

# What is “PlanMaryland”?

Now that a revised draft of the PlanMaryland objectives and processes is available, it’s a good time to see what this is all about. The revised plan addresses most of the objections raised by local officials. Probably the most telling comment was Governor O’Malley’s position expressed at an August meeting with local government officials: “... nothing in the language of PlanMaryland stops communities from embracing sprawl. In fact, the governor argued, local officials reserve the right to make as many ‘stupid land-use decisions’ as they want --- they just shouldn’t expect the state to pay for them.” *reported by Eric Jaffe on [www.infrastructurist.com/2011/08/30/maryland-delays-anti-sprawl-plan](http://www.infrastructurist.com/2011/08/30/maryland-delays-anti-sprawl-plan)*

Here’s the brief view of PlanMaryland from the plan introduction.

## What PlanMaryland Is

It’s a plan to:

- Improve the way in which state agencies and local governments work together to accomplish common goals and objectives for growth, development and preservation.
- Help accommodate a projected 1 million additional residents, 500,000 new households and 600,000 new jobs by the year 2035 without sacrificing our agricultural and natural resources.
- Stimulate economic development and revitalization in towns, cities and other existing communities that have facilities to support growth.
- Save 300,000+ acres of farmland and forest over the next 25 years.
- Save Maryland an estimated \$1.5 billion a year in infrastructure costs during the next 20 years through a smart-growth approach to land use.
- Address the rapid pace of land consumption, which since 1970 has escalated at double the rate of

## What PlanMaryland Is Not

It’s not a:

- Substitute for local comprehensive plans nor will it take away local planning and zoning authority.
- Top-down approach to force compliance with a statewide land-use plan.
- Silver bullet that will solve all of our problems, but it is a strategic plan to address issues such as community disinvestment, sprawl development and inefficient use of existing resources.
- “One size fits all” approach. PlanMaryland recognizes that different areas of the state have different characteristics, problems, issues and opportunities.
- Mandate to spend more. On the contrary, if PlanMaryland helps local governments implement their existing comprehensive plans, it will save money by avoiding expenditures for unnecessary infrastructure and other costs.
- Conclusion. It’s the beginning of a collaborative process between the State and local governments to address critical issues of environmental and fiscal

If this piques your interest because of your concern for Cecil County’s future, take a look at the introduction below. And for further understanding consider downloading the larger document and see for yourself how Maryland is trying to balance growth and preservation in the state. [www.planmaryland.org](http://www.planmaryland.org) And send along your comments as CLUA develops our input to the current draft review.

Nancy Valentine

## Chapter 1: Introduction *(to Plan Maryland revised Draft)*

Nearly four decades ago, the General Assembly passed a law calling for the creation of a State Development Plan for Maryland. The Land Use Act of 1974 directed the Department of Planning to “prepare the Plan to promote the general welfare and prosperity of the people of the State through coordinated development of the State.” It prescribed a broad framework for what the plan should include -- “studies of governmental, economic, physical and social conditions and trends” – and how the Department should undertake the process.

Maryland is not large (42nd in land area in the U.S.), but it is populous (19th most) and densely populated (5th most). It is also very diverse demographically and ecologically, from the Atlantic shore to the 3,360-foot summit of Backbone Mountain. Shipbuilders and bio-medical researchers, watermen and rocket engineers have been drawn to its bountiful resources; writers, filmmakers and other artists have been inspired by the personality of its people and its enduring beauty. The economic, social and cultural vitality of Maryland is intertwined with her natural assets.

Concern for the impact of development on the state’s quality of life and environment long predated the 1970s law. Much earlier, the Maryland Planning Commission, one of the first such bodies in the nation, expressed concern about “miserable ‘string-town’ trends that are the result of lack of control. Up to 1900, we find a solid, slow growth within city limits, then a veritable explosion of population as the automobile brought decentralization and the urge to move to the country. Only the ‘country’ in this case has been a sad disillusionment for many.”<sup>1</sup>

That was written in 1938 by the group as chaired by Abel Wolman, a brilliant engineer and inventor known as the father of modern sanitary engineering. In the decades that followed, Maryland has had many nationally recognized smart growth successes at the State and local levels, from gains in bay restoration to agricultural preservation to neighborhood revitalization. But despite the foresight demonstrated by Wolman and many others since, symptoms of the problem of sprawling land use have continued. Since the 1974 Land Use Act was passed, more forest and farmland have been developed in Maryland than during the prior 350 years. Moreover, the pace of land consumption has ballooned at twice the rate of housing growth since then. It has also grown at three times the rate of population increase. The need for a state plan, and for a course change, is overdue. More than 1.6 million acres, or 27 percent of the total land in Maryland, has already been developed. That is more than double the 654,000-acre total in 1973, which comprised nearly 11 percent of total land at the time.<sup>2</sup> The number of developed acres per person (for homes, work space, restaurants, retailers, schools, hospitals, houses of worship, etc.) has increased

84-percent since 1973, from 0.16 acres of developed land per person to .29 acres in 2010. Put another way, picture a football field. In 1973, every man, woman and child in Maryland each had the developed equivalent of about 15 yards on that field. Today, each Marylander's living "space" runs to about the 27-yard-line. The State is going to grow by 1 million people by 2035, but we can’t make the field any bigger. People have asked, “Why does this matter now? What’s the rush?” But we’ve waited too long already. We need greater support and incentives to encourage smart growth and to discourage sprawl. Each acre consumed for development never returns to its previous state. The tide of development keeps churning outward, weakening communities at the core and natural resources at the edge. That it has taken 37 years to get from the law that called for a plan to the actual creation of a plan is a good measure of all the pressures allied not to do this, to put this off “for another day.” There are no quick fixes, but the consequences do not become evident quickly either. The challenge remains hard to grasp, and the will to address it hard to come by. Consequences play out on much longer spans than four-year election cycles.

At Governor Martin O'Malley's direction, the Department of Planning set out three years ago to create a State Development Plan by addressing one of the first "instructions" of the 1974 law -- to seek comments from and consult with the "local governments of the areas that are affected by the Plan and regional planning commissions ... educational institutions ... research organizations ... civic groups ... and interested persons." Three rounds of "listening sessions" over three years attracted 1,500 people to 30 locations around the state. An additional 1,500 people discussed the concept and the draft plan at dozens of smaller meetings. Thousands more followed the plan online at Plan.Maryland.gov and via the 21st Century tools of social media. (The legislature of 1974 might not have envisioned Twitter and Facebook but knew a need for a plan when it saw it.) Thirty-seven years later, what follows is a blueprint for a collaborative process between the State and local governments, the development and environmental communities, the Sustainable Growth Commission and other stakeholders to address critical issues of environmental and fiscal sustainability. While Maryland has smart growth efforts across many agencies, it has never had a game plan for linking these programs in a strategic way. PlanMaryland will improve the State's coordination on smart growth with citizens, the environmental and development communities and local governments. It does not substitute for local government plans or local zoning.

We intend no inference that the plan is a message from the state that it "knows all" and needs to "correct" local governments. To the contrary, the document is actually a striking acknowledgment from government -- from any level of government -- that its various agencies have sometimes worked at cross purposes and haven't been as effective as they could in trying to fulfill the shared goal of smarter growth. PlanMaryland, we believe, is what the public says it wants and deserves in government; that is, leadership willing to take a critical self-assessment and examine ways to work better, more effectively and more efficiently. There's a growing recognition of the need to take agencies out of their "silos" to focus on a common goal of making existing communities stronger, healthier, cleaner and safer. Goals for planning, development, conservation and sustainable quality of life are interdependent. Independent initiatives by the State or local governments won't achieve the goals. Rural resource lands, for example, haven't been sufficiently protected through the State's preservation programs without local zoning and related tools limiting adjacent development. Greenhouse gas emissions can't be effectively controlled by agencies charged with protecting the environment if a majority of the workforce can reach their jobs only by driving automobiles from homes so widely dispersed that they cannot be served by public transportation

PlanMaryland embodies these core principles: that government should consider the long-term consequences of its decisions; that the public approach to fiscal, environmental and energy policy should be sustainable; that today's leaders should not "kick the can" of difficult problems down the road to the next generation; that State agencies and local governments should work together to accomplish common goals and objectives for growth, development and preservation. PlanMaryland seeks to make more efficient use of investment the public has already made in existing communities. A smart growth approach could save \$1.5 billion a year in spending on roads, schools and other infrastructure.<sup>3</sup> The Priority Funding Areas established in 1997 sought to curtail sprawl, but two-thirds of acres developed for residences have occurred outside the PFAs since that time. The inexorable march of residential sprawl is an insatiable cycle: subdivisions spread farther out, requiring new services, creating lengthier commutes, driving up the cost of government and the cost of land, and pushing another ring of subdivisions farther out. Toward the center of those outward ripples you'll likely find community disinvestment and inefficient use of existing resources.

PlanMaryland aims to improve a process of stimulating economic development and revitalization in towns, cities and other existing communities that have facilities to support growth. One goal is to make it more conducive for people to be nearer jobs. Another is to save 300,000 acres of farmland and forest projected to be lost over the next 25 years. Yet another is to promote more walkable communities where families can be less reliant on their cars to work, shop and play. Growth patterns that have rested on decades of much cheaper gasoline will have to change to reflect new realities. (While "quality of life" is

very subjective, we don't believe that sitting in traffic for hours ranks as a positive for most workers, and the average miles traveled per Marylander was up 14 percent from 1996 to 2008 alone.) We must significantly improve our ability to minimize damaging impacts to land and water resources and maximize social, economic, and environmental benefits for Maryland's citizens, while accommodating population growth and economic development. PlanMaryland has three main objectives to do that:

- Concentrate development and redevelopment in towns, cities and rural centers where there is existing and planned infrastructure.
- Preserve and protect environmentally sensitive and rural lands and resources from the impacts of development.
- Ensure that a desirable quality of life in Maryland's communities is sustainable.

PlanMaryland is a framework to accomplish these goals in two steps: First, working with local governments to identify the areas for growth and preservation. And second, coordinating and aligning state programs to support mutual local and state goals. The six chapters of the Plan describe the current challenges, outcomes to accomplish and a process of where and how to achieve them. The Plan also includes a set of appendices that further document the approach and conclusions within each chapter. A separate set of "elements" articulate details on how the Plan is implemented.

PlanMaryland is not a substitute for local comprehensive plans. It will not remove local planning and zoning authority. It is a policy plan that works within existing statutory authority and does not create new laws or regulations. PlanMaryland does not supplant existing laws and regulations that State agencies must follow. Through the implementation of PlanMaryland, if State agencies identify the need to amend laws or regulations to more effectively achieve the desired public outcomes, those laws and regulations will be subject to the legislative process under the General Assembly. The Plan serves as a management and planning tool to improve the efficient use of State resources and better coordinate those resources with local government resources and decision-making.

We don't believe that sound planning is anathema to individual property rights. Sprawl -- "haphazard growth, especially that resulting from new housing on the outskirts of a city," Noah Webster's book says - isn't the result of an individual action. It's the collective result of numerous similar but distinctly separate actions. A plan that produces better alternatives will provide more choices and less impact. PlanMaryland provides a different choice - and a way to a better future for Maryland.

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<sup>1</sup> "Five Years of State Planning," Maryland State Planning Commission, December 1938

<sup>2</sup> 2011 Land Use/Land Cover Analysis, Maryland Department of Planning

<sup>3</sup> Fiscal Impact Analysis, "Analyzing the Effects of Smart Growth on Projected Road Development in 2030," Ken (Kiman) Choi, Maryland Department of Planning, August 2010