

Maryland Sustainable Growth Commission Meeting

May 14, 2012/1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

The James and Anne Robinson Nature Center
6692 Cedar Lane
Columbia, Maryland

Meeting Summary

Members: Jon Laria, Calvin Ball, Greg Bowen, Karl Brendle, Kelly Cartales, Diane Chasse, Yates Clagett, Cheryl Cort, Sandy Coyman, David Goshorn, Richard Hall, Don Halligan, Frank Hertsch, Brigid Kenney, Gerrit Knaap, David Lever, Robb Merritt, Sam Parker, Dru Schmidt-Perkins, Ray Skinner, Rollin Stanley, Bryce Turner, Bob Walker

Attendees: Marty Baker, Jamie Bridges, Kurt Fuchs, Carol Gilbert, Kristen Harbeson, Christopher Uhl, Ashley Valis, Anne Roane

MDP Staff: Chuck Boyd, Arabia Davis, Jenny King, Stephanie Martins, Matt Power, Andy Ratner, Pat Russell

Welcome & Opening Remarks

County Executive Ken Ulman welcomed everyone to the Nature Center and asked everyone to please join him in a tour of the facility before beginning the meeting.

After the tour, Mr. Laria welcomed everyone to the meeting and said he was most grateful to the County Executive for inviting the Commission to visit and tour the Nature Center. He noted that today's agenda is full but before beginning he wanted to acknowledge Rollin Stanley and his great leadership on the Commission. He thanked him for everything he has done for Montgomery County and the State and wished him well in his new role in Calgary.

Mr. Laria also introduced the newest member of the Commission, Mr. Robert "Yates" Clagett who will be filling the agricultural slot. Mr. Clagett stated that he is a life-long resident of Prince George's County. He works at the Prince Georges County's Soil Conservation District and is President of the County's Farm Bureau. He appreciates the opportunity to serve on the Commission.

Urban Smart Growth Issues

Bryce Turner, Karl Brendle and Rollin Stanley presented their views on issues concerning urban smart growth.

Mr. Turner stated that his presentation focused on three main ideas. It is all about intensity, not density. We need to encourage local developers to take a look at Locavesting which helps to support small businesses and healthy communities. Another idea includes “skinny development” – small scale skinny development that has local support and encourages entrepreneurship. Mr. Turner indicated that economic development is the driver for smart growth intensity. He said Baltimore needs to invest in urban development that focuses on seniors and rental apartments, which will thrive in Maryland.

Mr. Brendle’s presentation focused on “Overlays for Revitalization” in the City of Laurel. This revitalization tool was developed to help developers replace older commercial and residential buildings with new structures with the understanding that the development plan would need to be approved by city officials and be congruent with the City’s revitalization goals.

Mr. Stanley presented his report on the challenges of changing demographics and building communities to meet those challenges. He said there is not enough room to continue sprawl growth and felt the key is refocusing on the opportunities in our built environment. Infill opportunities do exist, as pointed out in Silver Spring, Wheaton, and White Flint. But, in order to make things better, attention needs to be drawn to the problems. We need consider bold choices, but we also have to manage expectations.

Rural Smart Growth Issues

Greg Bowen, Sandy Coyman and Anne Roane presented their views on issues concerning rural smart growth.

Ms. Roane, Planner, City of Cambridge, stated that the City adopted a new comprehensive plan in 2011. After completing their comprehensive plan, the City needed to address the zoning ordinance and was one of 36 cities nationally that participated in the EPA Building Blocks Workshop. In helping revitalize the downtown and its historic structures, the City has established partnerships with the University of Maryland, Morgan State and Catholic University. According to Ms. Roane, the redevelopment of their port area is the biggest project going on right now. She mentioned that the Maryland Department of Transportation has selected a developer to build a mixed-use development on 11.77 acres of waterfront property and that the property is owned by MDOT and leased by the City. The goal of this project is to continue to revitalize this historic downtown area by offering entertainment activities and retail opportunities to the residents and tourist.

Mr. Coyman talked about Rural Observations, Rural Eastern Shore, and Rural Planning. He said people need to be educated to get a better understanding of what smart growth is all about. With regards to agriculture, loss of critical mass is a big concern. In fact, the chicken industry is at a critical juncture where there is barely enough farmland devoted to supporting this industry. This is a major economic development concern for the eastern shore, particularly if farmland losses continue, potentially causing the industry to move to the Carolinas.

Mr. Bowen talked about the rural perspective on smart growth. He noted that rural planning has been prominent in Maryland for years, highlighting the nationally recognized “Plan for the Valleys” in Baltimore County. As far as town sizes and growth strategies, Mr. Bowen pointed out that Maryland has some good examples of rural communities, like Chestertown and Solomon Town Center that have maintained a good residential/commercial balance and have managed commercial strip (sprawl) development fairly well. Mr. Bowen also pointed out that regional planning and economic development is critical for rural areas – on such topics as regional transportation strategies, agriculture preservation, and agri-tourism. He noted that some of the challenges for rural smart growth include the lack of infrastructure and loss of federal/state funding. Mr. Bowen recommended that state and local officials identify new techniques that encourage builders, bankers and purchasers to embrace products not tested in the market.

Mr. Laria thanked the presenters and acknowledged that these very good presentations demonstrate the talent and passion of the Commission members. He said it is good to hear from Commissioners about their views on smart growth in Maryland. He then asked members if they had any questions for the presenters.

Mr. Ball said he is intrigued by the opportunity to promote redevelopment highlighted in the presentations. He pointed out that the Route 1 Corridor in Howard County presents a prime revitalization opportunity. But, there are challenges that must be addressed concerning higher densities and compatibility with established communities.

Mr. Turner noted that he sees these challenges as opportunities to educate people on how quality smart growth can fit into their community and be an asset. Mr. Brendle added that the City of Laurel looked to its transit facilities as its opportunity to focus infill development. He noted that reversing decades of suburban sprawl is difficult, but change can begin by using the transit infrastructure that is along the Route 1 Corridor.

Mr. Parker felt that Mr. Stanley’s presentation was a different way to look at development - as a problem solver. Our social environments are changing; we need to figure out how people are going to live together in these new environments. We are changing and people’s needs are too. He added that there needs to be a larger outreach to different kinds of thinkers and that the Commission should consider including social scientist as part of this discussion. Another challenge is getting society to think about land use beyond the physical. The key is to create and generate a mix of uses that embraces a diverse population.

Mr. Laria asked the panel, if they felt that with scarce federal/state/local resources whether small scale / skinny development provided an opportunity for developers to continue to build?

Mr. Stanley’s response was that, the development would have to be done strategically and that there would need to be linkages to other community amenities. Mr. Stanley noted that the goal would be to get a diverse group of small business to support this type of development.

Ms. Roane said we need to strengthen the language on adequate public facilities in comprehensive plans. Mr. Bowen was in agreement with this statement and said that many times commercial developments are abandoned because a new development is constructed.

Commission Workgroups

Mr. Laria asked members to review the draft work plan for the Sustainable Growth Commission Workgroups (copy distributed at the meeting). The last workplan was completed in December 2010. He also distributed a list of workgroup members and asked members for their feedback. Mr. Laria noted that in addition to the workgroups, he proposed that the Commission take the lead on examining:

1. The comprehensive plan process in Maryland and its relationship to other state and local planning elements;
2. The impact of recent legislative and regulatory actions with regard to stormwater management on the State's progress towards achieving the Twelve Visions; and
3. The Smart Growth Subcabinet's Annual Report on the implementation of the Smart Growth Areas Act.

Mr. Laria encouraged Commission members to read the 12 Visions of Smart Growth. He noted that these visions are not policy neutral, but advocate for smart, sustainable growth. Mr. Laria also commented on the 2011/2012 Maryland Department of Planning Smart Growth Annual Report, and recommended that the Commission members review it. MDP staff agreed to send out the PDF link to the document and will bring hardcopies of the report to the next meeting.

Mr. Laria provided an overview of Workgroup work plans. He mentioned that the Concentrating Growth Workgroup now includes two Vice Chairs – Robb Merrit and Russ Brinsfield. He challenged the members to provide suggestions on ways to advance the Commission's efforts, particularly given the diversity and talent of its members.

Mr. Knaap felt the role of the Commission needs to be elevated. He expressed his concern that Commission's reporting and recommendation responsibilities appeared to be missing from the work plan. Mr. Laria responded by noting that the Commission's charge implies the authority to report and make recommendations, but he welcomed the opportunity to discuss the details of the work plan with each Workgroup chair.

Mr. Coyman said the work plan needs to focus on one or two issues and come up with some policy recommendations. He indicated that the Commission needs to look at what are the biggest impediments to achieving smart growth. He said it will be helpful if we have a few things to focus on for the next year as a group.

Legislative Wrap-Up

Mr. Hall discussed the three main bills of interest that successfully passed the legislative session -- the Septics, Stormwater, and PlanMaryland. The Septics Bill was the most controversial and

complex of all of the bills, adding it was a huge win for the environment. Mr. Knaap questioned the Commission's role with regards to this particular bill. Mr. Hall said that the Commission would be briefed on its role to review proposed Tier 4 exemption request at the next meeting.

Mr. Skinner advised that a small bill – HB 1327 – Areas of Sustainable Communities passed to extend the deadline for Sustainable Community applications to December 31, 2013. Previously, that deadline had been June 2012.

PlanMaryland Update

Mr. Boyd said he has met with every county, and over six jurisdictions regarding the PlanMaryland Planning Areas and Guidelines. MDP will continue to reach out to local governments throughout the year to help them identify their Planning Areas. He also mentioned that MDP has met with every one of the State agencies in the Smart Growth Subcabinet regarding their preparation of PlanMaryland Implementation Strategies. Mr. Boyd said that he has received some draft Implementation Strategies/Work Plan, but all agencies are supposed to submit their work plans June 16th. After that, State agencies will refine their submissions and collaborate on preparing a final report of Implementation Strategies to the Governor by mid-August. Once submitted to the Governor, the report will be made available for local governments to evaluate as they identify their Planning Areas.

As for the PlanMaryland workgroup, Mr. Boyd pointed out that local governments have not started to submit proposed Planning Areas and State agencies have not submitted Implementation Strategies, but that will likely change in this summer. He anticipates scheduling a meeting by the end of June or early July to begin review State agency Implementation Strategies.

Mr. Laria noted that the Commission will want to remain engaged in this Workgroup. Mr. Boyd said he will report back to the Commission at the next meeting scheduled for July.

Adequate Public Facilities Reporting

Mr. Boyd said MDP is getting the next round of reports starting in July and will be starting to assess those reports. He stated that MDP plans to provide more information to the members by September at the earliest.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.