



HCCA

Howard County Citizens Association

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The Voice Of The People of Howard County

CB-26 Howard County General Plan
HCCA testimony before the Howard County Council
June 18, 2012

HCCA commends the Planning Department for organizing this draft around the theme of sustainability and placing more of an emphasis on individual change: if we as a community are to become more sustainable, we must all participate. We also like the appendix that sets up a matrix of actions to be taken and giving an indication of the time frame of when to expect this action to occur. There are many good suggestions and obviously they all can't be acted on all at once. It is helpful to citizens to know how the administration sees its work plan unfolding.

Tonight, we would first like to make a few comments about PlanHoward 2030: Fiscal Impact Analysis.

The plan presents 4 different scenarios. We note that the two plans that model the lower rate of development, one in good and one in not so good economic scenarios have a net positive average income that can be more consistently counted on, as opposed to the model with the higher rate of development that doesn't do well at all in bad economic times. We would support the comprehensive rezoning to model the lower rate of development, not the higher rate of development as a result.

We also note that the fiscal analysis that was done for the general plan only includes costs coming from the capital and operating budgets, but doesn't include the rapidly inflating costs of separate fees that appear on citizens' tax bills such as the cost of water and sewer, trash collection, the fire tax, and the soon to come stormwater fee. For example, citizen's served by Baltimore City water have had rate increases of 9% for each of the last 4 years with no end in sight. The contract for trash removal will come up for renegotiation next year-and is expected to have a substantial increase. The stormwater fee is actually going to pay the cost of prior inaction on the environmental costs of prior development. The recently opened, state of the art ENR facility that processes our waste water in the Patuxent River watershed will meet the growth demand-until 2020. Then we will need to come up with some other idea at some unknown cost to us all to service further growth.

Thus, you might think by just looking at this report that you are looking at rosy numbers for the county with increasing growth, but realize that each citizen is taking a larger hit with increasing development.

The other disappointment that we had was that only economic factors were considered in this report. Although we know the county knows about the state's work with the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI), none of its ideas are incorporated into this report. What is the cost to Howard County when folks have longer commute/travel times, when our air and water are further polluted, or crime increases? What is the cost or gain to us when other economic, environmental and social indicators are taken into account? That is a report that we would like to see at the

same time that we are implementing this General Plan. We would note that in Maryland, in the last 50 years, the economic indicators have gone up substantially, the social indicators barely and the environmental indicators have gone down.

As far as the General Plan goes, two major changes stand out. The introduction of PUD zoning and the changes to the priority funding areas and the concomitant change in APFO. Our primary concern centers on the details of their future implementation. HCCA would be willing to work with the county on such future legislation.

PUD (Planned Unit Development) zoning is being presented for the first time in Howard County. (Pg 143, second paragraph) This kind of zoning can be very subjective and it needs a lot of study and wide spread community input for safeguards if it is to be seriously considered. Basically, PUD zoning give the developer increased density in exchange for greater community enhancements. Frankly, the enhancements that are mentioned in this general plan (affordable housing, open space amenities, pedestrian and bike connections, or environmental restoration) should already be part of what is required. If PUD zoning is to be implemented, important enhancements for the greater community need to be on one side of the equation, because increasing the density will bring an increased cost to the surrounding community.

We would also ask that PUD not be a floating zone, but only be allowed in certain growth areas. This would help ensure stability and predictability in established neighborhoods.

APFO

Pg 72-75 Amount and Phasing of Future Residential Development

On Pg 73 the proposed APFO chart has 1200 units in the growth and revitalization areas. Since they are spread out over the eastern part of the county, we wonder how will the schools be able to predict capacity? Also, what if one developer requested all the units- wouldn't it overwhelm the local school?

We recommend that all of the APFO legislation be reviewed, not just the allocations chart, especially to expand the distance from the development that needs to be looked at to meet the roads test or to place an upper limit on the number of units that can be carried over to the next year. Other criteria such as adequate police and fire coverage and hospitals should also be considered.

PART III, Chapter 7, Transportation, Roads and Highways

Page 90 - The finding that the number of vehicle hours lost in traffic delays will increase by 57% by 2035 is shocking, considering the existing congestion on key arterials. There is no discussion of the relationship of housing allocations to traffic congestion. We request the addition of the following at the end of the last sentence:

[will continue to experience peak period traffic congestion] "unless housing allocations are limited to the amount that can be accommodated on arterials as well as the nearest intersections."

Page 91 - Under "Implementing Actions" at the bottom add the following:

"c. Housing Allocations: Limit residential growth to that which can be accommodated by existing arterials at the D Level of Service or better although not required by state regulations for state roads."

"d. APF Regulations. Amend APF to include the nearest two major intersections, including the nearest state road intersection or interchange, in developers' traffic studies."

PART III, Chapter 7, Transit Services

We applaud the central role given to bus systems in the discussions and implementation proposals (pp. 86-98). Most important, we believe that increasing the frequency of buses from the current 60', to 30' would increase ridership and greatly improve the quality of life for those without cars, as well as helping employers who need staff to arrive on time. (Pp. 93-94).

Bus rapid transit (BRT) would improve public service and increase ridership; this would add to profit and provide more frequent of service.

We believe that there should be seating at all bus stops; often the elderly, those with children, or simply tired people are entitled to the convenience of seating particularly when the service is only once per hour.

Page 95 - We would add the following under Implementing Actions:

b. Complete Streets. [Promote complete streets by amending the Design Manual for road improvements to address bus stops,] "including the need for a transit shelter or other seating at every bus stop," [as well as pedestrian pathways, crossings, and bicycle improvements.]

[new] g. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). Encourage BRT with dedicated roadways or lanes at the earliest opportunity.

Pg 138 Policy 10.1 Protect and enhance existing communities (these issues overlap with Policy 5.4 - Revise the Rt 1 Corridor Revitalization Strategy under Economic Growth) To this section, we would ask that the following be added

- e. Ensure infrastructure so that the product equals the vision. Change development regulations and disallow waivers that enable developers to not put in sidewalks near schools or along major arteries or to not put in doors to commercial buildings that directly access a walkable sidewalk. (perhaps have, or legislate having, commercial buildings with as many doors that access the (front) sidewalk as access the (rear) parking area.)
- f. Prioritize adding county owned land to a land bank to provide for future facilities in designated growth areas
- g. Re-evaluate what is allowed and where they are located in M-2 and M-1 districts in light of their close proximity in certain cases to parkland or to established residential areas to minimize environmental, health and safety risks. (Look at how to deal with increasing residential and commercial use conflicts)

- h. Convene a Rt 1 committee including citizens and businesses to discuss what is working and not working with current Rt 1 zoning.
- i. Ensure that a community amenity/public space is included in every mixed use development (not just for the occupants of that community)

Pg 143 Policy 10.4 Review and update all county development regulations

- a. More flexible zoning-to better address infill and redevelopment goals and issues. This is an important issue to citizens and we would like more information about this section. Whose goals, whose issues? How flexible? How predictable? Will it implement the recommendations made several years ago by the infill task force? Will it start over? HCCA would agree that infill regulations should be reviewed, but we don't agree that flexible zoning is the only response.

Pg 143 Policy 10.4 The discussion on pg 142-3 talk about updating the regulations to support County goals to protect and enhance existing communities, advance redevelopment of designated areas, expand affordable housing, preserve open space, protect the environment and meet other County objectives. Yet Policy 10.4 has only 2 implementing actions-to have more flexible zoning and to streamline the development process. I would ask that others be added, such as:

- c. Review regulations to prevent conflicting requirements (this is confusing to developers and it undermines trust from the public).
- d. Review regulations in order to expand affordable housing, preserve open space, and to protect the environment (Topics for review include redevelopment flexibility and amenity requirements; parking; pedestrian, bicycle and transit improvements; compatibility of infill development; green building; historic preservation; forest conservation; landscaping; open space; and scenic roads.