

Cecil County Citizens Land Use Forum Questions and Concerns January 9, 2006

The questions and concerns below have been transcribed from the 3x5 cards distributed and collected during the Cecil Citizens Land Use Forum at the Cecil Community College. Some people have volunteered their names and signed their questions in which case, they are so noted. Most chose not to sign their cards.

The questions are in Roman font and the concerns are in Italics. Sometimes the questions were either rhetorical (not meant to be answered) or simply are unanswerable, so I have listed them in Italic, as concerns rather than questions. Likewise where the issue was framed as a statement rather than a question I have italicized the statement. I have tried to transcribe these as accurately as possible to the best of my ability. A few may be somewhat scrambled due to handwriting issues. I have grouped them and titled them to make it easier to reference the questions and concerns. They are presented in alphabetical order except for the very first group of questions related to the process itself.

So in order of presentation, I offer the following topics and their related concerns:

*Land Use Forum Process
Bonus Density
Comprehensive Plan
County Commissioners
Definitions
Downzoning
Farmer's Concern
Growth
Growth Corridor
Housing
Impact Fees
Jobs and Opportunity
Open Space
Planning and Zoning Commission
Resources
Roads and Traffic
Schools
Taxes
Transit
Visual Heritage
Zoning*

Land Use Forum Process:

What was the cost to local governments for your services? Jim Black / Charlestown MD

Are the presentations going to be available on-line? Paper copy?

Would it be possible to have the PowerPoint lecture material available on the website for later referral by browser or download? Robert Moreland / Elkton MD

Is there a resource (online) to view in map format the current/pending proposed development within Cecil County which includes data on density/residential unit amounts/ commercial development/ industrial development?

Is Eastern Shore Land Conservancy putting extra effort into preserving Cecil County land?

Q. for Joel : What type of legal status do these development plans have? Are developers required to follow it, or can it be over-ridden by political officials?
Annette Bickel

What comparisons are being made with Cecil County (where we have major highways) and the five counties beyond us going south? We have been a county “behind” in many ways, so some of the comparisons in economic and people growth can seem to me out of sync with proposals made, and proposed as well.
Rachael Davis

I would like to see a show of hands – How many people have been resident of Cecil County for 20, 15, 10, or five years?

Bonus Density:

Why is CC granting bonus density in rural legacy areas?

Many planners and development advisors recommend various sorts of cluster development yet Eileen McLellan advises they are not good for rural areas. Why? Harley Williams

Why do we reward developers with higher bonus density in our agricultural areas? Shouldn't we be giving these kinds of incentives for building in the growth corridor?

Current bonus density and special exceptions to ordinances seems mostly a loophole for developers to exploit. There should be simple, fixed definitions of the allowable density and strict definitions of allowable uses for any zoning classification

Comprehensive Plan:

Is the complete up to date county Comprehensive Plan on the county government website (or any website)? If so, where?

How do we ensure that our treasured rural regions remain according to the Comprehensive Plan? What “teeth” can prevent unreasonable deviance (special permission) from occurring during the TAC/Planning Commission process?!

I thought Cecil County had a development plan that directed development to specific areas but development appears to be completely uncontrolled. For example – Aston Pointe!

What is the County’s plan to provide the necessary infrastructure to meet the needs of growth? Don Craig / Rising Sun

In the Cecil County Planning Process, it seems the only document taken into consideration is the zoning regulations. According to Maryland law, how does the County comprehensive plan fit into the Planning Commission’s deliberations?

What is the point of having a comprehensive plan, road code and subdivision regulations if the developers are only going to be granted waivers and exceptions?

County Commissioners:

Why is Cecil County pro-development at all costs?

Several small organizations have formed all across Cecil County to try to communicate to our elected officials what we want. We donate, we attend meetings, we write letters. Our officials seem to disregard our desires. What more can we do?

Four years ago I was in this very same room at a Forum discussing the very same issues. Nothing I have seen has changed as far as the County Commissioners (Democrat and Republican) response to uncontrolled growth. It still appears that developers and realtors have a stronger influence than citizens. Even if this is only a perception how do we get them to listen? We still have a chance to do it right!

The Commissioner form of County Government may be too weak to resist the developers...Especially with a volunteer Planning Commission. No one is in charge – the buck doesn’t stop anywhere.

APFO – Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance - what are the holdups in getting this implemented? Why hasn’t this been done already?

What happens when you feel that your commissioners are deliberately ignoring the citizens that voted them into office – preferring to listen only to the developers?

Will the state prioritize Cecil County? Will MALPH prioritize Cecil Co. given the information you just presented?

We have formed groups throughout several communities signed petitions not to build outside the growth area –we fight several months maybe years and still the community loses. Where are our rights? We pay taxes.

Definitions:

Define the difference between neighborhood and development.

What is your definition of sprawl compared to development?

What are the “NAR” and the “SAR”?

Please explain what the growth corridor is. Chris / Colora

Please define “growth area” and give us an example of one.

What type of zoning disrupts conservation and preservation?

What are good examples of planned growth in Maryland?
What are bad examples? Bud Waltz / Rising Sun

What do you mean by base realignment for APG?

Downzoning:

Would changing the NAR/SAR five acres/house to 30 acres per home help or hurt efforts to maintain our quality of life? If so, how much can we influence our commissioners?

Farmers Concerns:

What can be done to protect the small (30-100 acres) farm owner who wants to keep his farm but is slowly being assessed and taxed at higher and higher rates?
George Balog / North East

Pollution is a stated concern. Farms are often blamed for large amounts of Bay pollution. Has consideration been given during the planning stages and enforced during growth for the increased use of chemical fertilizer and chemical run-off for high end and mid range “show” lawns created by current and future county growth?

*If farmers wouldn't sell acreage to developers – wouldn't this solve the problem?
Perhaps we need to help farmers?*

*Farms that are preserved should be taken care of, and not look like a dump.
Practices are supposed to be put in. Neal McCleary*

Choice is of paramount importance to all landowners especially farmers. How are you proposing to protect farmers land use choices? Mary Scheeler

What can residents of Cecil County do to ensure all of our farm land is not developed?

What can be done with the farms that the developers have already set up for many homes? Edward Ellison

Are the farmers within the county looking for support or are they counting on being able to sell their land when they are ready to retire?

How can you have a forum on land use without including farmers – the land owners and competent developers?

What choice do owners of farmland have for their property when developers offer \$ for their property?

Numerous times this evening saving farmland has been stated. What is the basic problem in agriculture?

Growth:

*Which is the chicken? Which is the egg? Development or population growth?
Jim Black*

Do they (developers) actually think? That leaves us to suffer. If we built it they will come? They build and then move on. It's already happened in and around Atlanta GA.

Concern: Sustainable Development.

Growth Corridor:

If the community does not want the land developed and they get together as a group – why then does the land still get developed? Especially out of the growth area?

Along with incentives provided to developers to build in the growth area, shouldn't there be restrictions and detriments to building outside those areas?
Robert Moreland / Elkton MD

Why is there more development outside the growth corridor than within it?

Are there any examples of how we can incentivize developers to build in growth areas and penalize them for developing in rural areas?

Why with current growth areas designated, is more growth occurring outside the growth areas? James Baker / Elkton MD

How can we slow down growth in the growth corridor? Because won't this trickle outward into farmland? Are there restrictions for growth in the growth corridor?

Developers will want to develop in areas that the general public wants to be: Seashores and rural pastoral tracts of land. How do we make the growth corridor a more desirable place to live to relieve pressure on these other areas? Michael Goetz.

If developers like/want less restrictions to promote development in the growth corridor we should drastically tighten restrictions in other areas.

What can we do to redirect our growth of development now?

Route 40 and I-95 are major reasons for population growth in Cecil –versus the rest of the Eastern Shore Counties – shouldn't we compare apples to apples – once? Mary Scheeler

I have been told in official venues (mun. council meetings) that MD state government has already designated the I-95 corridor in Cecil County as "the State's highest priority residential development tract". Is this true? Is it too late?
Jim Black

Housing:

How do you answer the rising cost to rent a decent place to live in Cecil County? Poor are using more of their income to pay rent. What is your answer to least cost?

Impact Fees:

Impact fees? Why not? What is holding these up? Pressure from Developers, Realtors etc?

Why doesn't Cecil County have an impact fee per each new house when most MD counties have enacted a fee?

Jobs /Opportunity:

Over what time period are the 10,000 jobs for Aberdeen Proving Ground to take place?

There's 3% growth for jobs in CC – What type of jobs are they? White collar, Warehousing, manufacturing? What type of pay scale? Robert Fritz / Port Deposit MD

How can we best capitalize economically on the opportunity to foster "rural industry" such as equine, tourism, farming etc... to avoid ending up looking like New Castle County?

Can economic progress at the same rate under either "smart growth" or "poor growth"? Does "smart growth" stunt the economy?

Open Space:

How do we manage to classify streets, gutters, settlement ponds etc. as "open space"? Shouldn't open space be a place where our children can safely play?

What about Open Space programs for all residents. Plan to expand old roads?

As population increases and open space declines preservation of parkland becomes more vital than ever. How can this fit with the required growth in housing to support a growing population?

Parkland should be maintained for its primary purpose: recreation, open space and wildlife preservation and unfettered access to those that paid for it: private citizens. None of these goals or purposes should be compromised for the purposes of economic development. What will Cecil County be doing to maintain parkland for future generations without resorting to privatization? Michael Goetz

Preservation money is too little – Neal S. McCleary

Cecil Co. Population – 92,000

Baltimore Co. Population 920,000

In Northern Baltimore Co. there is currently more contiguous open space than currently in Cecil County. Large areas in Northern Baltimore County just downzoned from 1 in 50 to 1 in 80 acres.

Planning and Zoning Commission:

Why do we (P&Z Comm) and County Commissioners make development decisions without regard to the future? Each decision seems limited to the immediate situation and the facts at hand – but no care for our children.

So you're saying we need to make development difficult in areas we don't want developed but our county officials vote "yes" or "no" to these rules and more

often bend and break their own rules that currently exist. Again, what can we do? Can we recall certain commissioners or rally to fire Planning Commission members?

It's not unusual for Cecil C. planning commission/commissioners to review between 15-20 developments per month! How long did this process take to implement and enforce in Talbot County?

There should be a minimum specified time period for the details of any proposed changes to County Plans or Ordinances to be reviewed by the Office of Planning and Zoning, and examined by the public. Currently, at least for amendments to the master Sewer and Water Plan, this is not the case. Details for MS&WP do not have to be available prior to the hearing before the Planning Commission either for OPZ staff or public review. cursory review by OPZ the night of a Planning Commission hearing is inappropriate and a disservice to County residents.

The Planning board often says it must rule for a project because they have to follow the rules, not public sentiment. How are rules established and how can they be changed to let public sentiment play a role?

The zoning regs cannot prevent over-development because they focus on individual properties and not the big picture. So that's how the Planning Commission works. Nobody has regulatory oversight over the "big picture" as defined in the Comprehensive Plan.

Should there be a residency requirement to serve on the Planning and Zoning Commission?

I feel it would be in the best interests of Cecil County to have all land use decisions and policy makers be residents of the county. One example is the position of Director of the Office of Planning and Zoning currently filled by a Delaware resident.

The Planning and Zoning Commission appears to represent developer's interests. Why don't we make them accountable to the citizens and elect them?

Cecil County Planning Commission members are appointed by the Commissioners in closed door meetings. Political appointments. No limits are placed on proposals heard and reviewed by P/C in one session. A proposal's details are heard and voted on at the hearing. No requirement to submit details to members and the public for review prior to hearing.

Often during the construction of new development there are questions/concerns regarding violations or potential violations of codes or good building practices with regards to protection and conservation of the land and water resources of

Cecil County. i.e. improperly installed or no silt barriers and other protections. How many resources are dedicated to identifying these issues and correcting them? Both through stop work orders, fines, sanctions and county bans for further business within the county?

Plans- Zeitler Road rezoning superfund site allowing 1500 homes. Is this a good plan?

Does County planning have a process for citizen input similar to this process (tonight)/ How do they institutionalize citizen input pro-actively?

Resources:

Water Supply – Is the State concerned? Is the county? I have neighbors in those \$300,000 houses that can't use /access water aquifer. Shouldn't we consider this a fundamental resource for growth?

What will be added to the plan to correct the county landfill problem which will be compounded by additional growth? Despite the odor problem – the life of the landfill should be shortened because of the added intake.

The (7) concerns listed in the brochure! What are the restrictions on wetlands? Why was Perryville allowed to build a Mall in the wetlands? J. Hillyer

Stream fencing water boundaries need 100% cost sharing. Neal S. McCleary

What is the County's plan to provide the necessary infrastructure to meet the needs of growth? Don Craig / Rising Sun

Roads and traffic:

Since the early 1960's in a 5 mile area of my home (Muddy Lane) at least 18 farms no longer exist, yet I have had builders say to me that they will build regardless of what we the people in my area want. It seems we are closing the barn door after the horse has escaped. What can be done now that we have already overcrowded our roads and schools. Muddy Lane has during peak hours 300-400 vehicles per hour.

Are there plans to widen route 40 to three lanes?

Erosion caused by spraying roadside guard rails and killing grass cover. We need police on our roads. Neal S. McCleary

Schools:

At what rate are the schools going to be able to keep pace with growth? Will teacher salaries increase to draw good teachers here?

Where is the County going to place all the new incoming children within the existing schools and districts?

Please comment on the important consideration of our public school system when developing. R. L. Price

How and who are we going to pay for the increased demand on schools in this area? Out of state builders? New residents? Long-time County residents? The same applies for all infrastructure: roads, fire, police, medical, water/sewer etc.

Taxes:

Is development increasing traffic, our taxes, and burden on our schools?

Homeowner tax relief. Please explain. R. L. Price / Colora

How can we continue to allow development of houses that generate about \$2000 in real estate taxes and cost about \$17,000 per year (2 children) in school expense alone, plus other infrastructure costs?

My real estate taxes nearly doubled this year!

Is there a reason why taxpayers are forced to subsidize the oil and gas companies in the form of new interchanges and ramps for I-95? Why can't these tax dollars subsidize affordable light rail commuter service instead? Wouldn't a proposal to build another access ramp for I-95 between North East and Perryville be further incentive to develop? Why should my taxes help increase the value of farmland to a developer?

Transit:

Can you talk about the impact of extending MARC service to Elkton and possibly linking MARC to SEPTA in Cecil?

Visual Heritage:

For those areas slated for housing development, why not require more aesthetically pleasing designs; incorporating more open spaces and sustainable environmentally friendly technology?

Tonight the Chesapeake City town council is voting on annexation in which the developer circumvented the normal review process, wants the property zoned for large tract homes instead of a traditional neighborhood, and waives the town's approval of the design. How do you get your town officials to do what is best for residents not the developers?

Zoning:

Approval or disapproval recommendations by the Office of Planning and Zoning for zoning ordinance or plan changes should not reside solely with the Director of

the Office of Planning and Zoning. They should have a carefully weighed staff review. Decision making by one person, after perhaps only cursory review of such important matters is simply not appropriate and can lead to erroneous interpretations and oversight errors detrimental to the County.