

The CLUE

Calendar of Events

Tuesday, June 2, 2 pm

Board of County Commissioners (County Admin Building)

Monday, June 15, 12 noon and 7 pm

Planning Commission (County Admin Building)

Tuesday, June 16, 2 pm

Board of County Commissioners (County Admin Building)

Wednesday, June 17, 6 pm

Comprehensive Plan Citizens' Oversight Committee (County Admin Building) *Overview of the draft new Comprehensive Plan*

Thursday July 9, 7:00 pm

CLUA Meeting: *Introducing the New Comprehensive Plan (Perryville Library) See story below*

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Draft of New Comprehensive Plan Becomes Public This Month

On June 17, ERM, the contractor for the new Comprehensive Plan, will present an overview of the proposed plan to the Citizens Oversight Committee. The oversight committee has been responsible for overseeing ERM's work and providing guidance on policy. There are a number of CLUA members on the committee. The public may attend the June 17 meeting (6 pm, County Admin Building) as spectators but cannot actively participate. This rollout is being billed as a "mini-plan", i.e., without all of the documentation that will make up the final product. It will consist of an Executive Summary of major plan policies and recommendations, land use map, and transportation map.

The Comprehensive Plan still has a long way to go, and public hearings will be held at various times later this year and into 2010. Changes can be incorporated into the plan at

several stages. Final approval by the Board of County Commissioners is not expected until early 2010.

The next CLUA meeting will be devoted to the draft new Comprehensive Plan. The meeting will be on Thursday, July 9, at 7 p.m. at the Perryville library. This is an important introduction to the plan that will largely shape the future of Cecil County. It will enable us to understand the major points of the plan, and its pros and cons, before the county's first public forum is held on July 15.

Artesian Update

Ed Cairns reports that the next court date for the ARCA, CLUA, et al. suit against the county regarding the Artesian deal — specifically, the transfer of county-owned wastewater treatment plants in the eastern part of the county to Artesian Water Company — will be on Tuesday, June 23. The time of the hearing is still to be announced; we'll send an e-mail out when we know for sure.

Our case is based on state law that does not permit the commissioners to transfer county-owned facilities that are still in "public use" to a private entity (see October and November CLUA newsletters for more information, at http://cecillanduse.org/clua_docs.html). As described in last month's newsletter, at a Cecil County Circuit Court hearing on March 27, the county sought to have the case dismissed on procedural grounds, but Judge Campen (a visiting judge from Talbot County) ruled that the suit can proceed.

Meanwhile, in response to a large amount of documentation assembled by Ed Cairns, Ron Hartman, and others, the state Public Service Commission deferred its hearing on the extended franchise agreement, including the sale of the county's treatment plants to Artesian, until July. The sale cannot be consummated until the PSC grants approval.

Our motivation in bringing these actions is to prevent the northeast corner of the county, now largely rural, with productive farms and orchards, from becoming a designated growth area; and to prevent the county government from making critical and irreversible decisions like this behind closed doors, without public debate, open competition, or independent review.

Short Notes

- CLUA has made a \$50 contribution to the Cecil College Foundation in memory of Tom McWilliams.
- Several days before he died, Tom told me that he had learned that the developer of the Elk Point Marina had dropped his lease on the property (presumably this was a lease with option to buy). As you may recall, last fall we urged the commissioners, apparently

successfully, not to grant the proposed development a Critical Area “growth allocation” that it needed to proceed. There is no doubt, however, that eventually the property will be developed in some way by somebody.

- Speaking of the upper Elk River, the new county boat ramp off of Oldfield Point Road, just south of Elkton, is supposed to be completed by the end of this month. However, the river is so silted up there that the ramp will probably be useful only to kayaks and canoes until the river is dredged in the fall.

- We have not heard what the new plans are for the “Granite Cliffs” development adjacent to Port Deposit. The old plans, which we had serious concerns about, showed a 700-home development with water drawn from the Susquehanna, but the developer pulled them off the table at the end of April. There is no county TAC meeting this month.

- CHARGE, the Cherry Hill Alliance for Responsible Growth and Expansion, has dissolved and donated the money that remained in its bank account, over \$2000, to CLUA for future legal fees. Thanks very much to Lindsie Carter and Ken Wiggins for considering CLUA and arranging for the transfer of funds.

- CLUA recently sent a letter to the county commissioners urging that agricultural preservation funds (for purchase of development rights) *not* be totally zeroed out of the county’s 2010 budget, as the draft budget showed. Unfortunately, the commissioners felt the cut had to be made so there is no funding for the county program to purchase development rights in 2010. Thanks to commissioner Robert Hodge for supporting some level of ag land preservation funding in the budget, albeit to no avail.

— George Kaplan

From the Baltimore Sun

When Growth Returns, Will We Go Back to Environmentally Unsustainable Development?

By Robert Wieland

May 20, 2009

We have had the fear put in us that the economy is in dire straits. Since the alarm was first raised by a very conservative administration and is being re-sounded by a much more progressive one, we should all suspect that there really is a problem here — if the losses in our investments, home values and diminished work prospects were not enough evidence already.

What I wonder, when I try to understand the government's response to this great adjustment, is: What is it we are trying to get back to? I know that we would all like to have our money back and to be facing the better earning possibilities that we enjoyed in 2006. But if

there was something unsustainable about the situation then, why are we trying to get back there?

Before the bubble popped, a developer was planning to build 2,600 housing units in Trappe, a town of about 450 current housing units and 1,150 people. Trappe is about seven miles from both Cambridge and Easton, towns with populations in the range of 11,000 to 12,000 people (and their own new housing developments). But it is 50 miles from Annapolis and 80 miles from either Baltimore or Washington.

There is nothing really unique about Trappe; all across the mid-Atlantic, plans for similar developments lie dormant. [See: Cecil County.]

Before the bubble popped, I wondered how building an additional 2,600 housing units this far from anything could possibly make sense. A finance guy explained it to me. It boiled down to this: The margin between the land's productive value (what one could make growing stuff on it) and its development value was so great that you could pass a piece of that margin down a long line of investors from here to Shanghai and there would still be a big pile for the guy who put it all together. It didn't matter if there was demand or not. The houses would be sold. The market said so.

So that didn't last. The market changed its mind. Now the proposition of that many houses in Trappe looks a bit dicier. And yet, the town commissioners and the developer still assert that this development will happen. All the permits are in. The developer has made a large commitment in time, energy and money that he will not easily let go, and the town thinks the development will improve its financial position.

Now comes the government's stimulus. What are its intentions? Will it make housing developments like Trappe's start going gangbusters again? Farming isn't getting any more remunerative, so that margin between the productive value of land and its development value is still the easiest money in town. And, if the stimulus money is looking for "shovel-ready" projects, what's more tempting than already permitted housing developments? In fact, the town wanted stimulus money to get this project restarted, and the state initially approved it.

Meanwhile, at the same time we are facing this economic crisis, we also have serious environmental imbalances looming. Close to home we have the demise of the Chesapeake Bay looking increasingly imminent, and globally we have a problem with excessive carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The economic downturn of the last two years has done more to help bay restoration and global climate change than any well-intentioned, passable legislation might have done over that same period. Do we have to lose all that benefit if the economy gets going again?

I am not an opponent of growth. I understand that if there is no growth, then my children can't start accumulating wealth without making someone else poorer. Growth is good, if just for their sake. But building houses far from where people work is not good growth. Adding roads to accommodate more cars when there are already too many cars, adding shopping centers when there is already too much impervious surface, building houses so now people can own two homes — none of that is good for our environment. It is not

sustainable growth.

If you are awed by the changes wrought by the current unwinding of economic imbalances, wait until you see what could be coming due in the environmental adjustment.

Robert Wieland is a resource economist working to expand the application of economic analysis in environmental decision-making. This column is distributed by Bay Journal News Service.

Growth: The Big Questions

I just posted on the CLUA web site a link to a rather lengthy paper (38 pages of text) written last year by Tom Horton, who for a long time was the Baltimore Sun's resident Chesapeake Bay expert and environmentalist (he retired several years ago). The paper is called "Growing! Growing! Gone! The Chesapeake Bay and the Myth of Endless Growth"; Rupert Rosetti gave me a copy a few months ago. The paper raises some fundamental questions about the area's growth, environment, and economics. The paper can be found at http://www.abell.org/pubsitems/env_Growing_808.pdf. Despite its length, it is an easy and interesting read.

In its May issue, the Bay Journal (<http://www.bayjournal.com/>) published a summary of Horton's paper by Lara Lutz. Even this overview is a bit long (8 pages) to reprint in full here, but if you don't have time to read Horton's paper, it is a good synopsis. The Lutz article is at <http://www.bayjournal.com/article.cfm?article=3581>.

I think Horton raises disturbing questions that we all need to think about. Even CLUA's vision statement talks about "responsibly managing growth" but Horton is asking whether that idea is actually sustainable. Certainly I would urge anyone who is in any way connected with the land use planning or development approval process (I know you're out there — many of you are CLUA members!) to at least read Lutz's summary in the Bay Journal.

Below are a few "teaser" excerpts from the Lutz article.

— George Kaplan

In the early days of the Bay cleanup efforts, public presentations about the Chesapeake often included an illustration from the comic strip "Pogo," with the character's famous saying, "We have met the enemy, and he is us."...

Now, as the human population of the Bay watershed cruises toward 17 million, author and conservationist Tom Horton is asking hard questions about the Bay's biggest long-term problem: growth...

"Growth is good. Growth is necessary. Growth will come. Growth can be accommodated,"

he writes. *"These are the greatest, most uncritically accepted and fatally flawed assumptions made by those charged with protecting the natural resources of the Chesapeake Bay."*

Despite the problems it spawns, most people view economic growth as necessary and population growth as unstoppable. But Horton disagrees. He's asked for a new public conversation — not to debate growth strategies, but to question growth itself.

"It's hypocritical to take people's money to restore the Bay while ignoring how many people live around the Bay and the growth projections for the future," Horton said...

"Smart growth is still growth," Horton said. "Environmental groups want to focus on behaviors, not the number of people out there behaving. There's nothing wrong with that, but they are ignoring a big part of the problem."

Horton argues that we can only save the Bay by replacing growth with a better model. "Right now, everything is pretty much cast in terms of 'grow or die,'" he said. "That's not something we've thought through very much." The assumption that "growth is good" leads state and local governments to pursue growth even as its citizens complain about the impacts on traffic, schools, water treatment systems and open space.

Elected officials who champion the Bay can also find themselves supporting projects that create more pollution. Maryland, for example, has welcomed a large influx of military jobs through BRAC.... At the same time, the state continues to put funds and energy into restoring the Bay and shares the Bay Program's burden to stem pollution from developed land.

Horton said that growth should give way to stability — in terms of the economy, population and land use... Experts call it a "steady-state" economy. It's been an academic concept since the 18th century, but never part of the mainstream dialogue.

A steady-state economy depends on balance, with the right number of jobs, goods and services for a relatively stable population. The growth economy, on the other hand, depends on more people to consume ever larger amounts of products and natural resources...

"Most people in the environmental community are really glad that someone — not them — is bringing this up," Horton said. "Even the scientists. They think we need to discuss this, and they are frustrated by their own inability to do it."

Want to read more? Go to one of the web addresses above.

Let us hear from you! The CLUE belongs to you. We'd like to know what you have to say. What are your concerns and interests regarding Cecil Land Use? Tell us about your pet peeves, your ideas for improvement, people you'd like to praise, process suggestions, new problems identified, new opportunities arisen, or new challenges to face. Speak up, and share with us. Write to the editor at gkaplan@zoominternet.net

The Cecil Land Use Alliance newsletter is published periodically under the auspices of the Board of Directors. It is provided to all members, directors and available to the public at large. Suggestions and articles are welcome. They should be submitted to the editor by e-mail to gkaplan@zoominternet.net, or by mail to P.O. Box 215, Colora MD 21917. We encourage our readers to visit our website at <http://cecilanduse.org>

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