

Maryland Department of Planning

Environmental Justice Strategic Plan

DRAFT

Introductory Message & Vision

Introductory Message by Secretary

At the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP), Environmental Justice is embedded into the newly codified Sustainable Growth (SG) Model. Maryland's Sustainable Growth Planning Principles (Principles) were signed into law by Governor Moore on April 8, 2025, following the Maryland General Assembly's approval of House Bill 286 - Local Comprehensive Planning and State Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Policy - Planning Principles. Over the subsequent year, MDP collaborated with 14 other State agencies to create the introductory SG Implementation Guide that unpacks the eight Principles: Land, Transportation, Housing, Economy, Equity, Resilience, Place and Ecology.

The SG Model positions the Principles as deeply interconnected, where no Principle can be implemented in a vacuum. The inclusion of Equity as a stand alone Principle was deliberate in order for Equity to be explicitly addressed while also infusing every other Principle with Equity. In 2026, Senate Bill 197/ House Bill 243 - Land Use - Comprehensive and General Plans - Alteration of Elements aligned the Comprehensive Planning Elements under the Principles. This creates a planning framework for local governments that emphasizes Maryland's land use and development priorities while also allowing flexibility in how they are applied by various jurisdictions.

Planners work together with the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT) and the State Data and Analysis Center (SDAC) located within MDP, are all committed to equipping local jurisdictions with the data and analytics, preservation tools, and technical guidance needed to create an environmentally just Maryland.

Secretary Rebecca L. Flora, AICP, LEED-BD/ND

Agency Environmental Justice Vision Statement

Vision: The Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) envisions a state where land-use decisions are guided by transparent, accessible data, and where the cultural heritage, safety, and well-being of all residents are central to planning best practices.

"Maryland achieves economic prosperity for all through the plans, policies, and places that have embraced diversity, treasured all shared heritages, and upheld human well-being and ecological regeneration as paramount." - Maryland Department of Planning, Strategic Plan 2024

Translating Mission into Action

To turn this vision into a reality, our core mission to serve as a cross-disciplinary resource for thriving communities explicitly prioritizes *overburdened* and *underserved* populations as defined under the Environment Article. We are shifting away from historical, unequal land-use models by embedding this mission into three progressive, clear operational timeframes:

- **The One-Year Horizon:** MDP is developing targeted planning resources, guidance manuals, and data toolkits. These resources are designed to help local jurisdictions bring their next comprehensive plans into full compliance with state equity goals. This foundation of support will continuously grow, adapt, and improve to match modern best planning practices.
- **The Two-Year Horizon:** During the Environmental Justice strategic plan cycle, MDP will actively bridge the gap for low-capacity jurisdictions by providing direct access to essential planning toolkits, model ordinances, compliance checklists, and localized 1-on-1 technical advising. At the same time MDP will collaborate with other state agencies to encourage the alignment of other state plans and departmental capital project scoring criteria with the Sustainable Growth Principles, ensuring state policies and funds support all communities, including those most in need.
- **The Long-Term Horizon:** Over the long term, MDP's ongoing prioritization of underserved populations will fully establish the Sustainable Growth Model as the standard for Maryland. By permanently infusing equity into all local and state land-use and development decision-making, MDP ensures that the built environment actively protects public health, lifts up historical kinship communities, and regenerates our shared ecological systems for future generations.

Executive Summary & Overall Approach

Executive Summary

The Maryland Department of Planning operates uniquely as a cross-disciplinary, consultative hub rather than a regulatory enforcement body. Because we do not directly issue environmental permits, approve or deny local plans, or enforce zoning codes, our strategic approach relies on shifting inter jurisdictional coordination and public participation from passive information gathering to active creation. Through initiatives like our Planner Roundtable Series, we use direct feedback from local practitioners to create tools, resources, and policy ideas that address real-world community needs.

1. **Data Transparency:** We empower local planners to use equitable spatial analysis to identify and track cumulative environmental and socio-economic burdens.
2. **Cultural Resilience:** We protect and interpret historic resources to build an inclusive preservation program that accurately tells the stories of all Marylanders.
3. **Local Capacity:** We advance local plans, policies, projects, and placemaking strategies to explicitly enshrine environmental justice within local land-use and zoning frameworks.

Environmental Justice Implementation Framework

The following matrix outlines how MDP maps its broad environmental justice goals directly to targeted actions and agency performance metrics:

EJ Goal	EJ Objectives	Priority Actions	Metrics
Data-Driven Equity	Provide professional consultation services and specialized tools to local governments and state agencies.	Census [on-going]; Interagency Coordination [on-going]; Web-based Tools [on-going]	1. Number of analyses and projections produced. 2. Increase in number of 'hits' to Planning tools and applications.
Cultural Resilience & Placekeeping	Protect and interpret historic resources to build a more inclusive preservation program that tells the stories of all Marylanders.	Identify Gaps [on-going]; Programmatic Improvements [on-going]; Proactive Partnership [on-going]; Cross-Agency Cooperation [on-going]	1. Percentage of state for which architectural data gap analysis has been completed. 2. Number of local hazard mitigation plans that include cultural resource components. 3. Number of federal and state projects reviewed annually.
Embedding EJ in Local Planning	Advance local and state plans, policies, projects, and placemaking strategies that include the innovative use of	Technical Guidance [on-going]; Build Rapport [on-going]; Proactive Research[on-going]	1. Number of jurisdictions that advance equity through provisions in plans and programs. 2. Number of jurisdictions that include resiliency in their plans and codes.

	best planning practices, tools, and data to enshrine Environmental Justice in land-use decision making.		3. Number of jurisdictions that participate in Roundtables 4. Number of visits to MDP's planning tools, guidance documents, and interactive maps available on MDP's website. 5. Number of jurisdictions that obtain EPA grants for brownfield assessments and/or cleanup.
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Overall Approach to Advancing EJ

The Maryland Department of Planning, along with the State Data and Analysis Center and the Maryland Historical Trust divisions, is deeply committed to advancing environmental justice through data driven, culturally informed, and equitable land-use decisions.

Over the last three years, MDP has worked closely with the Maryland General Assembly to progressively shift the state's planning model to place equity at the center of development. This structural work led to the passage of House Bill 286 in 2025, which established the Sustainable Growth Planning & Policy Principles and restructured the Sustainable Growth Subcabinet to focus on economic, environmental, and social equity. This was closely followed by Senate Bill 197/ House Bill 243 in 2026, which formally aligned required local comprehensive plan elements with these Principles. This statutory alignment ensures that every local jurisdiction in Maryland must explicitly address equity when planning its future built environment.

The MDP Strategic Plan directly fulfills the mandate of the Executive Order 01.01.2025.17 by establishing a clear, whole-of-government approach to environmental justice that embeds equity across all state and local land-use frameworks. In compliance with Section C(8) of the Order, this document provides the public with an Environmental Justice Strategic Plan with metrics to promote Environmental Justice in ways tailored to the specific agency and its authority, mission, and programs. By linking these targeted priorities directly to our established data, preservation, and best practices benchmarks, MDP ensures that its planning initiatives are tied to specific performance and accountability measures outlined in the Order.

Goal 1 — Data-Driven Equity

Data-driven planning is foundational to identifying systemic burdens. The State Data and Analysis Center (SDAC) within MDP serves as the central hub for socioeconomic data and mapping and U.S. Census coordination. By leveraging spatial analysis tools, SDAC serves as the lead coordinator to ensure that local jurisdictions can visualize trends, understand the root causes of socio-economic issues, and make proactive planning decisions.

SDAC serves as the primary liaison between the United States Census Bureau and local governments. Ensuring that local governments can access and use the Census Toolkits is critical to getting an adequate response level. Better census data informs Maryland's understanding of change in all communities, including those that are overburdened and underrepresented. The data generated through the Census serves as a foundation for redistricting and also building constructive data sets that inform policy makers and implementers on how to most effectively address Maryland's needs. Good census data is the foundation to Environmental Justice work.

Goal: Empower local planners to utilize Equitable Spatial Analysis in all land-use decisions through the development of web-based tools.

- **Objective:** Provide professional consultation services and specialized tools to local governments and state agencies to work towards effectively combining environmental and health burden data with local socio-economic characteristics and zoning maps.
- **Priority Actions:**
 - **Census:** Lead the 2030 Maryland Census. Create a comprehensive tool to allow Maryland's socio-economic information to be searched and instantly generate reports, charts, and interactive dashboards.
 - **Interagency Coordination:** Work with other state agencies to develop policies on interagency data sharing.
 - **Web-based Tools:** Develop web-based tools that allow users to easily access and understand Maryland demographic data.
- **Metrics:**
 - Number of analyses and projections produced.
 - Increase in number of 'hits' to Planning tools and applications.
 - Number of reports generated
 - Number of Census responses.

Goal 2 — Cultural Resilience & Placekeeping

Environmental justice extends beyond physical pollution to encompass the preservation of community identity and cultural heritage. The Maryland Historical Trust (MHT), a division of the Maryland Department of Planning, recognizes that the historical documentation of marginalized populations has frequently been neglected. Over the past few years, MHT has undertaken several initiatives to improve equitability and environmental justice throughout the division.

MHT has embarked on a Board-led inclusive effort to examine its own programs and impacts; over the course of the last plan, the Maryland Heritage Areas Program completed phase one of an equity assessment to improve equitable grantmaking. Some measures can and will be undertaken with existing resources; however, in many cases, additional investment will be necessary to respond to the needs identified.

By identifying documentation gaps, improving funding strategies, and strengthening climate adaptation plans, MHT protects and interprets historic resources to build a more inclusive preservation program that tells the stories of all Marylanders.

Goal: Expand the reach of preservation programs to underrepresented and at-risk communities, ensuring their historical narratives and local assets are documented and/or protected.

- **Objective 1:** Protect and interpret historic resources to build a more inclusive preservation program that will tell the stories of all Marylanders.
- **Priority Actions:**
 - **Identify Gaps:** Analyze existing MIHP data by county to identify data gaps and priorities that will guide future research associated with underrepresented communities.
 - **Programmatic Improvements:** Strengthen and update the Non-Capital Historic Preservation Grant Program to support the identification and documentation of historic properties associated with underrepresented communities.
- **Metrics:**
 - Percentage of state for which architectural data gap analysis has been completed.
- **Objective 2:** Encourage economic development by enhancing historical resources and leveraging non-state investment to strengthen climate change resilience and to improve the lives of people who live and work in existing communities.
- **Priority Actions:**
 - **Proactive Partnership:** Identify existing communities that could benefit from MHAA and HRTC programs, but have not done so in the past. Work proactively with partners to improve access to funding and other resources.
 - **Cross-Agency Cooperation:** Work with Maryland Department Emergency Management (MDEM) Hazard Mitigation Team and local government partners to support the development of mitigation and adaptation strategies for threatened sites.
- **Metrics:**
 - Number of local hazard mitigation plans that include cultural resource components.
 - Number of federal and state funding, permits, licenses, or actions reviewed annually.

Goal 3 — Embedding EJ in Local Planning and Best Practices

MDP's statutory duty to harmonize local planning activities with state planning efforts offers a powerful mechanism to embed environmental equity into local planning and land-use policies and laws. By providing targeted technical assistance, training, and modern planning models, MDP supports local jurisdictions' capacity to prioritize underserved populations and address climate resilience.

Maryland's Sustainable Growth Planning Principles (Principles) were signed into law by Governor Moore on April 8, 2025, following Maryland General Assembly (MGA) approval of House Bill 286. Over the subsequent year, MDP collaborated with 14 other State agencies to create the introductory SG Implementation Guide that unpacks the eight Principles: Land, Transportation, Housing, Economy, Equity, Resilience, Place and Ecology. In 2026, Senate Bill 197/ House Bill 243 aligned the Comprehensive Plan required elements with the Principles. To support implementation, the Planning Services Section improves resource access and availability to local planners.

MDP Planning Services Section has a number of available resources for local planners that offer a variety of engagement levels. The Planning Services webpages enable local planners to contact their regional representative for one-on-one consultations, browse through issue-specific resources, or jump right to the *Equity Planning and Environmental Justice* resource page to help communities build capacity to implement planning best practices. The Planning Services Section also offers an accredited webinar series and Planning Commission training for continuing education and operates a brownfield redevelopment outreach program to connect local planners to state and federal financial and technical resources.

Goal: Advance local and state plans, policies, projects, and placemaking strategies that include the innovative use of best planning practices, tools, and data to enshrine Environmental Justice in land-use decision making.

- **Objective:** Provide comprehensive planning guidance, review, and targeted technical consultations to maximize the percentage of jurisdictions integrating equity, environmental protection, and resilience measures within plans and programs.
- **Priority Actions:**
 - **Technical Guidance:** Provide local governments with technical assistance to encourage land-use that is consistent with state and local policies, including local planning, placemaking, and community development that advance the department's environmental justice vision.
 - **Build Rapport:** Create opportunities for local practitioners to share best practices with their peers and platforms to discuss challenges that extend beyond jurisdictional boundaries.
 - **Proactive Research:** Utilize focus groups, task forces, academic partners, and sister agencies to study pressing long-term planning concerns of Maryland's jurisdictions.
- **Metrics:**
 - Number of jurisdictions that advance equity through provisions in plans.
 - Number of jurisdictions that include resiliency in their plans.
 - Number of jurisdictions that participate in Roundtables.
 - Number of jurisdictions that obtain EPA grants for brownfield assessments and/or cleanup.

- Number of visits to MDP's planning tools, guidance documents, and interactive maps available on MDP's website.

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