

# The CLUE

## Calendar of Events

**Saturday, December 5, noon**

Cecil County Christmas parade (Main Street, North East)

**Wednesday, December 9, at 5 pm**

Maryland Attorney General's town hall meeting on Susquehanna River issues (Donaldson Brown Conference Center, 200 Mt. Ararat Farm Road, Port Deposit)

**Tuesday, December 15, at 7 pm**

Board of County Commissioners (County Admin Building)

**Monday, December 21, at 12 noon and 7 pm**

Planning Commission (County Admin Building)

**In This Issue:** CLUA needs board members (p.1); Survey results (p. 2); Susquehanna town hall meeting (p. 3); It's not hard being green (p. 4); New wetland buffers proposed (p. 5); Watershed Watch (p. 8); Rail proposal pro and con (p. 11)

## Wanted: People Who Want to Get Things Done

The January meeting of CLUA is the "annual meeting" at which we elect new board members. Five seats (each with a two-year term) become vacant each year. We are looking for people who would like to serve on the CLUA board and help direct the organization in 2010-2011. We expect 2010 to be a very busy year. A new Comprehensive Plan will be adopted, there is an election next fall, and there will be a referendum on charter home rule. Much about the future direction of the county will be determined next year. CLUA will need "all hands on deck" and good leadership. If you would like to serve, or at least want more information on the possibility, talk to Nancy Valentine ([nmv@theworld.com](mailto:nmv@theworld.com)), the nominations chair. Also talk to Nancy if you would like to nominate someone else.

The January meeting will be held on January 19<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm in the North East Library.

At this meeting we will be setting up new committees, so committee chairs and members for specific areas of interest will be needed. Other positions that are open are newsletter editor and web master.

Many of you responded to the recent survey by saying you would like to do more. Now is the time to step up!

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## **CLUA Survey Results: A Synthesis**

Thanks to the 48 people who responded to our survey (a 50% response, which is quite good) we now have a good picture of what CLUA should be doing in the future. We appreciate the time you took and the thoughtful comments that were submitted. I'd like to briefly share the survey's results with you.

### ***Goals***

People's responses show that the two most important goals for CLUA are preserving forestry and agriculture as well as assuring open, accessible, and transparent government processes. Right behind them, in second place, are preserving the County's rural character as well as being a citizen voice in the growth plans of the county. Protecting the environment comes next. Promoting economic development for county residents, on the other hand, shouldn't be a major focus for CLUA.

Thus CLUA's purpose is twofold: 1) preserve and protect our natural resources and agriculture, and 2) keep a close eye on political/planning processes within the County.

### ***Purpose***

People's responses indicate that CLUA needs to (in descending order of importance): 1) become an authority on countywide conservation/land use issues, 2) educate ourselves, the public and elected officials on land use issues, 3) take positions on proposed county codes and policies, 4) develop and advocate our own ideas regarding new county codes and policies, and 5) fight individual developments that seem to violate the Comprehensive Plan.

Thus, it's clear that CLUA should spend as much time and effort on education as on advocacy.

### ***Education***

When it comes to the educational aspects, CLUA needs to do research and become experts on various issues. CLUA should then provide expert background information at commissioner meetings as well as publish studies and white papers. In addition, CLUA should engage in the planning process by drafting and modifying ordinances and policies, and then provide this material to the commissioners.

Another large part of the education process is to reach out and inform the public through various media outlets. Respondents' suggestions include improving the use of our newsletter and website as well as the Cecil Whig. They also suggested we provide

streaming videos of our meetings on You Tube, participate in various blogs, and hold symposia for the public on an as needed basis.

### ***Advocacy***

CLUA has also been given the charge of being the advocate and “voice” of Cecil County’s citizenry. Part of the advocacy will come from any ordinances and policies written as well as other educational literature advocating on various issues. Other political actions that should be taken include: 1) challenging candidates to follow through on their campaign promises (i.e. through scorecards or endorsements), 2) lobbying on issues, and 3) endorsing appropriate candidates. Throughout all of these actions, respondents want CLUA to be a ‘watch dog’ and make sure our government’s processes are transparent and respectful of its citizenry.

### ***Closing Thoughts***

This is a huge job that the CLUA is being asked to do and it calls for a large organization that functions a bit differently from the way we function now.

In the past, various coalitions banded together to fight local development issues and to speak out about various countywide land use issues. Going forward, CLUA needs to become a separate individual organization in its own right. Its main job will be to focus on monitoring countywide issues while becoming experts on land use issues and advocating for preserving our natural resources and agriculture. When local groups call for help, CLUA needs to form coalitions with them and empower them to fight against individual developments.

Obviously, CLUA is nowhere near that ideal. (But we can make it a goal for 10 years from now!) However, we do have dedicated volunteers ready and willing to get to work on 2010’s issues.

After looking at this data, it’s become obvious that CLUA needs to do some organizational restructuring to enable us to meet our goals. This will be explained at our next general meeting in January along with getting committees up and running.

Julia Belknap  
President

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## **Attorney General Gansler to Visit Lower Susquehanna River December 9 — Town Hall Meeting That Evening**

Attorney General Douglas F. Gansler will visit the Lower Susquehanna River on Wednesday, **December 9, 2009**. The Lower Susquehanna River Audit is part of the Attorney General’s statewide tour of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed and its tributaries.

Attorney General Gansler will spend the day in Port Deposit to hear firsthand from local environmental leaders, residents, elected officials and students about the challenges facing the Lower Susquehanna River. Protecting the environment and holding polluters

accountable is the Attorney General's top priority. The information gathered during the audits of individual rivers provides valuable information in identifying polluters and problems faced. This information is essential in the Attorney General's efforts to enforce the laws and assists in designing creative solutions to environmental issues.

As part of the Audit, Attorney General Gansler will visit the Conowingo dam on the Lower Susquehanna River. The Lower Susquehanna River audit visit will conclude with a **Town Hall Meeting at 5:00 p.m.** at the **Donaldson Brown Conference Center**, located at 200 Mount Ararat Farm Road in Port Deposit, Maryland 21904. The public is invited to attend the Town Hall meeting. This is an opportunity for citizens to share their concerns about the health of the Lower Susquehanna River and any other environmental issues in the community.

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## Making Green by Going Green

We've all read the op-ed pieces in the Whig by the former editor who thinks that the environmental movement will kill the American economy. Here is another point of view that appeared on October 15 in the Baltimore Sun from somebody currently in business .

### Time to End the Myth

What's good for the environment can be just as good for a business' bottom line

by Alan Bubes

Business growth and environmental concerns are always at odds, right?

What is good for the environment is bad for business. What is good for business is bad for the environment. In public debate after debate we hear that taking the necessary steps to protect the environment devastates the bottom line.

At least that's what people seem to believe.

Surveys bear this out. An Associated Press/Stanford University poll found that 65 percent of Americans felt that U.S. businesses harmed the environment at least "moderately." Some 44 percent of respondents said they disapproved of the way businesses handled issues involving the environment. Only 7 percent said business helped the environment "a lot" or "greatly;" 62 percent characterized this support as little to none.

It is time to change those perceptions.

Doing right by the environment can be a sound business strategy. Every business executive I know wants to reduce energy and water usage costs so those dollars can be used to grow the business. From a personal perspective, every business executive out there wants a clean, safe community in which to raise a family.

Local businesses recognize they are the economic engine that provides our employment base. They have a vested interest in environmental stewardship because they want to attract talented workers. They can only accomplish this if they do their part for the environment where they work and live.

Many businesses have long realized this and put it into practice. For example, the textile rental industry, in which I work, has reduced solid waste for years. We rent cloth napkins and towels and other reusable textiles and then provide the commercial laundry service. Our textiles are long-lasting alternatives to disposable products that quickly end up in landfills.

Because we do so much laundry for so many businesses, we provide huge economies of scale in the use of water, electricity, and detergent.

In addition, we are reducing strain on the environment by using more efficient plant equipment. We have documented our improvements. This year, we completed the first decade of the Laundry Environmental Stewardship Program (LaundryESP). It is a partnership between the Textile Rental Services Association, our national trade group, and the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Our industry committed to 10 percent reductions in the amount of water and energy needed to clean a pound of laundry. During the intervening 10 years, we achieved 28 percent and 14 percent drops, respectively. We decreased our wastewater pollutant volume to sewers by 43 percent and reduced greenhouse gas emissions 15 percent. And we increased our use of environmentally friendly wash chemicals, such as peroxide bleach (a substitute for chlorine), by 45 percent.

Taking those steps made business sense — we cut operating costs and were able to invest those monies in new opportunities to increase competitiveness.

In undertaking this exercise, more businesses need to publicize their achievements and lead by example. Not to aggrandize the industry, but to apply best environmental practices which the public can often also adopt.

As I have seen in my business and as many consumers have learned, “going green” does not come easy. But in the long run, it saves the planet and your money. ■

*Alan Bubes is chief executive officer of Baltimore-based Linens of the Week. His e-mail is a\_bubes@linensoftheweek.com.*

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## **Wetland Buffers in the New Comprehensive Plan**

The 2010 Comprehensive Plan is now being reviewed by the Planning Commission and the State agencies, prior to a Public Hearing by the Planning Commission expected in January 2010. The Plan contains several recommendations that support our desire to “protect our wetlands, streams, and the health/economy of the Chesapeake Bay”. One of

these proposes to extend the buffers around wetlands in our rural areas to 75 feet from the current 25 feet, which is the State minimum requirement. For a detailed explanation of the rationale for this provision, please see the attached letter from Eileen Butler, a Cecil County citizen and member of the Citizens' Oversight Committee to the Planning Commission. We urge you to support this recommendation. (Next month, we plan to cover another recommendation — Requiring “denitrifying” septic systems within 1000 feet of perennial streams.)

November 9, 2009

TO: Mr. William Mortimer, Chairman, Cecil County Planning Commission  
Members of the Cecil County Planning Commission

FROM: Eileen M. Butler, Member, Cecil County Comprehensive Plan Citizens  
Oversight Committee

SUBJECT: Comments on expansion of wetland buffers outside the growth area

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Planning Commission for permitting me to speak tonight on non-tidal wetland buffers. My name is Eileen Butler and I am a member of the Citizens Oversight Committee.

Wetlands are among the most valuable and complex ecosystems on earth. They provide many functions and values to society, including flood control, groundwater recharge and discharge, water quality improvement, shoreline stabilization, fish and wildlife habitat, recreational and educational opportunities, and aesthetic values. In fact, wetlands have been recognized as ecologically and economically valuable.

The Citizens Oversight Committee voted 18-2 in favor of recommending an increase to non-tidal wetland buffers outside of the growth area from 25 to 75 feet because of the increased pollutant removal such buffers provide. I believe there was only one other vote that leaned so strongly in one direction. Most votes on various issues were much closer.

The width of a wetland buffer is dependent on what you want to protect (water quality, wetland quality, wildlife habitat), and the characteristics of the surrounding land (soil type, slope, depth to groundwater, land use). Hence, there is no best width – rather an average width must be chosen since analyzing each site is impractical.

Wetland buffers protect the water quality of wetlands by preventing the buffer area itself from serving as a source of pollution, as well as by processing pollutants that flow from upland areas. Vegetation and deep permeable soils in the buffer slow down surface flow, allow for infiltration before runoff reaches valuable wetlands, and inhibit the formation of channelized flow, improving removal of sediments and nutrients. The uptake of dissolved heavy metals and large amounts of nutrients by plants has been well documented. Large buffers will be more effective over the long run because buffers can become saturated with sediments and nutrients, gradually reducing their effectiveness and because it is much harder to maintain the long-term integrity of small buffers.

In an assessment of 21 established buffers in two Washington counties, the study found that 76% of the buffers were negatively altered over time. Buffers of less than 50 feet were more susceptible to degradation by human disturbance. In fact, no buffers of 25 feet or less were functioning to reduce disturbance to the adjacent wetland. The buffers greater than 50 feet showed fewer signs of human disturbance.

A considerable amount of research addresses the size of buffers needed to remove sediments, phosphorus, nitrogen, and other pollutants.

Sediments – a number of studies suggest that coarse sediments are likely removed efficiently in the first 66 feet of a buffer and removal of finer particles may require buffers of at least 66 feet. Wider buffers also may be necessary to maintain sediment removal efficiencies over time as buffers become saturated with sediments.

Phosphorus – much of the phosphorus entering a buffer is attached to sediments. Much of the phosphorus may be removed within 30 feet, but phosphorus may be more consistently removed by buffers of 30-100 feet. Buffers can become saturated with phosphorus and generally cannot provide long-term storage of phosphorus.

Nitrogen – studies suggest that a minimum of 50 feet is necessary for effective nitrogen removal, and depending on the soils, 100 feet or more would include more areas of de-nitrification activity and provide more nitrogen removal.

In summary of the studies that have been done to date (of which, I provided a list of ten such studies to the Planning Commission through the assistance of Mr. Wiggins) – the distance of a buffer functioning for sediment and phosphorus control is out to 100 feet, for nitrogen the distance is out to 160 feet, and for wildlife habitat – out to 300 feet and more.

The COC did not focus on the needs of wildlife when discussing buffers. However, again, it has been well documented that buffers provide essential habitat for numerous avian, terrestrial, and wetland-dependent species. For example, birds and certain amphibians have essential life needs that can only be met in the adjacent upland buffer. State rare plant and animal populations depend on wetlands as well.

The State Department of the Environment only requires 25 foot buffers because that was the best that the State could do when the law was being debated in 1989. The State recognizes that activities outside of a wetland can degrade and alter its ability to provide the useful services we value. The Wetlands and Waterways program tried to increase the buffer with the thinking that 300 feet would be sufficient for water quality as well as habitat needs, but the political will was not there. The current 25 foot requirement is not a scientifically established width – but rather, a political result.

Other counties in Maryland have larger buffers than what the State requires. Harford has 75 feet and its law pre-dates the State's law. Baltimore has a 300 foot buffer requirement, according to the State. Calvert has a 50 foot buffer on all wetlands.

Cecil County can be a leader in water quality protection, while protecting its economic interests as well. Recreational opportunities and eco-tourism pour dollars into the local economy (Tourism Industry Impact Study for Cecil County). Wetlands provide the opportunity for birding, fishing, nature photography, and hiking. Buffers can contribute positively to recreation and tourism by improving water quality and by improving the aesthetics of stream corridors, both of which are important for water-based recreational activities.

The COC also recommended a TDR program. One incentive to participate in a TDR program might be to calculate the number of development rights of the sending area using the current 25 foot buffer, if the Commission thought there would be an economic loss to landowners. However, studies have shown that property values do not go down when environmental amenities are present. On the contrary, they can go up. Studies of site designs have been done whereby developers were able to achieve their desired economic return, preserve the sensitive ecological resources on the site, significantly reduce engineering, utility and site preparation costs, all while providing an amenity for homebuyers [community open space including a trail

system] (Conservation Thresholds for Land Use planners, Environmental Law Institute, 2003). In addition, the State has suggested that buffers could be treated as part of environmentally sensitive design as required by the new 2010 stormwater regulations.

The new Chesapeake Bay restoration strategy issued by EPA includes expanded regulation of urban-suburban stormwater runoff. Riparian buffers can eliminate the need for engineered stormwater management systems, which can cost from \$500 to \$10,000 per acre (Palone and Todd 1998). The value of buffers can also be determined by the costs saved in the treatment of drinking water. For many contaminants, including sediment, there is a direct relationship between quantity of pollutant and cost of treatment. (Protecting Stream and River Corridors, Univ. of Georgia, 2000). Further, the State has suggested that buffers may be used as an offset for any TMDL requirements the County may be facing.

To ensure the County's water quality now and in the future, the COC recommended a wider wetland buffer for wetlands outside the growth zone. The COC chose to use science to establish this policy recommendation. Cecil County can be a model county and help lead the way to a cleaner Bay.

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**Watershed Watch**

Dec. 2009

Rupert Rossetti  
(RupertRossetti@aol.com)

There is a lot going on right now that affects our local watersheds:

**Lower Susquehanna River gets State and Federal attention - opportunity for participation on December 9th:**

1. **Lower Susquehanna River - Town Hall Meeting with the Attorney General:** As part of the Attorney General's audit of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, **Attorney General Douglas F. Gansler** will visit the Lower Susquehanna River on Wednesday, **December 9, 2009**. He will spend the day in Port Deposit to hear firsthand from local environmental leaders, residents, elected officials and students about the challenges facing the Lower Susquehanna River and will visit the Conowingo Dam.

Protecting the environment and holding polluters accountable is the Attorney General's top priority. The information gathered during the audits of individual rivers provides valuable information in identifying polluters and problems faced. This information is essential in the Attorney General's efforts to enforce the laws and assists in designing creative solutions to environmental issues.

The visit will conclude with a **Town Hall Meeting at 5:00 p.m.** at the **Donaldson Brown Conference Center**, located at 200 Mount Ararat Farm Road in **Port Deposit**, Maryland 21904. The public is invited to attend the Town Hall meeting. This is an opportunity for citizens to share their concerns about the health of the Lower Susquehanna River and any other environmental issues in the community. **We urge you to attend.**

2. **Conowingo Sediment Task Force has restarted:** The Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has received funding to restart the investigation of management measures that could be undertaken to address the sediment build-up behind the dams on the lower Susquehanna. This funding provides USACE with the ability to scope a full (feasibility) study to investigate the issue of

sediment trapped behind the dams, potential impacts to the Bay if the Conowingo Dam reaches steady state (no longer retaining sediment) and possible solutions. The Corps is seeking a local sponsor willing to sign an agreement and cost-share the study. The last study apparently stalled when Maryland & Pennsylvania could not come up with a cost-share. Better luck this time – we need it!

The Conowingo Dam is both the best BMP (Best Management Practice) we have, and the greatest threat to the Bay. In normal years, the dam traps much of the sediment and phosphorus that comes down stream from New York and Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, major storm events not only bring down a lot more sediment, but scour much of that which is trapped behind the dam. Another catastrophic event like Hurricane Agnes (1972) which brought down 10 million tons and scoured another 20, would smother the crab, fish and oyster habitat all the way to the Bay Bridge and beyond! This is a seemingly intractable problem, which will only get worse by being ignored. **Contact me if you would like a copy of the Minutes from the recent meeting or if you would like to get actively involved.**

**Chesapeake Bay gets State and Federal attention - opportunity for participation on December 8<sup>th</sup> and beyond!:**

3. **Chesapeake Bay Executive Order:** The May 2009 Executive Order declaring the Chesapeake Bay a National Treasure requires Federal Agencies including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of the Interior and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to develop a strategy for restoring the Chesapeake Bay. **The recently released draft strategy is open for public comment until January 8, 2010.** Public feedback is important and valuable to the federal agencies. Comments may be submitted online at <http://executiveorder.chesapeakebay.net> by clicking on “provide comments.” The draft strategy, also available on the website, will evolve through public comments, state consultations and agency revisions before the final strategy is published in May 2010.
4. **Baywide TMDL:** Concurrently, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has challenged the Bay States to meet their obligations under the Chesapeake Bay Agreement, and is implementing plans to establish a Baywide TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load). You can think of a TMDL as a bit like a diet – it tells us how much of what sort of pollutants we are allowed to put into a particular water body, and the limits are typically less than what we are already doing – hence the diet. In this case, the EPA will establish a diet for each of the 92 segments into which they have subdivided the Bay (there are 52 such segments in Maryland) and these will eventually translate into diets for each of the inland drainage basins (watersheds) which feed those segments – going all the way up to the headwaters in New York. Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) will work with the EPA to assign the diet by county and watershed segment, and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources will be putting together the various “Watershed Implementation Plans”. For more information about this, take a look at the most recent Sassafras River Association Newsletter - the back page is devoted to the “pollution diet” [www.sassafrasriver.org/whatwedo/2009\\_11\\_sassafrasupdate.pdf](http://www.sassafrasriver.org/whatwedo/2009_11_sassafrasupdate.pdf).

**If you would like to get involved in this work, your best bet would be to join a local watershed organization or one of the two Tributary Teams that cover Cecil County. Contact me for further details.**

**Want to learn more?** The EPA is holding public meetings in the watershed States and the District of Columbia to provide information on the process, approach, and implications of the Chesapeake Bay TMDL. Two meetings are scheduled to take place in Maryland at the following locations:

- **Tuesday, December 8, 2009 - 2:30-4:30 PM** - Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) - in the Aeris/Aqua/Terra Conference Rooms on the 1st floor at **1800 Washington Boulevard, Baltimore, Maryland 21230**
- **Tuesday, December 8, 2009 - 2:30-4:30 PM – concurrent webinar** for those unable to attend in person. Access to the audio presentations and slide shows will be provided via computer, as well as on-line participation in the Q&A session. Space is limited. Reserve your Webinar seat now at: <https://www2.gotomeeting.com/register/568237411>. After registering you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the Webinar.
- **Friday, December 11, 2009 - 1:30-3:30 PM** - Chesapeake College, Todd Performing Arts Center, US Route 50 and Maryland Route 213 in historic Wye Mills, Maryland 21679

### **Local Plans and Ordinances**

#### **5. Comprehensive Plan recommendations – Wetland Buffers**

The Draft 2010 Comprehensive Plan contains several recommendations that are intended to better protect our water quality, in the ground, on the surface and in the Bay. A letter from Eileen Butler, a Cecil County citizen and member of the Citizens’ Oversight Committee to the Planning Commission in the main body of this newsletter explains the rationale for this provision. We urge you to support this recommendation at the Planning Commission Public Hearing to be held early in the New Year (Tentative date: Wed 13<sup>th</sup> January).

#### **6. Stormwater Management Ordinance rewrite**

The Stormwater Management Act (2007) is moving slowly through the regulatory process, and is now in the hands of the local jurisdictions, who are charged with updating their local ordinances to meet the new requirements. This is a huge change in the way both new developments and redevelopments will have to handle Stormwater, both during construction and throughout the life of the development. In brief, the developer must employ “Environmental Site Design to the Maximum Extent Practicable” (or “ESD to the MEP” for short) and only resort to conventional practices such as Stormwater management ponds when all ESD options have been exhausted. More on this next month!

### **Local Watershed Activities**

- 7. Kudos to the Sassafras River Association for completing their Sassafras Watershed Action Plan (SWAP).** The goal of the SWAP was to develop, by December 1, 2009, a scientifically robust action plan for the watershed which will include a prioritized list of restoration projects, cost estimates and funding opportunities that will have a clear and demonstrable effect on water quality in the Sassafras River. You can find out more by following this link: [www.sassafrasriver.org/swap/](http://www.sassafrasriver.org/swap/)

## Rail Proposal: Pro and Con

CLUA has been supporting the extension of MARC service to Elkton and Newark. A more comprehensive proposal for rail transit in Cecil County has been proposed by two CLUA Board members, who are seeking the CLUA Board's endorsement of it and help in presenting it to the governor and other officials. The Board will decide on this at its next meeting on Dec. 16. If you have comments or wish to express an opinion, e-mail Nancy Valentine at [nmv@theworld.com](mailto:nmv@theworld.com) (please keep messages short) prior to the 16th.

Below are two articles, pro and con, expressing different views of the proposal, as well as a response to the "con" article.

### Commuter Rail Service in Cecil County

Ed Cairns & Vernon Duckett

The CLUA board previously supported extending commuter rail service between Perryville and Newark — an initiative being led by Del. David Rudolph. The only service available now is in Perryville where ridership significantly (130%) exceeds capacity. Most of the towns along the AMTRAK line would benefit from this service and Elkton particularly has expressed a strong desire for it. Delegate Rudolph has organized a large contingent of public officials from neighboring Counties as well as from Cecil County to promote rail transit and efforts are underway by them to get some form of stopgap service for the imminent BRAC expansion in Aberdeen. (See the September and October CLUA Newsletters at [http://cecillanduse.org/clua\\_docs.html](http://cecillanduse.org/clua_docs.html).)

The Board is being asked to support a companion initiative to provide in-county commuter rail transit along existing rail lines in the Cecil County growth corridor. This initiative is being led by two CLUA Board Members, Vernon Duckett & Ed Cairns. They are organizing a "coalition of influential parties" to visit Governor O'Malley to add persuasion for funding of rail transit in Cecil County and would like CLUA to "sign on". Getting in-county rail transit service will require public expense to expand the rail line capacity and rebuild stations along the line, but these costs are small compared to the proposal to build more roads. For example: a western Elkton ring road and more lanes on I-95 as proposed in the draft 2030 Comprehensive Plan.

Some advantages for rail transit are:

- 1) Promotes residential and commercial growth mostly in the growth corridor which minimizes County expense to provide schools, roads, and services.
- 2) Reduces vehicular traffic on roads which decreases pollution, is more energy efficient, and lowers demand for road expansion.
- 3) Encourages higher density mixed use communities along the rail line which provides lower income housing, gives senior citizens better opportunities, reduces urban sprawl, and provides opportunity for efficient neighborhoods.

4) Provides alternatives for those unable to drive.

Possible disadvantages are:

- 1) Turns Cecil into a more attractive bedroom community, increasing our population without paying for cost of services.
- 2) Attracts people who want to "live in the country", increasing development pressure on our rural areas but this can be managed by controlling public water and sewer location, restrictive zoning, and a workable TDR program.
- 3) Will require public expense for track improvements to avoid conflicts with AMTRAK and freight rail traffic.

The Board is currently deliberating this issue and would welcome your input.

### **Latest Rail Plan Not Right for CLUA**

George Kaplan

Vernon and Ed's proposal for rail transit in Cecil County is imaginative and far-reaching, something that is usually lacking in county planning. It presents an intriguing vision for how the county growth corridor might be built around public transportation. Vernon has had a distinguished career as an architect, and Ed has been involved with transportation issues and WILMAPCO for many years, so their ideas are always worth serious consideration and discussion. I respect them both.

Unfortunately, my conclusion is that their plan should not be endorsed by CLUA, for the reasons I explain below. We should not seek a meeting with the governor to discuss it.

It is important to realize that Vernon and Ed's plan goes far beyond what is on the table now for extension of MARC service to Elkton and Newark. As Ed's piece notes, CLUA has already endorsed the MARC extension, and has actively supported it. Del. Rudolph gave us an update on that plan at the CLUA general meeting in November. It will be a long haul, and there is no money identified for it. Substantial funds would be needed to add a third track between Perryville and North East, to reconstruct the station in Elkton to modern standards, and to buy more locomotives and rail cars for the expanded service. The financial constraints were reiterated in a letter from the state Secretary of Transportation, Beverly Swaim-Staley, to CLUA president Julia Belknap in November. Nothing beyond an engineering study (still unfunded), and getting Amtrak to honor MARC tickets, is on the horizon.

I think supporting the MARC extension is the right thing to do, but Vernon and Ed's plan is much more ambitious. It proposes five additional rail stations in the county — a reconstructed Elkton station plus four new ones, with the idea of creating a *local* (intra-county) rail transit service. The total estimated construction cost is \$150 million. This kind of local public transportation is not what MARC does; MARC is all about moving people rapidly to and from major employment centers. For this reason, MARC stations are generally well

separated — for example, there are only three MARC stations between Perryville and Baltimore. So we would end up having three levels of daytime passenger rail service in Cecil County: intercity high-speed trains (Amtrak); commuter rail (MARC); and local transit (operating authority unspecified). All of this on just three tracks. Is this practical and safe?

The motivating concept is that this kind of local rail transit will enhance the attractiveness of the growth corridor and promote transit oriented development near the stations. But the plan, to be successful, would probably require an urbanized growth corridor with densities far higher than what most of us want anywhere in Cecil County. Remember that CLUA's vision is about "preserving our Eastern Shore rural way of life." The new Comprehensive Plan envisions a 50% increase in population by 2030. If 80% of the new residences are in the growth corridor, that will add 40,000 people there. That sounds like a lot, but if you do the math, it amounts, on average, to only about one new housing unit per acre in that area. I seriously doubt that such a low housing density can make for economically viable local rail transportation, and apparently most urban planning estimates concur. Half the potential customers are in place already, and there is very little demand for any type of local public transportation.

Equally important, it is unrealistic to think that such an expensive transportation project would be funded long before there is any hint of demand for it. The letter from the Secretary of Transportation emphasizes that the budgets are very tight and are mostly now devoted to maintaining what infrastructure we have. It is not a simple "roads vs. rails" issue — there are several other rail proposals in Maryland that have been in the queue for years and have demonstrated demand. So I fear that we would appear to be very naïve about the political realities if we seek high level meetings to talk about a project that will not, quite frankly, generate any support at the state level.

I certainly hope that more CLUA members do some creative thinking, as Vernon and Ed have, about the future that we want for the county and what we need to do to bring it about. Proposals like this stimulate debate and we certainly need more thinking "out of the box". But I do not believe that this proposal deserves our support. I think that what CLUA should instead be focusing on are the more immediate issues — zoning, ag preservation, water resources, critical area protection, and the structure of government — that will determine growth patterns and the quality of life in the county over the next decade. We citizens need to get control of these mundane nuts-and-bolts policies before more of the county's agricultural lands, forests, and shorelines disappear to development.

## **Response**

Vernon Duckett

The bottom line of George's two pages of rhetoric states the grass root objective of CLUA. Quote: "We citizens need to get control of these nuts-and-bolts policies before more of the county's agriculture lands, forests and shorelines disappear to development."

We have to start with the inevitable, which is growth.

1. It is impossible to stop or limit growth and no one can predict reliable extent of growth.
2. It is possible to control growth by planning methods.
3. The plan must concentrate growth in a specific location to prevent agriculture lands, forests and shorelines from disappearing to development.
4. That specific location needs to be more attractive to home buyers than the rural areas.
5. The houses built during the housing boom in the 1920's were virtually all 3 bed room houses within walking distance to a trolley. Also they were more or less the same.
6. The houses built during the recent housing boom in Cecil County were mostly 3 bed room houses with auto transit only.
7. Improving the quality of 3 bed room houses, making walking a pleasant experience, biking through high density developments without crossing streets to schools, shopping and rail station and reducing the price by competitive bidding and repetitive construction will appeal more to most home buyers than houses in rural areas that cost more and often become a mortgage risk.
8. The only place that the above 2 to 7 items can be realized is the Amtrak rail corridor.
9. Since no one can reliably predict the extent of growth in Cecil County the plan must be flexible.
10. The new station planned for Elkton can happen now. It will generate economic development but will not contribute much to growth.
11. A new station at North East can happen now. The rail line at North East already exists. It will generate economic development but will not contribute much to growth.
12. A new station at Charlestown will create substantial growth but the Marc rail line will have to be extended before the station can be built.
13. A new station at Bainbridge will create substantial growth but the current plan relies on auto transit only and will have to be changed to accommodate rail transit. There is an existing rail line from Port Deposit to Perryville which can have electric traction for for an estimated \$3 million.
14. The proposed development at Granite Cliff will create substantial and is on the existing rail line from Port Deposit to Perryville. The station can have access to the top of the cliff by cable car.
15. Florida is having a major problem with its expanding population of older people who can no longer drive and only have auto transit. Cecil County has the same problem which will soon be as acute as in Florida. The proposed new stations on the extended Marc line will solve that problem providing there is a one stop shopping center on the rail line.
16. The concentration of growth in the Amtrak corridor will reduce traffic on county roads and eliminate the need for the proposed expansion of route I-95. County roads will not need to be widened which will keep taxes from increasing.

In order for the newsletter to have sufficient readers it should be printed in the Whig as a paid advertisement. We should all chip in for the cost.

VERNON

**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](mailto: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](mailto: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>*

**President, Julia Belknap**

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