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## Growth by the book

### State, counties eye coordinated efforts on development guidelines

by Erin Cunningham | Staff Writer, The Gazette

With 1 million more people expected to make Maryland their home in the next 20 years, state planning experts say it's important to start thinking about where they want to concentrate the growth.

To achieve that goal, officials are drafting what they hope will be the state's first comprehensive, written growth plan, known as PlanMaryland.

The objective is to direct growth to areas that already have roads, schools and other infrastructure to support it, said Rich Josephson, director of planning services for the Maryland Department of Planning. Those "priority funding areas" include Baltimore city and inside the Baltimore and Washington beltways.

In the past, without a growth plan, sprawl resulted in Maryland. That put a strain on resources, harmed the environment and resulted in more cars and long commutes on area roadways, Josephson said.

A first draft of PlanMaryland is expected in the fall, said John Coleman, a spokesman for the state Department of Planning.

However, PlanMaryland isn't the state's first attempt at crafting a growth and development plan.

A 1988 report by the then-2020 Commission criticized the "lack of growth management and planning, particularly on a state and regional level." The report included six guidelines for policymakers, including growth in rural areas be directed toward existing population centers and "stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and the land is a universal ethic."

Soon after the report came out, then-Gov. William Donald Schaefer (D) created a commission to identify growth issues that should be addressed at the state level by 2020.

The so-called Barnes Commission, named for former Maryland Congressman Michael D. Barnes, began to develop legislation.

In 1990, the Barnes Commission proposed the state wrest land-use control from its counties. Local governments, as well as the banking industry, developers and farmers, strongly opposed the proposal.

Eventually, the Maryland Economic Growth, Resource Protection and Planning Act of 1992 was passed. It kept most of the decision-making on land-management issues in the control of local governments.

Current efforts build on the Smart Growth initiative that was a highlight of former Gov. Parris N. Glendening's (D) administration.

"We cannot continue — either in Maryland or, in fact, around the world — to develop at this sprawl pattern," Glendening said in a recent phone interview. "If we continue the way we are, you will not recognize much of the beauty that makes Maryland what it is today."

He noted that Maryland seems to be moving in the right direction to prevent further sprawl.

"I would give them two-and-a-half major cheers, and I would save the third cheer for more of a sense of urgency," Glendening said.

He added he was pleased by the current administration's efforts to involve in drafting the plan.

As part of the process, state officials are staging 13 public forums statewide to gather public input on priorities for growth. One such forum took place Wednesday at Anne Arundel Community College in Arnold. Forums also have taken place in Rockville and La Plata.

At the Rockville session, about 40 people offered thoughts on the future of the state. Attendees broke into small groups to discuss what is and is not working and outline future priorities.

Participants focused primarily on broad goals, such as better transportation, less congestion and improving the quality of life in Maryland.

Coleman describes the state's growth plan as a coordinating document to "get everyone on the same page," including county and city officials who authorize building permits and coordinate growth.

However, officials in Dorchester and Queen Anne's County said this month they knew little about the state's effort.

Helen Spinelli, planning director of Queen Anne's County, said the first document she received regarding PlanMaryland was a brochure on March 31.

Spinelli said she'd like a state plan to reflect efforts taking place in jurisdictions statewide and also to coordinate state and county planning — a primary goal of PlanMaryland.

In Garrett County, officials hope PlanMaryland takes smaller, rural districts into consideration as well, said John Nelson, the county's director of planning and land development.

"Plans shouldn't try to compile policies that will address the rapidly growing areas of the urban corridor without recognizing and acknowledging the difference of the rural areas and the rates of growth in the rural areas," said Nelson, who plans to attend a PlanMaryland meeting next month in Frostburg.

Although Garrett County is expected to see a slight decline in population in this year's census, Nelson said that about half of the county's development is in vacation homes, particularly in the Deep Creek area. That development does not count toward the county's population, he said.

Nelson said his goal will be to make sure state planners are aware of what distinguishes Garrett County from the urban corridor.

In Worcester County, officials are aware of PlanMaryland, but do not think it will affect the county because it is not in designated growth areas, spokeswoman Kim Moses said.

Prince George's County Planning Director Fern Piret said traditionally planning has been the responsibility of local jurisdictions, not the state.

"So, we're wary of the state taking a larger role that would conflict with what we do on a local level," she said. "But I don't think what the state's doing is doing that."

The focus in Prince George's County has been on developing walkable, livable and sustainable communities, Piret said — similar to the Smart Growth vision that Glendening describes.

Glendening, who is president of the Smart Growth Leadership Institute, which is part of the Smart Growth America organization that started in response to Maryland's Smart Growth program, said there is no single model of smart growth that works.

However, he cited several successful models in Maryland, including White Flint and Silver Spring in Montgomery County, which contain higher-density, mixed-use communities that are easily walkable.

Rollin Stanley, Montgomery County's planning director who attended the Rockville meeting, called PlanMaryland "something we absolutely have to do."

He stressed the importance of infrastructure.

"Once you have transit infrastructure, people will start using it when they see how convenient it is," Stanley said.

Now, he said, gas prices are relatively low and it is too easy to drive. When gas prices rise again, more people will begin to use transit. Living closer to transit — one of the goals of smart growth — also will encourage more drivers to get off the roads, he said.

Another goal of growth should be higher density, Stanley said.

"Growth is coming, and we need to decide how to put the growth where we can handle it," Coleman said.

As an estimated 1 million people swell Maryland's population of 5.7 million, Josephson said 400,000 new homes and 600,000 new jobs will be needed.

Without a plan to accommodate the new building, sprawl that already exists will become worse, he said.

With the right planning, the amount of new land development during the next 20 years could be reduced by two-thirds, he said.

"We need this plan in Maryland," said Richard Eberhart Hall, the state's secretary of planning.

Josephson said a plan has not been developed before because after the General Assembly authorized such an effort in the 1970s, there was little support from the governor until Gov. Martin O'Malley (D) took office.

Coleman said Glendening supported smart growth, but the idea of creating a written plan never took off until now.

Despite the delay, Josephson said it is "never too late" to begin planning for growth, an idea Stanley echoed.

"I'm really pleased with what [Richard Hall] is doing, and he's doing it at the perfect time," Stanley said. "Energy costs, transportation costs, the economic crunch and budget problems ... we're realizing we have to grow differently."

### **Upcoming public forums to discuss PlanMaryland**

6:30 to 9 p.m. Thursday, May 6, at Salisbury University, Guerrieri University Center, 1101 Camden Ave., Salisbury

6:30 to 9 p.m. Wednesday, May 12, at Chesapeake College, Caroline Student Center, routes 50 and 213, Wye Mills

6:30 to 9 p.m. Wednesday, May 19, at Frostburg State University, The Lyric Building, 20 E. Main St., Frostburg

6:30 to 9 p.m. Wednesday, June 9, at Hood College, Whitaker Campus Center Commons, Room 401, Rosemont Avenue, Frederick

6:30 to 9 p.m. Wednesday, May 26, at Cecil College, Technology/Conference Center, 1 Seahawk Drive, North East

6:30 to 9 p.m. Thursday, June 3, at Bowie State University, location to be announced, 14000 Jericho Road, Bowie

6:30 to 9 p.m. Wednesday, June 16, at Washington College, Hynson Lounge, 300 Washington Ave., Chestertown