

## ANNE ARUNDEL ALLIANCE FOR LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

By Mike Lofton



CEPA is a founding member of the **Anne Arundel Alliance for Livable Communities (ALC)**. The Alliance, born out of ideas generated at the CEPA Forum on Sustainable Growth in 2016, is a coalition of local and state organizations advocating for sustainable growth and environmental protections to safeguard and enhance residents' quality of life. The Alliance, comprised of dozens of organizations whose members and supporters include thousands of Anne Arundel County residents is engaged in the current General Development Plan update process. ALC submitted eight policy recommendations to be included in "Plan2040."

**Concerning Management of growth and establishment of development limits:** Table 3-2 in the 2009 GDP shows that in 2008 the development and redevelopment capacity of lots with RA – R15 zoning was about 26,000 housing units. This corresponds to about 10% of the constructed housing units in the County. A current estimate of new development capacity in RA – R22, solely based on lot availability and zoning density, suggests that only about 12,000 new housing units may be developed

in these areas. Therefore, in the aggregate, residentially zoned properties in the County are almost built out. Carrying capacity, which considers natural resource and infrastructure limitations, is less than capacity based on zoning in most communities. Areas where undeveloped residential parcels exist but infrastructure and/or natural resource limits have been reached should be identified. In these communities, planning efforts should focus on maintaining a stable population and enhancing quality of life for current residents. The recommendations:

### **1. Areas with infrastructure or natural resource limits should not be targeted for new growth.**

The availability of development opportunities should also be strongly influenced by the desires of community residents. The Plan2040 Small Area Visioning sessions have clearly demonstrated that residents are concerned with current overdevelopment, sprawl development, and loss of open space. Without changes in zoning of RA – R15 lots to increase density, it appears likely that development on these types of properties will be self-limiting in the aggregate, but there may be downzoning needed to meet local objectives.

### **2. Policies that discourage rezoning and modifications to allow more dense development of RA – R15 parcels should be included in Plan2040.**

Maintaining current zoning on RA – R15 properties is likely to have the added benefit of directing future development to town centers and mixed-use areas, in accordance with smart growth. It will be necessary, however, to assure that the boundaries of these population centers do not expand substantially into surrounding residential, open space, or environmentally sensitive parcels.

### **3. Policies that encourage upward development and redevelopment rather than outward expansion of population centers should be included in Plan2040.**

Currently, new developments are charged impact fees for costs associated with roads, schools, and public safety required by the new development. These fees are approximately 80% of County costs.

### **4. Impact fees should be raised to 100% of costs and the fee should be expanded to include costs associated with parks, libraries, and detention facilities.**

**Concerning Empowerment of Small Area Plans:** Following the last GDP, comprehensive rezoning began. Hundreds of proposed rezonings were considered. The entire rezoning process took over a year. Ultimately, three bills were introduced to address the County's seven legislative districts. Throughout the process, most recommendations were made by persons who did not live near the community affected by the proposed rezoning. Frederick County is pursuing a planning and zoning sequence that is more responsive to local community perspectives. Frederick has developed a

new comprehensive plan, Livable Frederick, which is a broad policy document. Its adoption will not be followed by comprehensive rezoning. Rather, small area plans will be developed to address land use and zoning at the parcel level in a manner that is consistent with the broad comprehensive plan. This approach allows local communities to fully engage in the planning and rezoning process and yields results that are consistent with the communities' vision for their future.

- 5. Rather than after adoption of Plan2040, rezoning should follow the adoption of Small Area Plans. This sequence should be specified in the Plan2040.**

**Concerning Improved protection of Green Infrastructure:**

Scattered development consumes an extensive amount of land and fragments the landscape, converting what was a once near-continuous stretch of forests and wetlands to small, isolated islands of habitat in a sea of developed land. In recent years, Anne Arundel County has been shown to be the most egregious practitioner of forest clearing among all Maryland counties. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has mapped the most ecologically important lands remaining in the State and identified them as Green Infrastructure. Green Infrastructure (GI) is a network of large blocks of intact forest and wetlands, called "hubs," linked together by linear features such as forested stream valleys, ridgelines, or other natural areas, called "corridors." An essential characteristic of Green Infrastructure is the interconnection of its features. Much of the Green Infrastructure in Anne Arundel County lies in its western and southern portions, as identified on DNR's GIS maps. Only about half of the County's Green Infrastructure lands are protected from development by various kinds of easements or inclusion in the Critical Area. These ecologically important areas and the flora and fauna living there warrant protection.

- 6. A zoning overlay for Green Infrastructure areas should be included in Plan2040 to:**
  - **Limit the disturbed area on each developed lot;**
  - **Prohibit construction near streams and wetlands; and**
  - **Minimize total impervious surface coverage, including access roads.**

**Concerning Increased agricultural preservation funding:**

Agricultural land in Anne Arundel County continues to be lost to residential development. Our rich history, natural beauty, and agrarian bounty – things that are appreciated by all County residents – are disappearing. The farm population is aging and often a farmer's net worth is in his land. Farming of commodity crops has become less economically attractive, and younger generations are frequently inclined to pursue employment in urban areas.

Agricultural Preservation Programs allow a farmer to capture some of the economic value of the land while retaining ownership. The Agricultural Preservation Program budget for Anne Arundel County will be unfunded in 2020, although a funding level of about \$2.2M per year is projected for following years. In a county with a \$1.5B annual budget, this amount is almost insignificant. A county that truly values its agricultural heritage should dedicate a portion of its budget to preservation.

- 7. Plan2040 should include a policy that a specified percentage of the annual County budget be dedicated to the Agricultural Preservation Program.**

**Concerning Establishment of a Planning Commission:**

Most Maryland counties have a Planning Commission that serves as an interface between the citizens of the county and the county government on land use issues. Members of the Planning Commission are typically appointed by the County Executive. Anne Arundel County does not have a Planning Commission but would benefit from the citizen accessibility and transparency of process that would be provided by one.

- 8. Plan2040 should recommend the establishment of a Planning Commission with the responsibility and authority to:**
  - **Monitor implementation of the General Development Plan and Small Area Plans;**
  - **Consider rezoning requests and make a recommendation to the elected officials;**
  - **Approve subdivisions plans and site development plans; and**

- **Review land use legislation and amendments to ordinances concerning development and make a recommendation to the County Council.**

For more information:

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