

To: Clean Water Healthy Families Coalition
From: Steve Raabe, OpinionWorks
Date: January 19, 2012
Subject: Poll: Voters Support Increasing Bay Fund, Restricting Septics

Overview

OpinionWorks' Maryland voter poll, conducted December 11-15, 2011 among 801 registered voters statewide, has found strong support for increasing the Bay Restoration Fund and for reducing pollution from growth and septic systems.

This support is based in part on the importance Maryland voters place on continuing to clean up the state's waters. Nine voters in ten believe it is important to take actions to make the Bay and local streams clean and healthy, while giving the waters poor grades for health today. Hearing that the Bay is in fact making progress towards clean water goals, three-quarters of voters believe "we need to do even more for the Bay to finish the job." Meanwhile, a near-consensus of voters believes the State should be active in coordinating and managing growth. This translates into strong support for the concept of "smart growth."

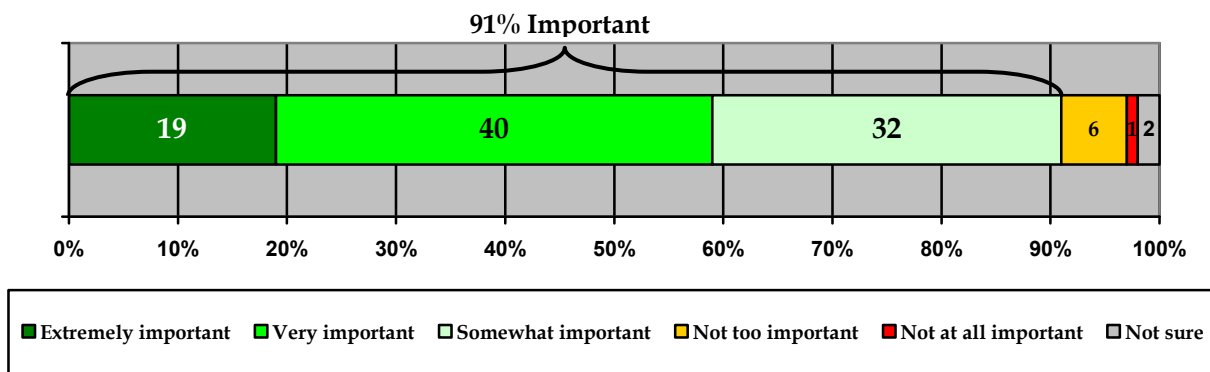
Ultimately, these voter attitudes help explain why large majorities of voters support increasing the Bay Restoration Fund and placing limits on septic systems. Our detailed findings follow.

Clean Water as a Priority

Making the Bay Healthy is a Motivating Concern for Voters

It is personally important to Maryland voters "to take the actions necessary to make the Chesapeake Bay and local streams clean and healthy." Nine out of ten voters (91%) say it is at least somewhat important to them. Six out of ten (59%) say it is *very* important or *extremely* important to them personally to take action on water health.

Importance of Taking Action to Make the Waters Healthy



"How important is it to you personally to take the actions necessary to make the Chesapeake Bay and local streams clean and healthy?"

Coupled with a will to act is broad awareness that the Bay and its tributaries are unhealthy today. Asked to grade the Bay on a scale of A to F, voters on average give the Bay a grade of C-Minus. Only 11% of voters grade the Bay higher than a C.

The grade voters give their local streams, creeks, and rivers is only a slightly higher C-Minus.

Grading the Health of the Waters

	A (4)	B (3)	C (2)	D (1)	F (0)	Not sure	Mean
The Bay	2%	9%	39%	21%	17%	13%	1.51
Local waters	4%	17%	34%	18%	15%	12%	1.75

“Teachers often give students the grades of A, B, C, D, or Fail. If I asked you to grade the Chesapeake Bay where “A” means it is extremely clean and healthy, and “F” means it is failing, what grade would you give it?”

“What about local streams, creeks, or rivers in your area? How would you grade them on that A to F scale where “A” is extremely clean and healthy and F is failing?”

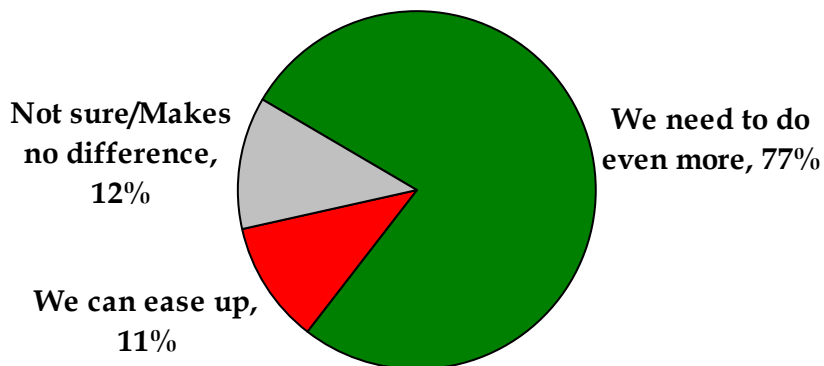
The Impact of Knowing Progress is Being Made

While 21% see the health of the Bay as getting better, an equal number (22%) see it as getting worse. The rest see no change (44%) or are just not sure (14%). We know from past focus group work that Maryland’s citizens are impatient to see improvement in the Bay. They are apt to wonder whether the effort and expenditures are yielding good results.

When told that “experts are now saying we are halfway to the goal of cleaning up the Bay,” a majority of voters (52%) are surprised. In fact, that surprise is highest among people who are most concerned with cleaning up the Bay.

Having heard the Bay is halfway to its goal, three-quarters (77%) of voters think “we need to do even more for the Bay to finish the job,” while only 11% think “that maybe the Bay needs less help than we thought and we can ease up.”

Knowing the Bay is Halfway to Its Goal

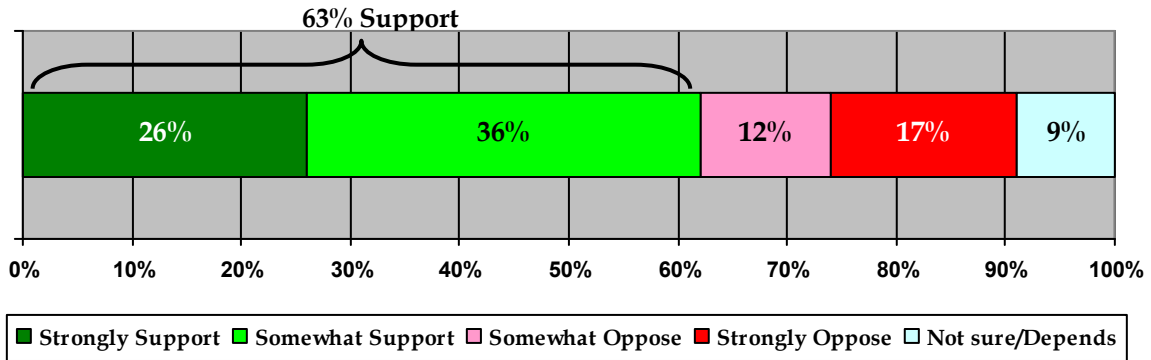


“Does knowing that make you think (rotate): [we need to do even more for the Bay to finish the job, (or does it make you think) that maybe the Bay needs less help than we thought and we can ease up]?”

Increasing the Bay Restoration Fund

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of voters would spend more tax dollars to make the waters safe and healthy “if State leaders and scientists said more tax dollars were needed.” Fewer than half that many (29%) oppose this idea.

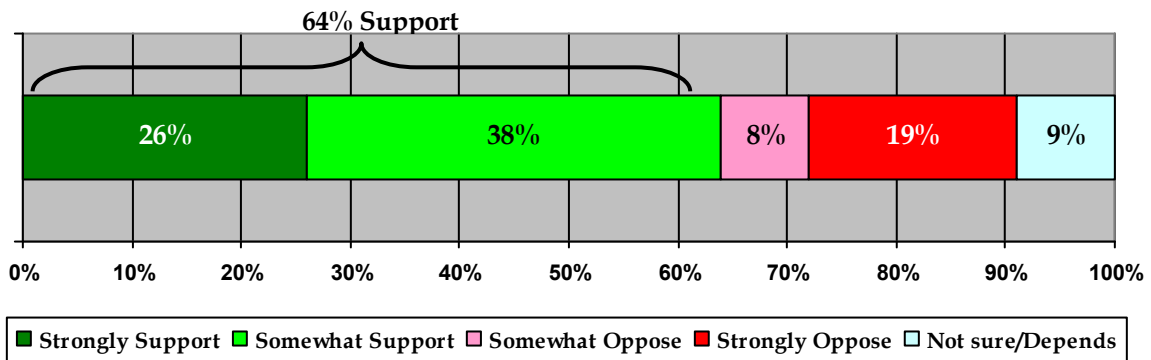
Support for More Tax Dollars to the Waters Safe and Healthy



“If State leaders and scientists said more tax dollars were needed to make our waters (split sample): {safe/healthy} is that something you would be likely to support or oppose, if you thought the amount was reasonable?” (If support/oppose): “Is that strongly or just somewhat {support/oppose}?”

There is equally strong support for an increase in the Bay Restoration Fund – with 64% of voters supporting an increase in the Fund “to finish upgrading major wastewater treatment plants and provide local governments with money to reduce polluted stormwater runoff and complete other water quality projects.” Only 27% of voters oppose that.

Support for Increasing the Bay Restoration Fund



“Maryland is making progress in cleaning up the Bay but needs to do more to meet its commitments. There is a proposal to increase the Bay Restoration Fund to finish upgrading major wastewater treatment plants and provide local governments with money to reduce polluted stormwater runoff and complete other water quality projects. If you thought the amount was fair, would you be likely to support or oppose this proposal?” (If support/oppose): “Is that strongly or just somewhat {support/oppose}?”

This support level is significant, and all the more so because Maryland voters today have a strong underlying skepticism about public spending and taxes. Though Maryland has never been a tax-averse state, today 49% of registered voters agree with the statement “I am totally

opposed to new taxes; the government must be forced to live within its means.” Clearly, the Bay Restoration Fund is an exception, with nearly two-thirds of voters supporting an increase. Two specific facts make the increase more attractive to voters:

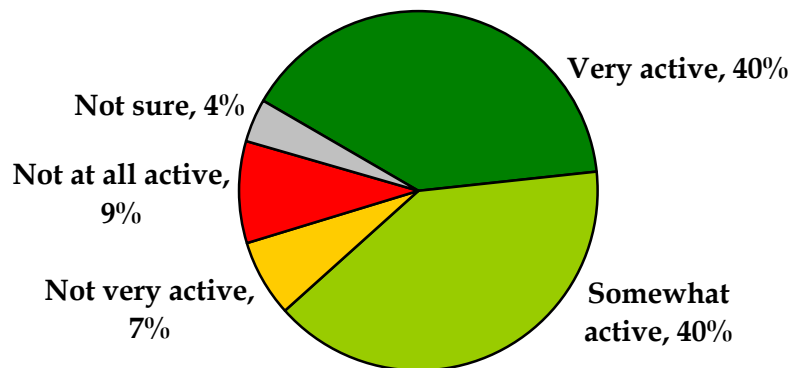
- Knowing that “by law, the fee is dedicated and could not be diverted for other purposes” makes 54% of voters more willing to support the fee.
- Hearing that “the fund would have clear goals, deadlines and milestones so we can measure progress and ensure government accountability” makes 52% more willing to support it.

State Action on Growth and Septic Systems

Voters Strongly Support an Active Role for the State Managing Growth

Turning to the topic of growth and development, Maryland voters express a strong preference for having an active role for the State in coordinating and managing growth. Eight voters in ten (80%) want the State to have an active role, with 40% wanting that role to be “very active.”

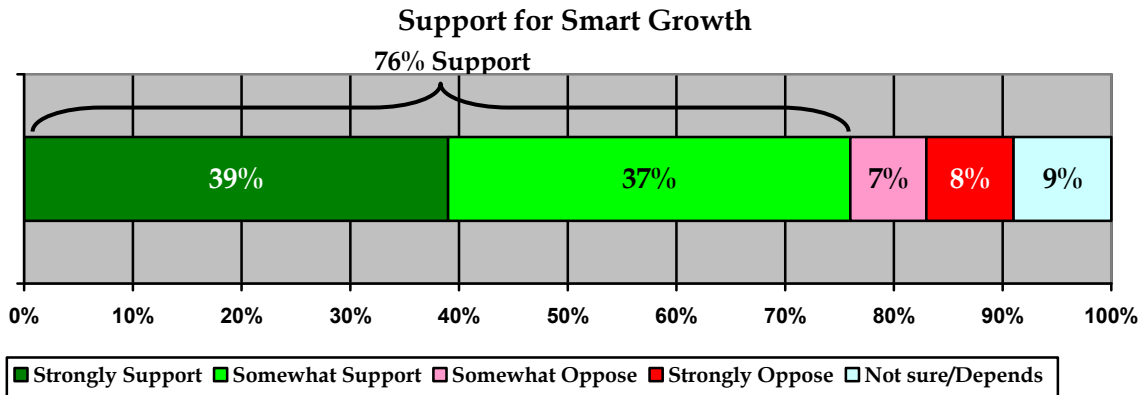
How Active Should the State be in Managing Growth?



*“How active do you think the state government should be in coordinating and managing growth across the state?
Very active, somewhat active, not very active, or not at all active?”*

In keeping with that finding, an overwhelming three-quarters (76%) of Maryland voters support the idea of “smart growth” which directs growth away from less-developed areas and towards places that already have services such as schools, hospitals, and transportation.

(continued, next page)



“Smart growth’ is an idea to help reduce pollution and improve communities. Instead of building new homes and businesses far from cities and towns, growth is directed to communities that already have services such as schools, hospitals, and transportation. Do you generally support or oppose this idea of smart growth? (If support/oppose): “Is that strongly or just somewhat {support/oppose}?”

Voters have Concerns about the Impact of Growth

Exploring voters’ underlying concerns about growth helps explain voter support for smart growth and an active state role in controlling and managing growth. Voters are most concerned about growth as a source of water pollution, with 82% saying they are concerned about that, and 57% saying the link between growth and water pollution concerns them “a lot.”

Three-quarters of voters (76%) are concerned about the loss of rural lands, with a majority (50%) saying they are concerned a lot about that. Similar numbers have concerns about the cost of road construction in rural areas resulting from growth and development.

	Concerned a lot	Concerned a little	Total Concern	Not much/ Not sure
Water pollution	57%	25%	82%	18%
Acres being developed	50%	26%	76%	24%
Road construction costs	46%	31%	77%	24%

“I would like to read you several facts about growth in Maryland ask if they concern you a lot, a little, or not much at all. (Read and randomize statements.)

“New development is the fastest growing source of water pollution in Maryland.”

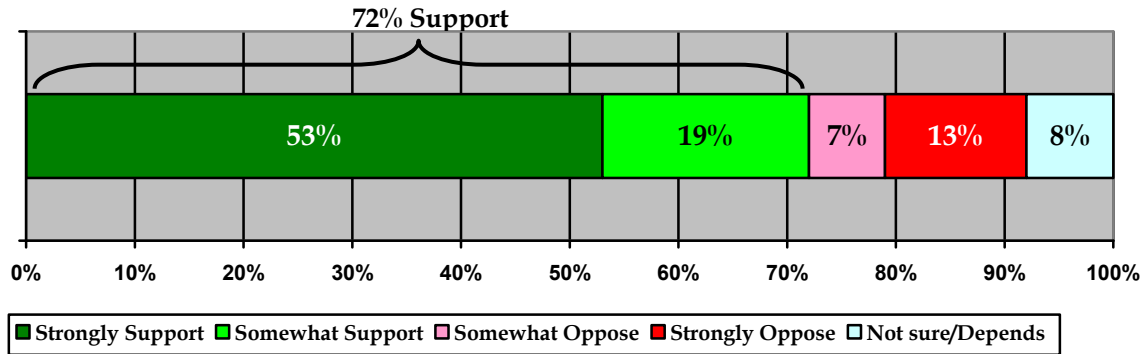
“Development plans passed by local government will result in over 400,000 more acres of rural lands being developed for houses and commercial uses over the next 35 years.”

“Maryland taxpayers will spend an extra \$30 billion in road construction costs at the current pace of development in rural areas.”

Voters Strongly Support Action on Septic Systems

Voters' underlying concerns about the impact of growth and their interest in an active state role managing it translate into strong support for two proposals to regulate and limit septic systems. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of voters support legislation that would tighten regulations on septic systems, with a majority (53%) strongly supportive. Only 20% overall are opposed.

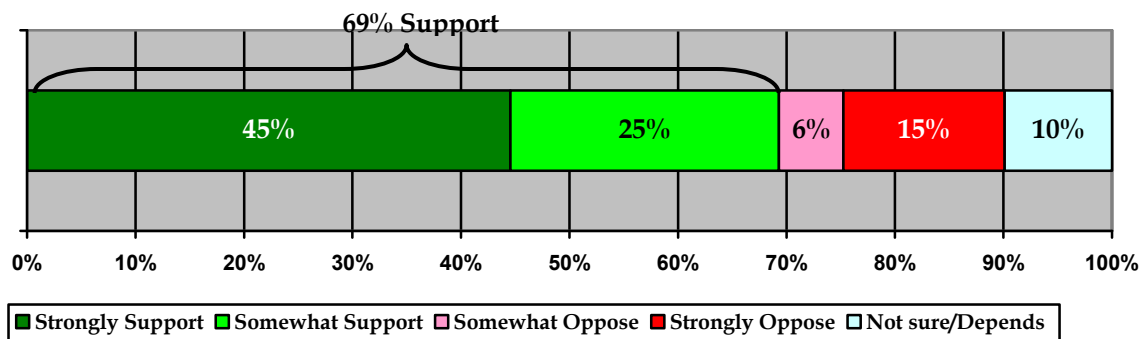
Support for Tightening Regulations on Septic Systems



“Some homes and developments that do not have access to a wastewater treatment plant rely on their own on-site sewage disposal or ‘septic’ systems to clean up their wastewater. Septic systems in Maryland are pumping thousands of pounds of harmful pollution into our groundwater every day, posing a public health risk. Would you support legislation that tightens regulations on septic systems to prevent water pollution?” (If support/oppose): “Is that strongly or just somewhat {support/oppose}?”

A similar large majority (69%) would limit the number of houses in rural areas that have septic systems in order to help clean up local waters. A near-majority of 45% strongly support that proposal. One-fifth of voters (21%) are opposed.

Support for Limiting the Number of Septic Systems



“Knowing that a house with a septic system pollutes between 6 and 10 times more than a house served by a sewer system, would you support or oppose efforts to limit the number of houses that have septic systems in our rural areas to help achieve cleaner streams and the Bay?” (If support/oppose): “Is that strongly or just somewhat {support/oppose}?”

On both of these issues, voters where the incidence of septic systems is likely to be greater – in the more rural counties of Western Maryland, Southern Maryland, and the Eastern Shore – are nearly as supportive as voters statewide.

- Sixty-two percent (62%) in the rural counties support tightening regulations on septic systems with 28% opposed. Statewide, 72% support tightening regulations.

- Fifty-seven percent (57%) of voters in rural counties support limiting the number of septic systems in rural areas, with 35% opposed. Statewide, 69% support limiting the number of septic systems.

How This Survey Was Conducted

OpinionWorks interviewed 801 randomly-selected registered voters across Maryland by telephone December 11-15, 2011. The poll has a potential sampling error of no more than $\pm 3.4\%$ at a 95% confidence level, meaning the survey results would differ by no more than that margin at least 95% of the time if *every* registered voter in Maryland had been interviewed.

Interviewees were drawn randomly from the database of registered voters provided by the Maryland State Board of Elections and matched with telephone numbers by a commercial vendor. The sample was balanced regionally and by political party, and screened to ensure that only registered voters were interviewed. Weights were applied to bring the voter sample into strict compliance with the demographic breakdown of Maryland's registered voter population.

Brief Background on OpinionWorks

OpinionWorks conducts frequent opinion studies in Maryland and the surrounding states. We are the polling organization for *The Baltimore Sun*, having accurately forecast the 14-point gubernatorial margin in 2010 and the Baltimore mayoral margin in 2011, and have polled for numerous other media throughout the region. We work for state and local agencies and for a variety of non-profit and for-profit entities within the region and nationally.