

This presentation premiered at WaterSmart Innovations

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View From the Dias: Reaching Out to Local Elected Officials

WSI2018 presentation

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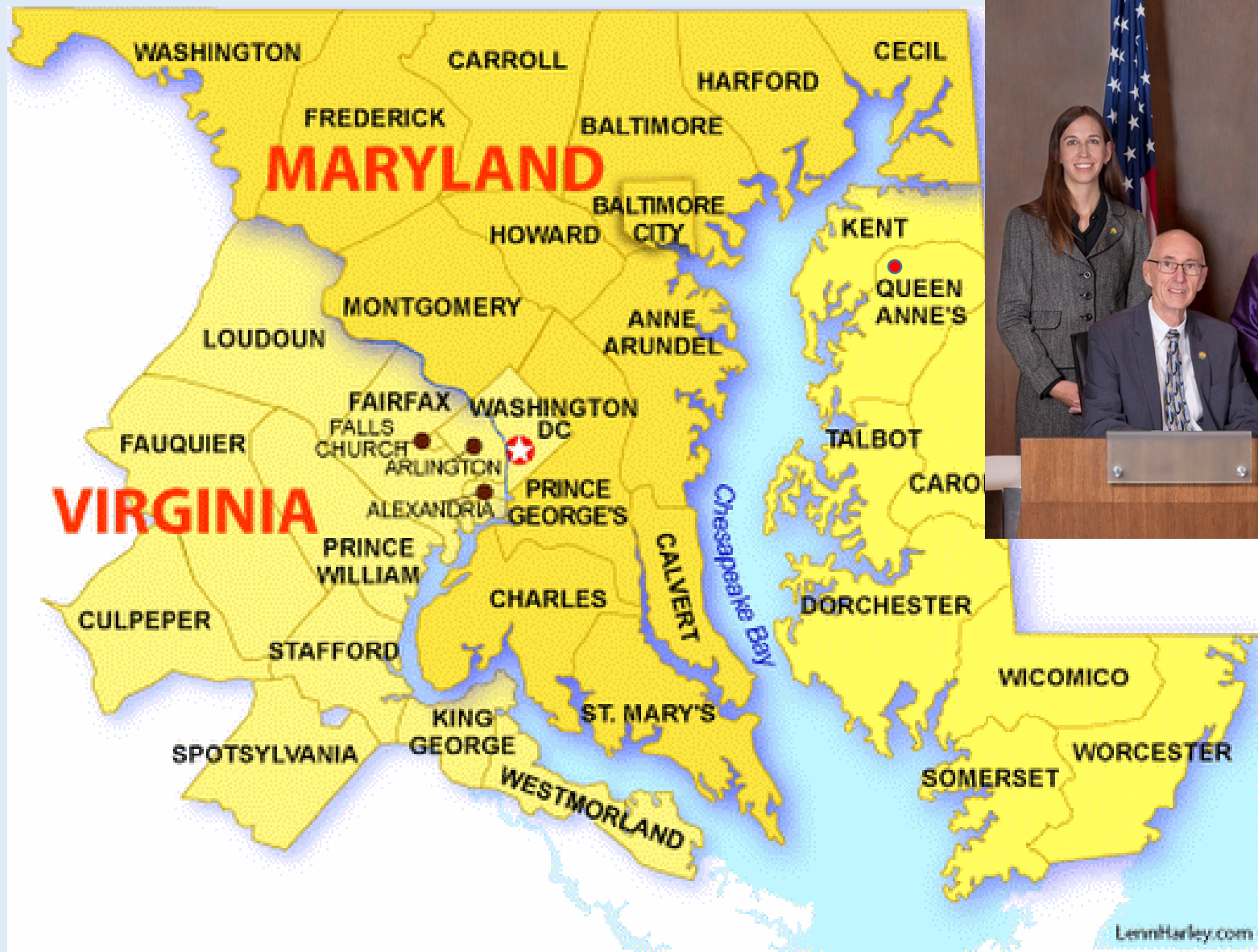
Sligo Creek Resources

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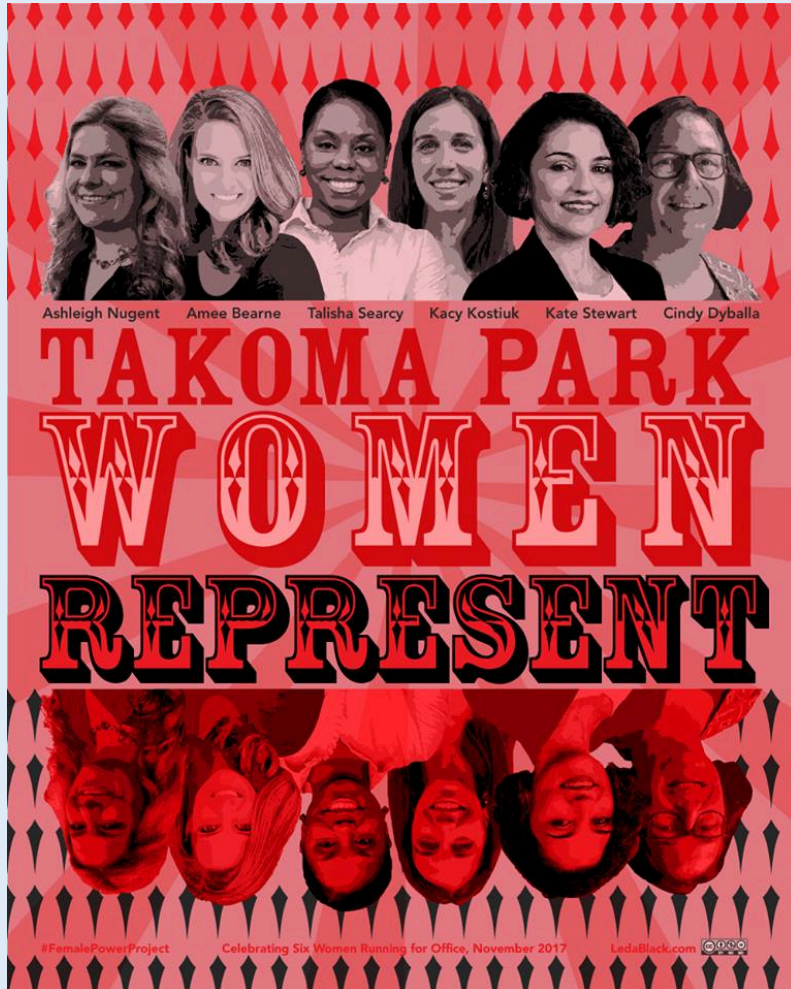


This Session: Elected Officials

- Who's in charge
- What are they thinking
- Advice from conservation practitioners: what works, what doesn't
- Programs & technologies, budget, codes & zoning, rates
- Communications
- Discussion—share your stories



Why Be Elected?



- Part of the wave of women
- Frustration with national level
- City committee experience
- Water resources career
- Committed to sustainability
- This I can do

Who's In Charge?

Are you part of:

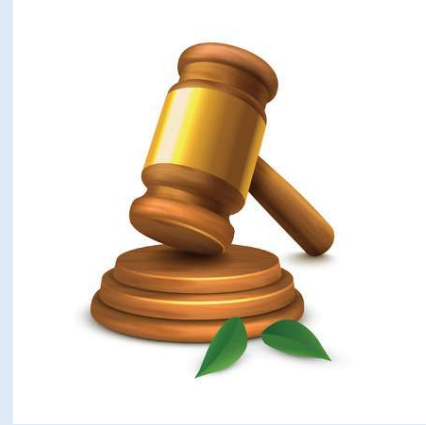
City dept. reporting to elected mayor and council

Water district with **appointed** board

Water district with **elected** board

Other

What about your general manager?



Who has **authority** for:

Programs & technologies

Planning, zoning & codes

Budget (and taxes)

Rates

Who has **influence**?

How Complex Can It Get?

Metro DC:

My city does not deliver water or set rates

My **city** approves sustainability budget, efficiency programs, stormwater fees

Elected **county** planning board adopts zoning rules, plumbing codes

Independent **regional appointed board** (WSSC) provides water & sewer, sets rates

MWD:

Focus on water

Board of 38—some elected, some appointed, all political

Wholesale and retail agencies

Most action is in board committees

Everything is open to the public

What are They Thinking?

- Competing priorities
- Short time frame
- Citizen demands, role of public opinion
- Fishbowl
- Don't like surprises
- Budget and taxes
- Lawsuits



Working in a Fishbowl

- Open to the public
- Broadcast
- Citizen comment
- Everything is potentially public
- Citizens demand transparency



Conservation:

Is the Political Benefit Often Too Long-Term?

- Primary goal: Getting re-elected
- Often their first elected position
- Desire to please the public and gain future loyalty
- Raising rates (or taxes) is politically unpopular
- Solutions must be politically desirable to be adopted
- Business interests and jobs are also paramount concerns

Source: M. Dickinson presentation



Reaching Out

Responsibility of elected official: due diligence before decisions

Job of staff: communicate information regularly

Three areas of focus:

- Policies & procedures
- Customer service & communication strategies
- Short & long term planning

Source: Wichita State U EFC

A Four-Step Approach: Showing Conservation Efforts in the Best Light

- What you want council to do
- Why this works for the community, with data
- Who else is doing this
- Will do no harm: to the community, not a political problem



Promoting a Program

- Be proactive about message
 - Identify who will object, address that up front (affordability programs)
 - Find common cause, build informal coalitions
 - Link to priorities, the more the better
 - Role of science and facts
-
- Pick your moments: when to be proactive, and when to lay low
 - First build trust, before drawing on that trust
 - Plant the seeds
 - Pilot programs are great



Programs and Technologies: LED Streetlights



- LEDs to save energy and money
- A few determined residents changed the conversation
- Council is distracted from main goal of program, and into the weeds
- Don't feed the bear

Adopting Programs

Salt Lake City:

- Conservation is small program, hard to get attention
- Data showed CII is few connections but large water use
- CII program addresses several city priorities, links across departments
- Grant money reduced impact to city
- Businesses got on board, seen as good partners



Adopting Programs

Metro Phoenix (AMWUA):

Board satisfied meeting water loss control standards

Staff saw savings opportunity

Canvassed staff operational needs, outside expert presented

Pilot program

City staff pushed as a group

Board supported concept recently



Planning, Zoning and Codes

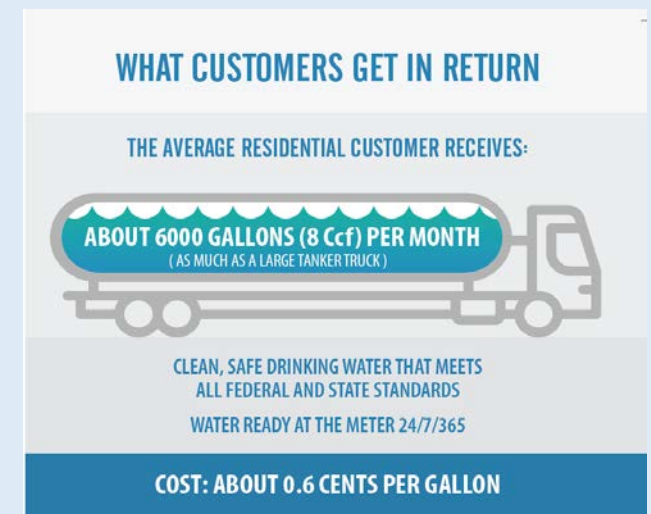
- Local landscape ordinances: a tale of two CO cities
- Code changes can find mutual benefit with other priorities and other communities



Rate Increases

- Anticipate council will hear complaints
- “We’re building a project” or “we’re not selling water” won’t sell the rate
- Tucson’s year of proactive outreach:
 - Ways we use water, how city can help
 - Value for investment
- DC water: got fixed rate increase, with negative publicity, not enough outreach, now looking for communications advice
- Both adopted affordability programs

Source: US Water Alliance webinar



Communicating with Ratepayers

A solutions-based toolkit

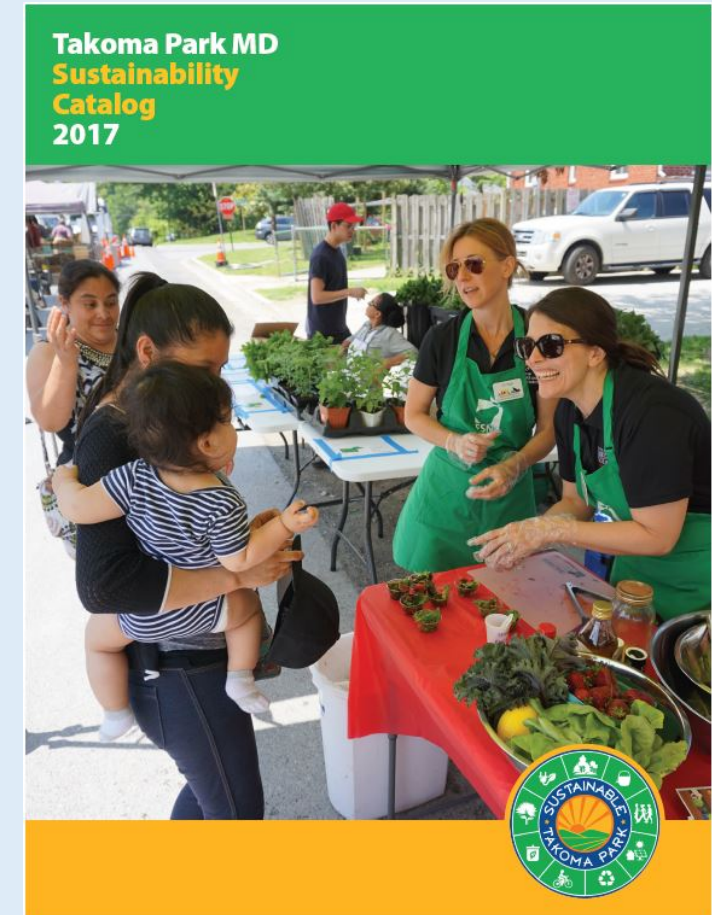
THE MESSAGE

THE TIMING AND
FREQUENCY OF
COMMUNICATION

THE VEHICLES
OF MESSAGE
DELIVERY

Communication Approaches

- Use the annual report to tell your story
- Regular meetings or contact
- Use citizen committees, other intermediaries
- Develop content, use all ways possible to get it out there
- Spend time on interactions, preparing
- Overprepare, don't overshare or distract



Common Problems

Recognize these and how to work with them:

- The changing board or council
- The demanding board or council member
- The non-believer
- Enthusiastic but uninformed
- Lots of questions
- In the weeds

Elected Officials Can Be Allies

- Know who's responsible for what
- See it from the other side
- Early and regular communication
- Find a champion
- Electeds have the pulse of their neighborhoods
- Citizen comment—the wild card
- Four step approach