

## **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.*

### **Bonus Density:**

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?

*The granting of Bonus Density has been at the discretion of Planning Commission. In the current ordinance changes being proposed, bonus density is eliminated.*

### **Comprehensive Plan:**

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

*We have established a Director of Capital Projects with a focus on infrastructure.*

### **Specific initiatives with anticipated start dates:**

- **Water:**
  - *Perryville WTP > 18–24 months*
  - *Principio Reservoir > 2011*
  - *Principio Creek > 2010*
  - *Steward & Associates > 18-24 months*
  - *Elkton West WTP > 2009*
  - *Elkton West GW > 2008*
  
- **Waste Water:**
  - *Perryville WWTP > 2008*
  - *NE River TMDL > on going*
  - *Seneca Point WWTP Expansion > 2009*
  - *Rt. 40 Pump Station Expansion > 2006*
  - *Washington Street Pump Station Expansion > 2006*

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?

*The Planning Department and Planning Commission processes do include the rendering of decisions and/or recommendations based on the County's Zoning Ordinance & Subdivision Regulations as well as the Comprehensive Plan.*

**County Commissioners:**

Why is Cecil County pro-development at all costs?

*For me the reality is that Cecil County is a great place to live and offers superior public services and natural resources, therefore many people desire to live in Cecil County. My intent as County Commissioner is not to stop people from living in our great county, but to initiate ordinances and regulations in concert with the County's municipalities and Comprehensive Plans to allow for an orderly managed growth.*

*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!*

*Please see my answer above. Additionally, we are currently proposing changes which I think will help address some of the growth issues we now face. Decreasing densities in the NAR & SAR, providing for Shared Facilities and increased densities in the growth areas, a Transfer of Development Rights Program, a Purchase of Development Rights Program, an Infrastructure Strategic Plan and Director, and partnerships with municipalities and regional groups to establish planning, are and will effect positive change.*

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

*The more we investigate, the more we find that APFO's actually cause many difficulties and unintended undesired effects. The Councils of Government, which includes representatives from the county and towns, have formed a sub-committee to investigate. Without the collaborative efforts and agreements of all local governments an effective APFO is not possible. I am a member of the sub-committee, and we are finalizing a proposed ordinance for review by the entire Councils of Government.*

## **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?

*Foremost, we the citizens elect our commissioners, so be an informed voter. Vote for candidates who reflect your opinions, or become involved in the election process yourself.*

*As for NAR/SAR densities, our Comprehensive Plan has established goals for the Rural Conservation District & Resource Protection Districts:*

- *Maintain the rural character of the County by planning for the preservation of prime agriculture land, open space and forests.*
- *Reduce conflicts between incompatible uses.*
- *Maintain agricultural uses by resisting encroachment of development into the prime agricultural lands, and physically separating other land uses from agricultural activities.*
- *Maintain the equity value of agricultural land.*
- *Strictly control development in sensitive and critical resource areas to protect natural resources.*

*It is my belief without PDR's & TDR's; we have not been able to provide for "Maintaining the equity value of agricultural land." Arbitrary densities also will not accomplish equity for agricultural lands. I have proposed densities of 1 du / 10 acres in the NAR and 1 du / 20 acres in the SAR, and TDR sending of 1/5 acres in the NAR and 1/3 acres in the SAR. I believe these densities will better serve the intent to preserve agricultural land, maintain land equity for the landowners, and establish effective TDR values to better manage growth.*

## **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

*Farm owners of 50 -100 acres can:*

- *Apply for MALPF District – Be approved and receive a 50% tax credit on County Property Tax*
- *Apply for MALPF District and convey easements – Be approved and receive a 75% tax credit on County Property Tax*
- *Apply for County PDR Program – Be approved, convey easements, and receive payment*
- *Apply for Historic District – Be approved and receive 10% County Tax credit on expenses to restore and preserve.*

*Farm owners of less than 50 acres may also be considered for previous programs if contiguous to lands in like programs.*

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

*Please see previous comments.*

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

*Support your local farmer's markets and farm related activities. Additionally, you can support the Commissioner's PDR & TDR programs, and financially supporting preservation groups.*

#### **Growth Corridor:**

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

*Please see previous comments.*

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

*Great question! I believe because of all the previous questions and comments I have made. Some of which include, but are not limited to: the need for infrastructure in the designated growth areas, substantial increase of land values, reduced farming operational profitability, reduced farming occupations, population growth, transportation opportunities, local economic growth, etc.*

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.

#### **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:**

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

**Jobs /Opportunity:**

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:**

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*

**Planning and Zoning Commission:**

It's not unusual for Cecil C. planning commission/commissioners to review between 15-20 developments per month!

*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?

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

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

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?

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.

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

**Schools:**

At what rate are the schools going to be able to keep pace with growth?

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*

**Taxes:**

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

*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?*

**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?*

**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.*