

DRAFT OF AA COUNTY'S GENERAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN IS AVAILABLE FOR COMMENT

By Mike Lofton



The following is excerpted from the Alliance for Livable Communities latest newsletter: <https://www.annearundel-livable.org/>

The preliminary draft of Plan2040, the General Development Plan for Anne Arundel County, is now available for public review. Please visit <https://www.aacounty.org/departments/planning-and-zoning/long-range-planning/general-development-plan/index.html> to download the draft plan document and to submit your comments.

Next Steps for Plan2040

- 45-day public review period for draft of the full Plan2040 document: September 30 - November 15.
- Planning Advisory Board briefing and public hearing to occur in December and January (dates to be determined)
- County Council introduction of Plan 2040 is anticipated in February 2021 with public hearings to begin in March 2021 (dates to be determined).

The four sections contain over 400 Goals, Policies, and Implementation Strategies. In addition, comments were solicited on proposed development policy areas and approximately 250 land use changes that have been requested by landowners or proposed by the OPZ staff. Just presenting this mass of data in a coherent manner and processing citizen responses is a challenging problem. OPZ staff has responded with skill and innovation. Video tutorials and County town hall meetings have been employed to assist citizens with navigation of the portal, and there is good reason to expect that a wealth of feedback data that is amenable to statistical analysis has been gathered.

The full set of 400 Goals, Policies, and Strategies can be downloaded as a 42-page document from the Community Engagement web portal. As currently written, Plan 2040 provides guidance, but not enough specificity to serve as an implementable plan of action. However, Plan2040 can still play a strong role in shaping our future.

The 2009 GDP was broadly characterized by an earlier County Council and Administration as “just guidance” that could be ignored, almost at will. Legislative and administrative actions were supposed to be consistent with the plan, but that concept was honored more in breach than observation. In many ways, the 2009 GDP was similar to Plan2040 in that descriptions of actions were often not specific, with no office given responsibility, no timeline indicated, and no priority assigned. Although it outlined many good aspirations, it was considered guidance and not afforded the respect it deserved. Had the guidance been respected and later legislative and administrative activities been consistent with it, the 2009 GDP could have had a much greater positive influence on the progress of the County.

An effective long-term planning effort can be composed of broad statements of guidance implemented by a combination of consistent legislative code and smaller actionable plans. The smaller plans should outline specific tasks with:

1. Assigned priorities,
2. Designated responsible parties,
3. Schedules, and
4. Reporting requirements.

Plan2040 can function as the guidance in this combination provided that the Regional Plans and any relevant legislation are consistent, detailed, and implementable. The requirement of consistency should be formally stated in Plan2040 and approved by the Council. Although Plan2040 could be renamed Guidance2040, it should be firm, thorough, and respected guidance. The value of Plan2040 will be determined by consistency of following legislation and its enablement of effective regional planning. The current draft of four important sections of Plan2040 is a good start.