

Cecil County Councilor Bowsbey: Will "Fight" for Earleville Residents' Water Polluted by US Army Corps; Seeks Council "Battle" Support

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By [Nancy Schwerzler](#)

Cecil County Councilor Joyce Bowsbey (R-2) went into battle-mode Tuesday over the pollution of Earleville residents' drinking water by the US Army Corps of Engineers, asking fellow Council members if they were willing to "fight the battle"—and saying she was ready to do so.

Bowsbey asked for a special worksession of the County Council—to include County Executive Tari Moore and representatives of the Army Corps, the Maryland Port Administration (MPA), Cecilton Mayor Joseph Zang, and community representatives from the affected Earleville areas.

Such a meeting, she said, would "provide reassurance to the residents that we've not abandoned them." But, she told fellow Council members, "maybe [you] don't want to fight the battle with them, but I do." Bowsbey said she would "continue to participate" in the Earleville community's efforts to resolve the pollution of their drinking water by the Army Corps' shipping channel dredge spoil dumpsite at the end of Pond Neck Road.

In mid-January, an independent federal study by the US Geological Survey confirmed what local residents have suspected for decades: that the Corps' dumpsite had polluted local aquifers and drinking water supplies in the West View Shores, BayView Estates, Sunset Point, and Pond Neck Road areas. The pollution, including arsenic, beryllium and multiple contaminants, persists now despite the fact that the Corps has not added new dredging spoils to the dumpsite in the past 20 years. [SEE original Cecil Times report here: <http://ceciltimes.com/2013/01/new-federal-study-proves-army-dumping-poisoned-earleville-wells-army-wants-to-resume-dumping-in-cecil-county/>]

But the Army Corps—and the MPA—have declared they want to resume dumping at the Earleville site in the next two years because it is cheaper to dump there than elsewhere. For decades, the Corps denied responsibility for pollution of local drinking water but the new USGS study proved the Corps was responsible for contamination and changing the entire groundwater flow in the area, which is located at the intersection of the Elk River and the Chesapeake Bay.

A majority of the County Council has been supportive of the Earleville residents' concerns—including Councilors Alan McCarthy (R-1) and Diana Broomell (R-4.) But County Council President Robert Hodge (R-5) has taken a cautious, wait and see approach and he did so again on Tuesday. (Councilor Michael Dunn, R-3, has been silent on the issue, as he is on most issues, and Dunn was the only Council member who did not attend a recent community/government officials meeting on the dumpsite issue at Bohemia Manor High.) [SEE Cecil Times Special Report on Bo Manor meeting here: <http://ceciltimes.com/2013/03/army-dump-port-says-to-fix-polluted-cecil-county-wells-tied-to-renewed-dumping-in-earleville-pipkin-says-clean-up-first-then-talk-about-dumping/>]

"I would prefer to wait," Hodge said Tuesday, for a county-led meeting until the Corps definitively declares that it plans to re-open the Earleville site to renewed dumping. "Today it is not even certain" that the Corps will indeed file required documentation with the state to resume dumping at the site, Hodge said. He said the Corps might decide resumed dumping, and remediation of existing pollution impacts, were "too costly" but, he conceded, such a scenario was "not likely."

Bowsbey said that after attending the Bohemia Manor meeting and presentations by Corps and MPA officials, it was clear to her that they considered the resumed dumping in Earleville as "a done deal" and there was no uncertainty about those agencies' plans.

In recent days, she said, she had met with leaders of the BayView Estates community that have been researching the issue "for years" and had compiled heavy "binders" of scientific data and documentation that caused her great concern.

Broomell said she agreed with Bowsbey's request for a special worksession on the issue, adding, "I believe this is a state issue, a local issue and a federal issue." Broomell added that she thought the federal government should pay the costs of fixing the water well problems the Corps had created in Earleville, including a possible new "community water system."

Hodge responded that he understood that some local residents did not want a community water system and instead just wanted new individual wells drilled on their property. And he resisted inclusion in a possible Council worksession meeting of Cecilton Mayor Joseph Zang—who has volunteered town water supplies to be piped about 7 miles out to Earleville to solve the water issues. Hodge said Zang should not be included until it is clear whether the Corps is willing to use such an approach.

Cecil Times was the only media representative at a recent meeting at the Cecilton Town Hall at which Corps and MPA officials were strongly positive about running a town water pipeline out to Earleville, and agreed to begin engineering studies to assess the feasibility of that option.

Broomell responded to Hodge that the full extent of the area pollution is still unknown, since there has been limited testing of wells in the past and even in the USGS study. If the pollution is broader than previously estimated, she said, individual well drilling might not be an "option" and only a community water system would be the solution.

Eventually, the County Council agreed to put off a special worksession on the Earleville dumpsite and water contamination until early July, by which time, Hodge said, the potential options might be clearer.