



MEMORANDUM

To: The Honorable President and Members of the City Council
c/o Natawna Austin, Executive Secretary

From: Christine Griffin, Deputy Director of Policy and Government Relations

Date: September 25, 2023

Re: 23-0182R Informational Hearing – Regional Water Governance Task Force

The Baltimore Regional Water Task Force (“Task Force”) was created by Senate Bill 880/House Bill 843 of the 2023 Maryland General Assembly. The purpose of the Task Force is to review the relationship between Baltimore City and Baltimore County and other nearby counties, relative to water and sewer services and operations.

The Task Force is charged with a very specific list of responsibilities as laid out in the legislation. The Task Force must review and evaluate the recommendations outlined in the 2021 Water/Sewer Services Comprehensive Business Process Review study (NewGen Report), as well as assess other governance models, to see how potential changes would impact the management structure of operations, recruitment, training and retention of employees, billing and collections, capital improvements, emergency management, and rate stability to the 1.8 million residents served by Baltimore City water.

In addition, the Task Force must analyze the fiscal implications and efficiencies of each alternative governance structure, including estimated short- and long-term costs, 10-year historical costs that each jurisdiction has paid to the utility, and cost-savings. The Task Force must then issue a final report to the Mayor of Baltimore City, the County Executive of Baltimore County, the Governor of Maryland, and the Maryland General Assembly, no later than January 30, 2024, recommending the governance model best suited for water and wastewater systems in the Baltimore region and the necessary funding to establish the recommended model.

Jointly commissioned by Baltimore City and Baltimore County, the NewGen Report under review was conducted by independent, national firm NewGen Strategies and Solutions and performed a comprehensive review of the shared water system’s existing governance structure, operations, and procedures. The NewGen report identified several challenges, including consistent issues with customer billing, limited regional coordination, and systematic limitations for long-term planning and improvements. The report concluded that the jurisdictions should convene a diverse stakeholder group to explore additional regional solutions, including potential alternative governance structures. SB 880/HB 843 was enacted by the Maryland General Assembly to create this group of stakeholders.

The 13-member coalition is a diverse group of experts, local stakeholders, and community leaders from across Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and the State of Maryland who are committed to addressing the pressing water-related challenges in the region and offer sustainable solutions.

The Task Force consists of the following members whose appointments were announced on July 20, 2023:

- Five members named by Baltimore City Mayor Brandon M. Scott:
 - o Baltimore City Comptroller Bill Henry—serving as Task Force Chair
 - o Lester Davis, Vice President, Chief of Staff of CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield
 - o Jason Mitchell, Former Director, Baltimore City Department of Public Works
 - o Patrick Moran, President, AFSCME Council 3
 - o Kishia L. Powell, General Manager/CEO, Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) Water

- Three members named by Baltimore County Executive Johnny Olszewski:
 - o Lauren Buckler, P.E., CEM, LEED AP, Deputy Director, Baltimore County Department of Public Works & Transportation
 - o Carla A. Reid, former General Manager, Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) Water
 - o Robert M. Summers, Ph.D, former Maryland Secretary of the Environment

- Two members named by Governor Wes Moore:
 - o Timothy Barr, Managing Director, Water/Wastewater, Maryland Environmental Service
 - o Jessica Medicus, Environmental Manager, Bay Associates Environmental, Inc.

- One member of the State Senate named by Senate President Bill Ferguson:
 - o Senator Cory McCray, District 45, Deputy Majority Whip

- One member of the House of Delegates named by Speaker of the House Adrienne Jones:
 - o Delegate Dana Stein, District 11B, Vice-Chair, Environment and Transportation Committee

- One member named by the Chair of the Baltimore Metropolitan Council:
 - o Yosef Kebede, Director, Howard County Department of Public Works

- And as mandated by SB 880/HB 843, the Mayor of Baltimore City and the County Executive of Baltimore have provided staff for the Task Force. The following staff members are responsible for coordinating and running all Task Force meetings, updating the Task Force website, and managing all communication with the public:
 - o Bukola Rashedat (B.R.) Hammed-Owens, Senior Advisor, Office of Special Projects, Baltimore City Department of Public Works
 - o Sameer Sidh, Senior Deputy Administrative Officer, Economic Development and Infrastructure, Baltimore County

The Comptroller, shortly after being appointed to Chair the Task Force, began meeting weekly with Richard Luna, Interim Director of Baltimore City Department of Public Works (DPW), for a review of the NewGen Report and strategic planning for Task Force meetings. **Given that we are aware that DPW will be providing a detailed review of the NewGen Report, strategy for Task Force meetings, and a timeline to the committee, we will not duplicate that information in this report.**

Also prior to the first meeting of the Task Force, the Comptroller reached out to each member of the Task Force and those responsible for appointing Task Force members. He also met with a coalition of advocates that have raised concerns about SB 880/HB 843. In each of these meetings, the Comptroller made it clear that “our water utility system is not for sale” and that “we will not be making any recommendations that involve Baltimore City giving up legal ownership of the water, wastewater, and stormwater system”. This sentiment was shared by Task Force members, as well as reiterated by the Mayor and County Executive in an opinion piece for the Baltimore Sun published September 12, 2023.

While SB 880/HB 843 made no specific reference to a public comment period, the Comptroller has been adamant since his appointment, that transparency and public engagement will be a high priority throughout the duration of the work of the Task Force. All meetings of the Task Force are livestreamed on YouTube and the public is encouraged to email comments, questions, or testimony to a dedicated email account. All testimony and email correspondence are being regularly collected and shared with Task Force members. For those that attend Task Force meetings, the final hour of each meeting has been reserved for public input. Any questions that cannot be immediately answered at a public meeting, will be researched, and answered online after the meeting. The public is also able to track all Task Force activities, meeting minutes, and votes on City and County websites.

Advocates have requested that the Task Force conduct racial and economic equity assessments of any governance model being considered, as there is no such statement in SB 880/HB 843 requiring this. The Comptroller is fully aware of the concerns raised by advocates that the Task Force will not fully study how changing the governance of the water system could affect Black residents of Baltimore City, water affordability for residents, and the city of Baltimore’s finances. And although he cannot guarantee that there will be an equity component to the final Task Force recommendations, because the recommendations have not been discussed yet or agreed upon, he has guaranteed that equity will be a part of the Task Force discussions.

It is important to keep in mind as we do this important work, that the Task Force has been mandated to follow very specific tasks in a very short period under SB 880/HB 843. And the Task Force is limited to the constraints of a bill that was passed by the Maryland General Assembly without any input from 11 members on the Task Force. Task Force members did not choose who would serve on the committee, Task Force members did not choose to leave out an equity assessment in the legislation, and Task Force members did not choose to have to complete this work in less than six months.

None-the-less, the Task Force is acutely aware of the critical work they are undertaking, and all are committed to the hard work of reimagining our regional water and wastewater systems in a way that serves ALL ratepayers and stakeholders in the region. The Comptroller is committed to coming up with a governance structure that is more transparent, more accountable, and better run on a day-to-day basis.

City Council members and the public are encouraged to share testimony and/or send questions to the Task Force. Below is the schedule for all the Task Force meetings, links to the Task Force websites, the link to the Livestream for all meetings, and email addresses for sending testimony, comments, and questions.

- **Task Force Meeting #1: Existing Organization & Agreements**
 - September 13, 2023 – 6PM – 9PM
 - Randallstown Community Center
 - 3505 Resource Drive, Randallstown, MD 21133
- **Task Force Meeting #2: Governance Models**
 - October 4, 2023 – 6PM – 9PM
 - Middle Branch Wellness Center
 - 201 Reedbird Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21225
- **Task Force Meeting #3: Governance Models & Preliminary Fiscal Analysis**
 - October 18, 2023 – 6PM – 9PM
 - CCBC Essex Campus
 - 7201 Rossville Boulevard, Baltimore, MD 21237
- **Task Force Meeting #4: Final Fiscal Analysis**
 - November 1, 2023 – 6PM – 9PM
 - Mount Pleasant Community Church
 - 6000 Radecke Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21206
- **Task Force Meeting #5: Summary & Recommendation**
 - November 16, 2024 - Virtual/Online
- **Task Force Meeting #6: Final Recommendation Report**
 - January 25, 2024 - Virtual/Online
- **City of Baltimore Website:** [Baltimore Regional Water Governance Task Force | Mayor Brandon M. Scott \(baltimorecity.gov\)](#)
 - **City of Baltimore Email:** WaterGovernance@baltimorecity.gov
- **Baltimore County Website:** [Baltimore Regional Water Governance Task Force - Baltimore County \(baltimorecountymd.gov\)](#)
 - **Baltimore County Email:** WaterGovernance@baltimorecountymd.gov
- **Livestream:**
[BRWGT YouTube Channel](#)

CC:

Celeste Amato, Chief of Staff, Comptroller's Office
 KC Kelleher, Director of Communications and Policy, Comptroller's Office
 Nina Themelis, Mayor's Office