

pointed a wetlands administrator and charged him with, among other things, receiving applications, conducting the hearings, and making appropriate recommendations to the board. By 1974 applications for licenses were pouring in at the rate of over four hundred a year, and so a second hearing officer was appointed. These two men continue to process more than four hundred applications annually, holding the required hearings and making recommendations to the board. In about 1 percent of the cases the board itself conducts the hearing—usually where the project is substantial or controversial or where a bond or compensation to the state may be required. Otherwise the board cursorily reviews the hearing officers' recommendations and more or less routinely follows them.

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The duties and responsibilities delegated to the board over the years have been so varied that a common element among them really does not exist. The closest one can come to such a common element is that of "procurement," in the broadest sense of the term. A great deal of what the board does, in one way or another, can be said to involve that function. In superintending the sale of state bonds, the board procures purchasers of that debt; in overseeing the various construction projects authorized by the General Assembly, it procures all manner of services and supplies from architects, engineers, appraisers, consultants, contractors, and materialmen; in managing state property, it procures buyers, sellers, lessors, and lessees, as well as the range of supplies and services needed to keep the property in good repair. Indeed, those responsibilities not involving the procurement function in some way can fairly be said to be collateral for the board.

It is not surprising, then, that procurement, especially for construction, capital equipment, and professional services, has been the center of attention—for the board itself and for those who have studied or observed it. The manner in which state contracts are let is obviously of great interest to many people, and particularly in recent times it has become the focal point for such public attention as has been given to board activities.

That attention has been, by and large, of two types: one, exemplified by the various official or semiofficial reports examining board activities, has focused on the procurement function generally, from a managerial or operational perspective; the other, emanating primarily from the news media, and occasionally from disappointed bidders or the General Assembly, has focused on particular actions or decisions. To some extent, of course, there is and always has been an overlap. Once the spotlight is placed on a particular decision or action, it tends to move around and illuminate certain other actions and indeed the underlying decision-making processes. But generally until 1979-80 these two frameworks of attention proceeded along different paths.

As we have seen, procurement—in the context of supervising the construction of the House of Correction at Jessup, the normal school at Towson, and the tobacco warehouses—was one of the first nonconstitutional duties given to the board, and it quickly spread beyond construction into supplies and equipment. Not until 1920 and the creation of the Central Purchasing Bureau was the board relieved of direct responsibility for procuring supplies and printing services,<sup>45</sup> but it still remained responsible, as confirmed in 1939, for supervising "the expenditure of all sums appropriated for the acquisition of land, buildings, equipment, new construction and other

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45. Acts of 1920, ch. 184. The bureau itself consisted of nineteen state officials, including the three members of the Board of Public Works. Of greater importance than the bureau itself were the authorization for and appointment of a purchasing agent to run the operation on a day-to-day basis. See also chapter 6.