hastings said he does not know where else that is happening, but certainly that could help add to the plan to make sure more folks are being hooked up. Ms. McAllister said, when they did the Morris Mill area, there were areas to the east of that area that found issues with their wells, and they were individually addressed, so that does happen.

Mr. Hastings said he is just trying to get an understanding of the process. He said the County probably needs to hire a staff member, and then there will be a series of public input sessions. Ms. McAllister responded, in order to answer all of the questions, they really need to move forward and commit to what they want to do and do the science studies, the hydrological modeling, etc., and at the same time have their public hearings to develop their areas and control growth.

Ms. McAllister said, at this point, this is just a plan to give them the starting blocks, but, again, to get all the answers, the next steps need to be taken. She said the State saw some of the potential areas and they were ranked very high as far as whether they would get funding or not, it is just that they were not consistent with the planning maps, and, therefore, the County did not get assigned a certain amount of money they would have been awarded.

Mr. Hastings asked if the County needs to accept this plan as their basis, or is this plan just kind of open for additional changes from the public, to which Ms. McAllister responded, she thinks this plan could change multiple times over the years, without a doubt, but she thinks that if it is agreed that the idea of getting into the water and sewer business is supported, they should approve the plan so the County Executive can move forward initiating these next steps.

Mr. Dodd said he has heard discussions from other Councilmembers who have talked to some of the towns. He clarified, he is not advocating this question, but, with the discussions, did any of the towns indicate they may want to turn their water and sewer system over to the County, to which Ms. McAllister responded, no, not directly. She said she thinks they do not really know what the County is going to have because they do not have anything at this point, but she thinks, if they have an operations division, they might find they should share resources throughout the municipalities and the technology that is available now. She said she knows some of the municipalities they work with find it very hard to find operators and keep it staffed. She said they have one operator who is working seven days a week, which is just not sustainable. She said, if the County gets into the business and develops a reputation successfully, she thinks they will be able to offer a lot more to some of the municipalities that are struggling.

Mr. Dodd said it was mentioned earlier about hiring an employee. He then asked what kind of credentials the first employee should have because they need somebody with expertise, to which Ms. McAllister responded, as an engineer, that is the first thing that comes to mind, but she thinks they really also need somebody who has expertise in writing grants and handling the management structure of this, versus the engineering side where they could always contract with other folks who have that expertise. She said she will talk more about that with Mr. Bozick, but she thinks they need somebody with the ability to get money and grants and get through the planning process. Mr. Dodd said that is why he thinks they need somebody in-house to guide them through this, to which Ms. McAllister responded, it is a lot, and somebody who is in charge of doing this every day would be very advantageous to keep things moving. Mr. Dodd added, especially if they know where to seek out the grants.

Mr. Hastings said, as soon as they can get this going, he will be happy to have that happen as he thinks this is the biggest thing that has held the County back from growth. He clarified, that being said, he wants to make sure they have the right growth. He said obviously they still want to stay an agricultural community, but it would be nice to have real substantial growth, and there is a lot of space for infill in most of their municipalities, so the faster they can get this going, he would be happy to see that happen.

Mr. Cannon said this is a great report, but they have to recognize that they will have second guessing and naysayers, and devil's advocates to a fault, but, as a Body and as leaders in this community, they have to not fall victim to any type of paralysis by analysis and do their due diligence, but they have to move forward and not lose site of the big picture because they want to make this work. Ms. McAllister responded, the big picture is huge, and that is what this is, and then they go individually as they need to.

Mr. Dodd said he thinks in the very near future the Council should have a townhall, at minimum, and invite citizens to hear what they have to say. He said they have already heard from a select group here today who brought some very good points, but he wants to hear what is going on throughout the entire County. He said he is not sure they are ready to approve this right away because they need to hear what



the public has to say, but they are working on it. He said this is something that has been going on for at least 20 years, and this Council is committed, and he is glad to see the citizens are committed as well.

There was no further discussion.



Larry W. Dodd, President, District 3



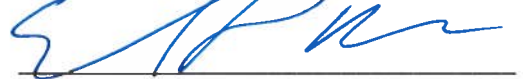
Joe Holloway, Vice President, District 5



John T. Cannon, At-Large



absent  
William R. McCain, At-Large



Ernest F. Davis, District 1



Nicole Acle, District 2



Josh Hastings, District 4



Laura Hurley, Council Administrator