

Green teens: Activists offer county a PATH to more than one kind of savings

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As far as the People Acting Together in Howard organization is concerned, it would be a two-fer.

The interfaith group, which goes by the acronym PATH and is the local affiliate of the community-organizing Industrial Areas Foundation, has identified jobs for youth and environmental stewardship as among its top priorities. It expects to draw 300 to St. John Baptist Church, at the corner of Route 175 and Tamar Drive, on Thursday, May 12, when it will ask the County Council and county executive to support the creation of environmental summer jobs for teens and young adults.

Specifically, the task would be the creation of hundreds -- ultimately thousands -- of rain gardens that would retain precipitation to prevent soil erosion and the runoff of harmful nutrients into the Chesapeake.

"It is probably the best way to restore our streams, lakes and the Bay," says Ned Tillman, chairman of the county's Environmental Sustainability Board.

You might not think young people in our affluent county are truly wanting for jobs, but PATH has conducted thousands of conversations with all sorts of people. "So many families are saying, 'Get my son or daughter out of my basement,' " says PATH lead organizer Cynthia Marshall.

Self-styled budget hawks might look at the idea as frill, but as Marshall points out, it's really a matter of whether the county wants to handle its very real storm water management issues through "gray" strategies -- storm drains, concrete basins and other capital projects -- or relatively low-cost "green" ones.

"We're asking the county to be fiscally responsible," Marshall says.