

**MARYLAND'S SUSTAINABLE GROWTH COMMISSION,
CONCENTRATING GROWTH WORK GROUP**

***SURVEY ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES AND INDICATORS
SUMMARY OF RESULTS, NEXT STEPS, AND SPECIFIC COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS***

Submitted by Joe Tassone and Shelly Aprill, MDP, January 21, 2015

The survey's purpose was to gather Maryland Sustainable Growth Commissioners' opinions & insights about the suite of Sustainable Growth & Conservation Objectives & Indicators presented for consideration at the September 22 meeting of the Commission, and take the next step toward development of a "Status Check" report. The intent for a Status Check report is essentially as a tool with which the Commission can take stock of where things stand toward achievement of Sustainable Growth and Conservation objectives, evaluate progress being made, and consider what might be done to better achieve the objectives and related goals of State Planning Policy.

- Section A of this report is a one page summary of survey results;
- Section B is a one page summary of intended next steps; and
- Section C is a seven page listing of specific comments, suggestions and concerns articulated by individual Commissioners who completed all or part of the survey.

SECTION A: SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

- 1) 15 Commissioners completed all or part of the survey. 7 answered all questions, 3 skipped some questions, and 5 answered only the broader questions about where to go from here.
- 2) There were 4 kinds of questions, the first 3 of which were repeated for each category, objective and indicator:
 - a) Are the objectives proposed in each category sufficient to measure progress (Development, Resource and Environmentally Sensitive Lands, Socio-Economic Equity, Transportation/Land Use, and Economic Development)?
 - b) Is each Objective proposed important and relevant?
 - c) Is each Indicator proposed a reasonable, adequate (in some cases interim) measure of status and/or progress toward achievement of the relevant objective?
 - d) Broader questions about where to go from here, specifically
 - i) Should the objectives and indicators be used to produce a "smart and sustainable growth and conservation ("status check") report for the Commission? and
 - ii) Should statewide and regional target benchmarks be developed for indicators to help frame and evaluate progress toward the Objectives where possible?
- 3) For each of the five Objective categories, 92% or more of respondents said that the objectives proposed were "very or somewhat sufficient"
- 4) 98% or more of respondents said that each proposed objective was "very or somewhat important and relevant"

- 5) With the exception of one indicator (which has been eliminated), 87% or more of respondents said that each indicator was a “very or somewhat reasonable and adequate” measure (in some cases interim measure). Note: interim measures will be interpreted in the draft report with that in mind.
- 6) Sixty three percent of respondents said that the Objectives and Indicators should be used to produce a “smart and sustainable growth and conservation (“status check”) report for the Commission
- 7) Seventy five percent of respondents said that both regional & statewide target benchmarks should be developed and used to help frame and evaluate progress toward the Objectives

SECTION B: NEXT STEPS

In response to the survey results and discussions at the last few Commission meetings, MDP is preparing an online report for the Commission’s consideration. It is intended to serve as an initial “status check” of progress towards a specific set of sustainable growth and conservation objectives the Commission believes are integral to achievement of State Planning Policy goals. The report will provide one or more “outcome indicators” – measures of where things currently stand – toward each objective statewide, by region, and in some cases by county.

In proceeding with this effort, it is important to note that many steps to better support State Planning Policy goals and the Sustainable Development and Conservation objectives have been taken by State and local governments, but may not yet have had sufficient time to show effects discernable in the outcome indicators. The online report will make this clear. Many of the indicators measure conditions that have been decades in the making, while State Planning Policy was officially established only a few years before the turn to the 21st century. No matter how eager we may be for demonstrable progress, it takes considerable time for program changes made through comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances, state and local laws, etc., to have noticeable effects on measures of this sort.

To address this and other issues raised through the survey or discussed at Commission meetings, and in consideration of the Commission’s other responsibilities, the following steps are proposed in future Status Check updates. This intent will also be made clear in the initial Status Check report.

- Incorporate the use of “program indicators” in the assessment – steps that have been taken by local governments, State agencies, and the State legislature in the form of changes to plans, programs, funding and requirements to support achievement of the objectives and Policy goals;
- Set target benchmarks for outcome indicators by region, to represent outcomes the Commission believes necessary to achieve sustainable growth and conservation objectives and support State Planning Policy;
- Monitor incremental progress toward the target benchmarks;
- Identify, to the degree possible, steps that could be taken to improve progress toward the objectives;
- Make recommendations that could be used by State and local governments or the private sector to help take those steps; and

- Communicate to the public and government officials the benefits of achieving smart and sustainable growth and conservation objectives.

SECTION C: SPECIFIC COMMENTS PROVIDED THROUGH THE SURVEY

Numerous specific comments, suggestions, questions, and stipulations as to appropriate use of indicators were provided by the Commissioners who completed all or part of the survey.

In a few instances, we made changes to the indicators or how they are interpreted in response to comments (e.g., we changed the way component indicators for mixed use, walkable communities are measured to ¼ mile for all components; we measured related parameters to address individual Commission member's concerns about the validity of certain indicators, and are including the relevant data in the draft "status check" report). In accordance with the prevailing sentiment favoring use of statewide and regional target benchmarks to better frame and evaluate progress, we are highlighting the intention to do so in future Status Check updates. One indicator was eliminated in response to our own assessment of its inadequacy, corroborated by the majority of respondents.

However, some suggestions were impractical to address for various reasons: we don't have and can't obtain suitable data, or suggested indicators do not meet the screening criteria we established at the outset of the effort. Some comments and observations relate to policy and are beyond the scope of the objectives/ indicators effort. Some suggestions might be good ones to follow, but will take more time than available to include in a first generation status check report. Finally, many of the comments to which we did not respond are insightful observations relating to efforts to achieve these and related public objectives that the Commission, the State, and local governments should keep in mind as they address their missions.

We would be glad to discuss and further consider any comments about the objectives or indicators to which we did not respond. They are summarized below in groups corresponding to the individual questions in response to which they were provided in the survey.

- 1) Sufficiency of proposed Development Objectives:
 - a) Incentive to keep rural area in farm production, not costly housing.
 - b) PFA's must...accommodate sufficient housing opportunities within each type to accommodate multiple sources which will generate price and design competition.
- 2) Importance of Development Objective 1, "Accommodate growth in PFAs, minimize pressure on resource/ environmentally sensitive lands:"
 - a) No objective should be implemented that would displace the working poor and seniors.
 - b) Funding farm land preservation on a larger basis.
 - c) Are resource and environmentally sensitive lands everything outside the PFA?
- 3) Adequacy of Composite Indicator for Development Objective 1:
 - a) Market fluctuations will skew the chart to some extent.
 - b) Needs context and to be used as a long term trend, not a snapshot.

- c) We should consider each parcel as a developed lot because that is what's going to happen without a conservation easement.
 - d) Backward looking, and doesn't reflect current activity.
 - e) Report # of parcels/sites and acreage separately.
 - f) The direction and progress of these two indicators suggests that each requires distinct attention, and potentially discrete policy solutions
- 4) Importance of Development Objective 2: Accommodate mixed used in a walkable environment within PFAs.
- a) This is the absolute objective. Literally as the population grows the methods of moving people cannot be accommodated by car and/or public transportation. Hence, walkable and bike-able neighborhoods must be our future.
 - b) Mixed use development does not work in most of Maryland due to insufficient project density and surrounding support for retail elements of mixed use projects.
- 5) Adequacy of Composite Indicator for Development Objective 2.
- a) I agree with your summary. Walkable and/or bike-able trips by most regions are minimum or nonexistence.
 - b) Not sure of a value of a composite mix.
 - c) People don't walk very far so 1/4 should be used in all cases.
 - d) Consider developing an index score for existing conditions, perhaps at the census tract level, and then reporting on how much development occurred within areas at threshold scores.
 - e) The index could even be weighted by region such that downtown Salisbury scores commensurate with downtown Baltimore for the purpose of this objective.
 - f) This indicator seems to have more to do with transit, recreation, and commercial choices than residential construction.
- 6) Importance of Development Objective 3: PFAs provide a range of housing types, densities, sizes and values and accommodate socio-economically diverse population.
- a) It is critical; affordable is as primary as other objectives. Take out affordable and green, smart and/or sustainable is a non-starter.
 - b) Economic and financial underpinnings will continue to pose challenges, especially where land cost and other improvements are expensive. The State doesn't have the funding to offset this reality.
 - c) The PFA doesn't provide housing types. The PFA accommodates housing opportunities.
- 7) Adequacy of composite indicator for Development Objective 3.
- a) Suggest the Capitol Region is far too generous as prices have soared. The same could be said for certain Baltimore communities as well.
 - b) There are multiple factors that influence these data, including jobs and economic success.
 - c) The indicator for housing to accommodate socio-economically diverse population is grossly weighted to the low cost end of the spectrum.

- 8) Importance of Agricultural & Environmental Resources Objectives.
 - a) The move to organic foods as a preference is a major driver. Preservation of agricultural land will perhaps drive down prices of natural/organic foods.
 - b) Point out the economic engine that agriculture is in good times and lean times in Maryland history.
- 9) Adequacy of Composite Indicator for Agricultural & Environmental Resources
 - a) Not clear on the science implemented here.
 - b) Maybe too subjective, not sure.
 - c) List all land not under easement as very vulnerable to spot development as in the real world!
 - d) I suspect only planners will grasp what these mean, and the stability measures mean different things in different regions.
- 10) Sufficiency of Socio-Economic Equity Objectives
 - a) No objective to blend in the ability to move from the bottom rung of education and job opportunities to a higher level.
 - b) Additionally, the large influx of non-skilled immigrants as not been properly addressed relative to their impact.
 - c) Problems worse in some rural areas.
- 11) Importance of Socio-Economic Equity Objective 1: Lower income households have access to: good education, affordable housing, affordable combined housing & transportation costs, jobs commensurate with education & training, social services, health care, and food.
 - a) Important and relevant, but nothing we are doing here will begin to address these very significant issues.
- 12) Adequacy of interim composite indicator for Socio-Economic Equity Objective 1.
 - a) Economic success of an area heavily influences affordability.
 - b) Percent of Homes Sold in PFAs Affordable to Low Income Workforce Households needs to be measured against demand or need, not a percentage of the total.
- 13) Importance of Socio-Economic Equity Objective 2: Populations of poverty and high risk are not geographically concentrated and isolated
 - a) The pockets of poor have been become deeper and centralized as result of successful gentrification. This situation, in my opinion, is one of the most significant impediments to sustainable growth.
- 14) Sufficiency of Transportation-Land Use Objectives
 - a) Suggest transportation and land use be separated. Zoning and land use guidelines have always guided development.
 - b) Jobs close to home a necessity for smart growth.
- 15) Importance of Transportation-Land Use Objectives

- 16) Adequacy of Transportation-Land Use composite indicator
 - a) Not sure data is adequate.
 - b) Question the purpose of a composite.
 - c) Simplifying might be a good option. The data will have different meanings for different types of areas. It also assumes that our transit options are going to be markedly better anytime soon...
over what period of time are you measuring?
- 17) Sufficiency of Economic Development Objectives
 - a) Economic development objective should include entertainment. Perhaps done the Physical Assets?
 - b) Not sure what 'stable' means in #7.
 - c) More use of how stable agriculture is to an area's economy.
- 18) Importance of Economic Development Objective 1: The value of residential, commercial, & industrial real estate in PFAs is stable or increasing
- 19) Adequacy of indicators for Economic Development Objective 1
 - a) Hyper-local data may prove to be contrary to findings.
 - b) I don't fully accept the premise. It is like saying GDP has to always grow.
 - c) How about vacancy and absorption rates in commercial markets, which are measured on a quarterly basis in metro areas (and increasingly even in tertiary markets)? Housing sales and price trends, also measured minutely?
- 20) Importance of Economic Development Objective 2: The number of jobs in PFAs is stable or increasing.
 - a) No-Brainer!
- 21) Adequacy of indicators for Economic Development Objective 2
 - a) Suspect of numbers as the Federal Government impact on the work force has been in flux for the last 3-4 years. Sequestration has been a telling example of how the much of an impact the Feds have on our state
- 22) Importance of Economic Development Objective 3: Household income is commensurate with costs of living in PFAs
 - a) Living cost must not be too high PFA area to keep people in place
- 23) Adequacy of indicators for Economic Development Objective 3
 - a) Many other factors should be considered beyond transportation that zaps household income. Food, health care, child care and disadvantaged family members.
 - b) You go where the jobs are.
- 24) Importance of Economic Development Objective 4: A diverse, educated, skilled workforce is available for current and potential employers.

- a) More help for education on a local level by state of Maryland

25) Adequacy of indicators for Economic Development Objective 4

- a) No, for the reasons mentioned above.
- b) Too many holes in the data so far.
- c) We need more data on this subject.
- d) This is an exceedingly difficult thing to measure, for all kinds of reasons.

26) Importance of Economic Development Objective 5: Physical assets (infrastructure) in PFAs have potential to support new businesses & employers

- a) As noted in my previous comments, the category should be broader. Additional communities' amenities are critical to sustainability.

27) Adequacy of indicators for Economic Development Objective 5

- a) Other public facilities should be considered as an aside.
- b) Just need to measure more types of infrastructure.
- c) Where does broadband fit?

28) Importance of Economic Development Objective 6: The business environment for agricultural, forestry and other resources based industries is stable or improving

- a) Show how Ag easement land encourages young people and their investment is a stabilizing factor in a sustainable future

29) Adequacy of indicators for Economic Development Objective 6

- a) Much could be added to the measurement.
- b) Might add in other Ag Census data.
- c) County extension offices offer this data on a county wide basis

30) Importance of Economic Development Objective 7: Land use outside PFAs and within designated resource conservation areas is stable and supports resource based and other compatible businesses

- a) Having trouble with the word "stable".
- b) I am not sure what this means. What is "other compatible business"?

31) Adequacy of indicators for Economic Development Objective 7

- a) Measure areas that have easements and that area will support Ag business indefinitely.
- b) I do not fully understand these measures, and am guessing most people would not either. They are also made out of any economic context