

# A Healthy Chesapeake Bay Begins with Local Governments

What is with this tax hike? Why is that new apartment building taller than the rest of my block? Why is my water bill so expensive? Why is my storm drain clogged with litter? Why did you cut down that beautiful old tree on my street? Where can I find a good job or receive career training?

As local elected officials from Virginia, Maryland, New York, Delaware, West Virginia and the District of Columbia appointed to the [Chesapeake Bay Local Government Advisory Committee](#) (LGAC), these are just a few of the questions we encounter from residents that are directly related to how we maintain our Chesapeake Bay Watershed – from green jobs training to reducing water pollution and containing our carbon footprint.

Created by the [1987 Chesapeake Bay Agreement](#), LGAC works with state and federal decision makers to communicate what local governments are seeing on the ground and the resources we need to keep our Chesapeake Bay watershed clean and healthy. Appointed by the Governors of the watershed states (or the Mayor of the District of Columbia), our 24 LGAC members represent counties, towns, cities, boroughs, and townships from across the watershed. Our communities range from highly urban areas with millions of constituents to large swaths of rural lands with scenic hills, rivers, and small historic towns.

The [Chesapeake Bay Program](#) is a unique, regional partnership dedicated to restoring and protecting the Bay, its tributaries, and the lands that surround them to improve water quality and living resources for our residents. In 2022, the Bay Program was [charged with preparing recommendations](#) that “prioritize and outline the next steps for meeting the goals and outcomes of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement leading up to and beyond 2025.” As the Partnership looks ‘beyond 2025’ towards the future of the watershed restoration effort, the buy-in and support of local governments is critical for advancing restoration goals. As the voice of local governments, LGAC wants to be clear about what local governments need in order to be effective partners in restoration now and into the future.

First, local governments are ready and willing to support watershed protection and restoration; but we need the technical and administrative resources to be true partners in these efforts. LGAC strongly supports the [Beyond 2025 Steering Committee’s recommendation](#) (pages 13-14) to expand local government technical assistance. Small, under-resourced local governments continue to have the greatest technical and administrative capacity needs. LGAC has long championed the opportunity to expand technical assistance by prioritizing relationships with local governments through existing trusted networks. Regardless of the term used for this technical assistance provider, we want to emphasize that the key element is that they are a connected individual who possesses a wide range of knowledge and skills related to water resources planning.

Second, as local officials, we value consistency. When state and federal leaders suddenly change directions, it pulls the rug out from under local governments who cannot easily realign priorities due to budgetary and staffing constraints. A recommitment to the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, as proposed by the Beyond 2025 Steering Committee, would ensure local officials have clear and consistent direction around water resource management and offer peace of mind that the time and money they have already invested will not be wasted.

Lastly, we need the Partnership to celebrate the significant progress that local governments have already achieved. Towns, cities, and counties around the watershed have invested hundreds of millions of their local tax dollars in wastewater treatment upgrades, green stormwater infrastructure, urban tree canopy, riparian buffers, living shorelines and more. Local officials throughout the watershed have worked in partnership with businesses, farmers, city planners, nonprofits, and community organizations to inform, educate, and inspire our constituents.

LGAC remains committed to sharing best practices with our fellow local elected officials and spurring additional on the ground action. Our members have hosted peer to peer learning exchange tours, facilitated roundtable discussions, and moderated panels at local government association conferences. Over the last 5 years, we have worked tirelessly to directly engage more than 2,500 local officials from around the watershed. This effort continues with an upcoming peer to peer tour that will convene Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners from across the District of Columbia for dialogue and peer learning around facilitating equitable access to greenspaces and building healthy communities for all.

These on the ground events allow us to hear from our fellow local leaders about the opportunities and challenges facing the Chesapeake Bay and communicate these insights and concerns to state and federal partners. As local officials, we make critical decisions on where and how to target watershed clean up efforts. We partner with our constituents to help ensure their tax dollars are going to clean waterways, healthy housing, abundant crabs and seafood stock, a thriving green jobs sector, and beautiful local parks.

As residents and neighbors of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, you have the opportunity to have your voice heard too. Like our LGAC Members, your voice is pivotal to protecting and restoring our lands and waterways. We urge you to engage with your mayors, council members, county commissioners, governors, and state and federal representatives. Trust me, we are accustomed to colorful comments and don't mind creative questions; the more the better for the sake of a clean and healthy Chesapeake Bay.

*Author: Daniel Chao is the Chairperson of the Local Government Advisory Committee (LGAC) to the Chesapeake Bay Executive Council. He also serves as a Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner (ANC-2E07) in the District of Columbia. If you have suggestions or would like to collaborate with LGAC, please contact us at [lgac@allianceforthebay.org](mailto:lgac@allianceforthebay.org).*