

Port of Baltimore officials lobby Cecil leaders on Pearce Creek site

By Cheryl Mattix cmattix@cecilwhig.com | Posted: Thursday, June 20, 2013 2:50 am

Maryland Port Administration staff members conducted a tour of their facilities Tuesday for Cecil County officials, emphasizing the economic impact of the Port of Baltimore and attempting to gain the county's support to reopen a former dredge spoil site at Pearce Creek south of the C & D Canal.

“The tour was well worth it,” said Council President Robert Hodge, who was accompanied by council members Joyce Bowsbey and Alan McCarthy. “I think everyone learned something Tuesday, but it doesn't mean we'll allow the Port of Baltimore or the Army Corps of Engineers to run all over us.”

The tour was a follow up to an information meeting held near the Pearce Creek dredge site in Cecil County last month.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Philadelphia office maintains the C & D Canal and the approach to the southern end of it from Poole's Island to the land cut, and the Port of Baltimore relies on the route through the C & D Canal staying dredged properly to allow big ships to deliver and pick up cargo in Baltimore.

“I know the Port of Baltimore is a big contributor to the state's economy and I understand the need to dredge channels the Port needs for ships bringing cargo in and out,” Hodge said. “We still have to hold authorities accountable to help residents with contaminated wells in the nearby communities and assure no future contamination will result from reopening the site,” Hodge said.

The tour started with an overview of the economic impact generated by the Port of Baltimore. It moved from there to a bus tour of the Dundalk and Seagirt Terminals and concluded with a boat tour of the harbor.

Kathy Broadwater, deputy executive director of MPA, said approximately 14,600 people work at the Port of Baltimore, and it generates another 25,410 in indirect jobs and pays \$304 million in state, county and municipal taxes.

“We took a big hit in 2009 with the downturn of the economy, but have rebounded quickly with 15 percent growth the last two years,” Broadwater said.

She highlighted some of the Port's biggest successes, including its ranking as the No. 1 port for cars in the U.S. In 2012. She said about 40 percent of the cars are shipped through the C & D Canal.

The port is also number one in “roll-on, roll-off cargo”, sugar and coal.

“Our success can be attributed to the diversity of the cargo we get,” Broadwater said.

The Port of Baltimore includes six port-owned marine terminals and 30 privately owned marine terminals.

She told Cecil officials that the Port faces many challenges, including upgrading an aging facility to handle an increase in cargo anticipated with the expansion of the Panama Canal, as well as the increasing cost of dredging and the challenge of finding proper placement of the material.

The C & D Canal's shipping channel is the only one with “zero” capacity for dredge siting among the four shipping channels used by the Port of Baltimore, according to Frank Hamons, MPA Deputy Director for Harbor Development.

McCarthy asked Hamons why they don't put more effort into cleaning up the sediment that has built up behind the Conowingo Dam instead of focusing on dredging the sediment after it enters the Bay.

“That's an interstate problem, so we can't do it,” said Hamons, referring to the sediment coming from New York and Pennsylvania that ends up flowing into the Chesapeake Bay through the Conowingo Dam during major storm events.

“It's a federal issue so we can't do it, but we support it,” Hamons said.

Blazer, who is in charge of improving water quality in Baltimore Harbor, told Cecil officials the MPA is proud of its efforts to reclaim the 160-acre Masonville site to use 100 acres for a dredge containment site and 50-acres for a nature area and 11-acre waterfront open to public access.

He said that effort was a result of a public/private partnership and outreach to the community.

Hodge said he views a comparison of the Masonville site to Peace Creek as “apples to oranges.” “They are not alike at all,” Hodge said. “Pearce Creek is in a rural area that is not served by public water and sewer and the Masonville area was a highly contaminated former industrial site that was improved by the reclamation process.”

McCarthy, Bowsbey and Hodge believe eventually the Army Corps will reopen the Pearce Creek site, but as local officials, they



Port of Baltimore tour

CECIL WHIG PHOTO BY CHERYL MATTIX Cecil County Director of Administration Al Wein and County Councilman Alan McCarthy talk with MPA Chief of Dredged Material Management Dave Blazer during a Tuesday boat tour of Baltimore Harbor.

intend to fight for the Cecil County residents who have been harmed by previous contamination to their wells.

“I want federal officials to crack down on Pennsylvania and New York,” McCarthy said. “I believe that is the root of the problem.”

He said he believes the Army Corps is looking at three options to help the residents, including helping them with new private wells, drilling one big community well or connecting to public water from Cecilton.

“If they don't come up with a satisfactory solution,” Hodge said, “We'll be after them, making a lot of noise.”

“I think it's going to reopen, but I also think it's the Army Corps of Engineers responsibility to provide the communities with clean water,” Bowsbey said.