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Local Government Advisory Committee

to the Chesapeake Executive Council

September 1, 2025

Chesapeake Bay Program
1750 Forest Drive, Suite 130
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Management Board,

On behalf of the Local Government Advisory Committee (LGAC) to the Chesapeake Bay Executive Council, thank you for your tireless commitment to protecting and restoring our local waterways, including the Chesapeake Bay. We are particularly grateful for the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft revised *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*.

LGAC's mission is to share the views and insights of local elected officials with state and federal decision makers, as well as to enhance the flow of information among local governments. Our 24 gubernatorial appointed members represent counties, towns, cities, boroughs, and townships from across the watershed. During this pivotal moment in Chesapeake Bay watershed restoration efforts, LGAC members engaged with their respective county associations, municipal leagues, and other local government associations to collect feedback on the draft revised *Watershed Agreement*. LGAC also created a one-page fact sheet specifically tailored for local officials, hosted a webinar for local governments and participated in several conference sessions to discuss the draft *Agreement* with county officials.

Based on discussions with a wide range of local government officials, we respectfully offer the following feedback on the draft revised *Watershed Agreement*:

1. **Local officials appreciate that the revised *Watershed Agreement* is a refresh and not a complete rewrite.** Local governments need clear and consistent direction guided by long-term water resource goals. By continuing to stay focused on core tenets like clean water, living resources, and community engagement, the revised *Watershed Agreement* offers reassurance that the time and money local governments have already invested will not be wasted.

2. **The *Watershed Agreement's* four revised goals are easier for local governments to understand.** Simplifying the goals in the 2014 *Watershed Agreement* from ten to four makes them much easier for the general public, including local governments, to understand. Additionally, the goals themselves fit well together and collectively cover the breadth of work required for a holistic approach to watershed restoration.



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3. **The *Watershed Agreement* does not specify what resources will be available for implementation.** Local governments are ready and willing to support watershed protection and restoration, but continue to need state and federal funding and technical assistance to be true partners in these efforts. To begin, the Chesapeake Bay Program needs to estimate the cost of implementing the goals and outcomes in the *Agreement*. Sufficient funding is absolutely critical to sustain and expand partnerships with local governments and to scale-up implementation.
4. **Local governments need clarity on what is expected of them.** As the revised *Watershed Agreement* is rolled out next year, states need to be clear about what is expected of their local governments and when. By early 2027, these expectations should be incorporated into Management Strategies for each outcome, including specific cost-estimates, and in state-specific resources or materials tailored for local governments. LGAC stands ready to review these materials, provide feedback or guidance, and share them widely with local government partners.

In addition to these broad remarks, the attached appendix offers specific feedback on the draft revised *Watershed Agreement*. If adequately addressed, LGAC's comments and recommendations will make the draft *Watershed Agreement* stronger and more impactful. As your Advisory Committee, we strongly recommend that the Executive Council build upon the progress of the Partnership this past year by first revising the draft *Watershed Agreement* based on public feedback, and then adopting the revised *Watershed Agreement* at your annual meeting.

Chesapeake Bay restoration efforts are facing significant headwinds and the Partnership will need to be agile in recognizing, anticipating, and responding to not just changing environmental conditions, but also to population shifts, changes in technologies, and their impacts on local economies.

LGAC looks forward to continuing to collaborate with state and federal leaders on strategies that support local governments and their work via multi-sector collaborations to protect and restore local waterways. Our members are eager to support implementation of key aspects of this new *Watershed Agreement*, particularly those related to planning and land use, toxins, local leadership, and changing environmental conditions.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this feedback. If you have any questions or require further clarification, please reach out to LGAC staff at lgac@allianceforthebay.org.

Sincerely,



Commissioner Marty Qually
Local Government Advisory Committee Chair
Adams County, PA

Appendix: Detailed Comments

- Preamble: LGAC suggests adding 'learn' to 'live, work and play.'
- Principles: LGAC members appreciate the commitment to 'Acknowledge, support and embrace local governments ... in watershed restoration, conservation and protection activities,' but the *Watershed Agreement* is unclear about the mechanism for ensuring that these principles are upheld.
- Clean Water:
 - Reducing Excess Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Sediment - The *Watershed Agreement* is unclear how the timeline of this outcome and associated Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) targets will impact local governments, especially those with Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permits. It is also unclear how the timing of current permit cycles will or will not line up with the new TMDL target. Local governments need consistent guidance, so taking the time needed to get these targets right is important. LGAC looks forward to working with the Agricultural Advisory Committee on this outcome.
 - Toxic Contaminants Mitigation - LGAC supports this outcome because toxic contaminants, like PFAS, continue to be a concern for local governments.
- Healthy Landscapes:
 - Protected Lands - This outcome contains many 'placeholders.' LGAC members would like clarity on when and how local governments will have the chance to weigh in on these specific numbers. As one of the partnership's Advisory Committees, LGAC requests the opportunity to provide feedback on these targets before they are finalized.
 - Land Use Decision Support - LGAC members appreciate that this outcome respects local land use authority, while ensuring appropriate state and federal support (e.g. high resolution land use data available for local governments to use for no cost). However, the language lacks specifics about how state and federal partners plan to share these data and resources with local governments. Additionally, many local governments will need technical assistance to understand and utilize these data and tools. Lastly, LGAC suggests that more than two case studies should be highlighted each year.
 - Healthy Forests and Trees - LGAC suggests clarifying that native vegetation that can adapt to changing environmental conditions are the priority for forest and tree canopy restoration efforts.
- Engaged Communities:
 - Local Leadership: LGAC supports this outcome because building local officials' knowledge and capacity is an essential prerequisite for local government participation in watershed restoration, conservation and protection activities. However, the current target is somewhat vague and the Partnership could consider a more straightforward target. For example, 'engage X# of local government leaders in meaningful watershed knowledge and capacity building opportunities.' Implementation of the outcome should be focused on knowledge and capacity building for

smaller local governments and/or newly elected officials. LGAC recommends including these details in the outcome's Management Strategy.

- Workforce - LGAC supports this outcome because local governments continue to have challenges finding and retaining qualified staff and/or contractors with expertise in green infrastructure and other environmental fields.
- Student experiences - LGAC suggests revising the outcome to fully encompass the breadth of all K-12 students in our communities.