

Land use advocates organizing for sustainable future - Capital Gazette

Developing a more sustainable future land use blueprint in Anne Arundel County and organizing to make that happen was the focus of a forum, "The Unsustainable Spiral of Growth."

The Friday night event drew about 80 participants who took in three presentations on state's Smart Growth policies and shortcomings, adding environmental impact costs in development planning and the recent effort to change land use policy in Charles County.

It was a teach-in planting seeds of organization aimed at the next county General Development Plan, the state mandated land use blueprint, coming in 2019.

Chesapeake Environmental Protection Association President Al Tucker called for an organized effort to create change. CEPA organized the event, another in its series of bi-annual forums on critical environmental issues.

"This is call to action to pass a sustainable financial and environmentally sensitive General Development Plan and to educate decision-makers to adopt a forward thinking plan investing in communities. If we don't do that, Anne Arundel County's future is at risk," he said.

A primary problem is that continued low density development creates more costs long term than is generated currently.

"We face a \$2.1 billion backlog in deferred maintenance issues," Tucker said. That should be a prima facie case that not enough money is being generated to meet maintenance and replacement needs, he added.

One way to address that is a recommitment to Smart Growth, the big picture development policy enacted in Maryland nearly 20 years ago.

Among other things, it sought to concentrate development in areas served by infrastructure and partially built out, so-called priority funding areas because state funds for infrastructure would only be spent in those areas.

But since enactment of the Smart Growth initiative, development has not changed, according to the University of Maryland's Gerrit Knapp who presented at the forum.

His study, taken at the 10th anniversary of Smart Growth, was that development inside and outside the priority areas remained about the same.

"Changes in development patterns take a long time," he told those gathered. "But should it be considered a success because it didn't get worse?"

He called for a new commitment. "We need to reboot Smart Growth and recommit to pursuing Smart Growth; we need a new strategy."

Elliott Campbell, of Maryland Department of Natural Resources' Chesapeake and Coastal Services, has been working on Maryland General Progress Indicator, which measures how our environment, society

and economy affect the well-being of people. The GPI is designed to measure sustainable economic welfare rather than just economic activity.

He explained that studies indicate growth in population and development does not mean growth in the economy and quality of life.

A 2010 study by Eben Fodor concluded there was no positive relationship between population growth and per capital income and faster growth rates are associated with lower incomes, pointing to controlling growth a more sustainable goal.

One way to effect those changes, Campbell noted, is to include the effect of lost natural lands in planning. Between 1973 and 2010 Maryland lost over 23 percent of its forest and 23 percent of its wetlands and almost 40 percent of farmland, he said.

The ecological services those lands provide to the general welfare and quality of life should be taken into account, he said. Planning should include no further loss of environmentally valuable lands and that impact fees for new development should include fees for environmental degradation.

Most of the data provided in the initial reports at the forum serve as background for study, discussion and formulating goals for the upcoming GDP, but the last presenter talked about what could happen if an organized coalition set its sights on change.

Kimberly Brandt, of 1,000 Friends of Maryland, explained the struggle to produce a more sustainable blueprint in Charles County, a task that took nearly 5 years and was enacted in July.

Basically nearly 20 organizations participated in the effort and were able to alter the future land use of the county from an aggressive build out plan to one more cognizant of natural features and protecting huge swaths of forest, and Nanjemoy and Mattawoman creeks that flow into the Potomac.

"Organizing was the key," she said.

Question and answer moderator journalist Terence Smith, who serves on the board of the Chesapeake Bay Trust, pointed out the historic bottom line relating to development impacts on the Chesapeake Bay and everyday life.

"When John Smith made his voyages in the Chesapeake ...there were an estimated 100,000 Native Americans living in the entire Chesapeake Bay watershed. Now there are 18 million around the bay, growing by 100,000 per year."

Ann Fligsten, of the Growth Action Network of Anne Arundel County, agreed to take the reigns of the coalition aiming to have a sustainable impact on the upcoming GDP. An organizing meeting should happen in the next weeks.



www.capitalgazette.com



<http://www.capitalgazette.com/news/government/ph-ac-cn-growth-forum-1017-20161016-story.html>



 <http://goo.gl/ffgS>

