

## **In Howard, Ulman advocates push for summer environment jobs**

### **Howard group supports Ulman's causes**

By **Larry Carson**, The Baltimore Sun

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Pollution of the **Chesapeake** Bay can't be eliminated in one summer, and there's no apparent way to find a job for every unemployed youth in Howard County, but a faith-based county group says it has a plan to make a dent in both problems.

People Acting Together in Howard, or PATH, is combining efforts with **County Executive Ken Ulman** to create summer youth jobs by training and paying students to build dozens of small rain gardens to help reduce polluting stormwater runoff.

PATH is asking for county government funding for summer 2012. The delay is intended to give themselves, Ulman and the County Council time to see if they can work out the details of a program — part of a much larger effort to reduce algae-producing nitrogen and sediment in local streams, lakes and eventually the bay.

"Stormwater runoff is something we can do something about," Ned Tillman, chairman of the county's Environmental Sustainability Board, told an enthusiastic crowd of over 350 people Thursday night. "Rain barrels and rain gardens ... that's the natural way of dealing with rain," he said, rather than letting it run off roofs, sidewalks and driveways, carrying chemicals, trash and oil residue into sewers, creeks, rivers and eventually the Chesapeake.

The group, part of the Saul Alinsky-founded Industrial Areas Foundation that also includes BUILD in Baltimore City, concentrates on grassroots support for social causes. PATH volunteers hit the streets last summer to boost enrollment in Ulman's Healthy Howard access program for the uninsured, knocking on 5,000 doors, and has also initiated state legislation to provide more protection for mobile home residents fearful of displacement when park owners redevelop.

The new PATH proposal was partly born in scattered discussion sessions in people's homes that the collection of 16 churches and Howard's Dar al Taqwa mosque sponsored to generate ideas for the larger group.

To them, the need for youth employment programs during the recession was clear as high school and college students searched, often fruitlessly, for seasonal or permanent work. But Tillman,

who also belongs to Columbia's Unitarian Universalist Congregation, got the idea of fusing youth jobs and the environment into a sort of modern Civilian Conservation Corps that could accomplish both goals.

Ulman included \$10 million in his proposed capital budget next fiscal year to boost the county's efforts to slow stormwater runoff and comply with state and federal requirements, which helped push the idea forward. In that proposal, PATH organizers saw an opportunity.

Ulman's administration is already working with PATH members to see if a nonprofit could be created to accept some county government money. Ulman, who appeared with County Councilwoman Courtney Watson, an **Ellicott City** Democrat, at a PATH meeting, sounded enthusiastic.

"We can work things out," he said after the 90-minute meeting at St. John Baptist Church in Columbia that began with a round of inspirational and freedom songs, including "There's a River Flowin' in My Soul" and "The Storm is Passing Over."

But Ulman said there are no guarantees. "I'm only going to pull the trigger if we feel we can get real value out of it," he said.

Watson, too, said she'd support the idea if a detailed plan could be worked out.

"I know how hard it is for teenagers to get jobs," she told the crowd, especially since she is mother to three teens herself. Watson added that for this summer, she e-mailed "every business I know" in the county and got back some job opening information that students can find at the county's Workforce Development office in Columbia.

The basic idea PATH is promoting is not complicated.

"You can't just do it top-down," Tillman said, promoting the idea that "each of us could put a rain garden in our back yards." Rain gardens hold and filter water runoff using natural obstructions like vegetation and strategically placed water collection points to absorb runoff instead of allowing it to pour into storm drains.

Ulman noted that Howard County already recycles industrial-sized ice cream syrup tubs into rain barrels and offers them free to county residents. The tubs, popular enough to already have a waiting list of applicants, are provided by Dreyers Grand Ice Cream in North Laurel, the biggest ice cream plant in the world.

"I am not talking about 10 of these [rain gardens and barrels] or a hundred, but thousands of them," Tillman told the group..

To emphasize their points, PATH presented four high school students, one college freshman and one **Towson University** graduate who have not been able to find either full-time seasonal work or a permanent job.

Beth Sylvia enrolled in graduate school after a fruitless six-month search, she said, though she did have summer internships in the environmental field, her major. "Many recent graduates don't have jobs," she told the crowd.

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