



Martin O'Malley, Governor

PRESS RELEASE



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STATE LAUNCHES ONLINE PLANNING EDUCATION COURSE FOR MEMBERS OF LOCAL BOARDS

New Course a Requirement of the 2009 Smart, Green & Growing Planning Legislation

BALTIMORE (December 30, 2009) – The Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) today released its “Planning Commission, Planning Board and Board of Appeals Education Course,” required by “The Smart and Sustainable Growth Act of 2009” (SB 280/HB 297). All current members of local planning commissions and boards and boards of appeals must complete an education course before July 1, 2010. This is an on-going educational requirement so new members must complete an education course within six months of their appointment. The online course can be accessed at Planning.Maryland.gov and is also available on paper and CD-ROM by contacting MDP.

“Citizens appointed to local planning commissions or boards, and boards of appeal often find themselves overwhelmed when they attend their first board meeting. Making planning decisions affecting their communities is complex and demanding. Because of this complexity, I am pleased to make MDP’s online planning education course available to support these ‘citizen planners,’” said Richard E. Hall, Secretary of Planning. “My department and staff are committed to providing assistance to our local partners. This is part of our effort to focus on the fundamentals of planning in Maryland.”

This new requirement applies to all local governments with planning authority. The Smart and Sustainable Growth Act states that the course must include education on the role of the comprehensive plan, proper standards for special exceptions and variances, if applicable, and the jurisdictions zoning ordinances and regulations, planned development ordinances and regulations, subdivision ordinances and regulations and other land use ordinances and regulations. The law also authorizes counties and municipalities to develop their own educational course if they choose.

The objectives and recommended course curriculum was developed in conjunction with the Task Force on the Future for Growth and Development with input from the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo), the Maryland Municipal League (MML), the Maryland Planning Commissioners Association (MPCA) and others. MDP then created the content for the self-guided modules and reviews as an online course at Planning.Maryland.gov.

The Smart and Sustainable Growth Act was passed by the 2009 General Assembly and signed into law by Governor Martin O’Malley on May 7, 2009. In addition to the education course requirement the law clarifies the link between local comprehensive plans and local land use ordinances. It defines the current requirement of “consistency”. Actions that are “consistent with” or have “consistency with” a comprehensive plan are actions that further, and are not contrary to, other items in the plan.

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