Which Future for Charles County?

Smart Growth?

Business as usual?

Presented by Jim Long    April 12, 2014    Bryans Road Fire House
Acknowledgement

SMARTER GROWTH ALLIANCE
FOR CHARLES COUNTY

Visit Our Website:
SaveCharlesCounty.com

1000 Friends of Maryland
AMP Creeks Council*
Audubon Maryland-DC
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Citizens for a Better Charles County
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Coalition for Smarter Growth
Conservancy for Charles County
Maryland Conservation Council
Maryland Native Plant Society
Mason Springs Conservancy
Mattawoman Watershed Society
MD Bass Nation
Nanjemoy Vision, Inc.
Nanjemoy-Potomac Environmental Coalition
Port Tobacco River Conservancy
Potomac River Association
Sierra Club, MD Chapter
Sierra Club, So. MD Group
South Hampton HOA
Southern Maryland Audubon Society
St. Mary's River Watershed Association
Which Future for Charles County?

Business as usual?  
Smart Growth?

Future?  What about right now?

What is “business as usual”?  

What is “business as usual”?
Charles County has...

- **Highest county property-tax rate in the state**
- **Greatest % of students using trailers in the state**
- **Longest average commute time in the state**

MD Dept. Assessments & Taxation

U.S. Census, American Community Survey
Charles County has...

- Second lowest number of jobs per household in the state
- Most forest cut per dwelling unit in the state
- The fastest growth outside areas qualifying for state assistance, in the state

Jobs per household

Acres cut per new dwelling

Source: Maryland Dept. Planning
Charles County has...

One of the worst drops in housing values in the state

Housing price difference
2007-2013

Source: MD Assoc. Realtors

Yet a huge backlog of “grandfathered” units is flooding the market with new subdivisions.
Charles County has...

- Highest county property-tax rate in the state
- Second lowest number of jobs per household in the state
- Most portable classrooms, per child, in the state
- Most forest cut per dwelling unit in the state
- Longest average commute time in the state
- The fastest growth outside areas qualifying for state assistance in the state
- One of the worst drops in housing values in the state

Graphs showing:
- Lowest teacher pay in S. Maryland
- Fastest increase in property tax rate in S. Maryland
Loss of our great outdoors
Loss of our great outdoors

Development harms our waters

Waters officially “impaired” in some way.

Mattawoman Creek
Port Tobacco River
Nanjemoy Creek
Zekiah Swamp
Gilbert Run
Wicomico R

Map compiles results for the index of biological integrity (IBI) determined by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR). IBI scores include fish and bottom-dwelling invertebrates from the Maryland Biological Stream Survey (circles) and bottom dwellers from the StreamWaders program (squares).

Stream-health data included in this document were provided by the Maryland DNR Monitoring and Non-tidal Assessment Division.
Mattawoman Creek

- A recreational centerpiece
- Tens of millions of commerce per year from the largemouth bass fishery
- Bass tournaments alone: a million more $$ per year than Charles County’s agricultural products!

‘til 2005 • “near to ideal conditions”
• “The best, most productive tributary to the Chesapeake Bay.”
Today

“levels of development should be reconsidered in light of declines in the fish community.”

“At a tipping point…”

“the...Development District virtually assures continuing and dramatic deterioration.”
Not only losing, but not preserving the great outdoors

3rd lowest in state for % of land preserved
This is business as usual

Transportation
- Commute time
- Poor prospects for mass transit to Waldorf

Education
- School trailers per child
- Constant school redistricting
- Teacher pay

Jobs
- Jobs per household

Taxes
- Property tax rate
- Growth in areas receiving no state $ 
- Rate of tax increase

Rampant Sprawl development
- Housing value
- Forest cut per unit
- Preserved fraction

Best in Bay
- Increasingly dirty water
- Loss of purifying forest
This is business as usual

Who’s responsible for this mess?!

Transportation
- Commute time
- Poor

Education
- School trailers per child
- Teacher pay

Jobs
- Property tax rate
- Growth in areas receiving no state $

Taxes
- Rate of tax increase
- Housing value
- Forest cut per unit
- Preserved fraction

Best in Bay
- Increasingly dirty water
- Loss of purifying forest

Rampant Sprawl development

Who's responsible for this mess?!
Local government & their land-use decisions!

Board of County Commissioners

2002 5-0 decisions

2006 5-0 decisions

2010 3-2 decisions: finally some improvement
County government determines quality-of-life through land-use decisions.

Elect

Board of County Commissioners

Appoint

Planning Commission

Comprehensive Plan

Quality of life
What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A blueprint for where and how we grow.

Comprehensive Plan  (general blueprint) ➔ Zoning  (implementation)

Dense sprawl in a “development district” 30% larger than D.C.

Sprawl zoning elsewhere
Land-use

The cost of sprawl development
Cost of Sprawl Development

- Servicing spread-out sprawl is inefficient.
- Residential services cost more than landowner’s taxes bring in!
  - Roads
  - Fire, police staff & stations
  - Schools
  - Water & Sewer lines
  - School bussing
  - Bigger government

~2/3 of budget strongly affected by sprawl!
Cost of Sprawl Development (con’t)

• Discourages investment in jobs and rapid transit

• Loss of green space & the great outdoors

• Restoration & health costs: dirty air, dirty water, flooding

• Maintenance costs in perpetuity
If that’s business as usual, what about the future?
One of the fastest growing counties in the state
Which Future for Charles County?

Business as usual?  
OR  
Smart Growth?

County Commissioners, 
we have a problem...
When you’re in a hole, *stop digging*!

How do you stop digging?

Fix the Comprehensive Plan!
Two futures via the Comprehensive Plan

Business as usual?  OR  Smart Growth?
What is Smart Growth?

- Investing in what we have – and in what we want to keep
- Vibrant communities with unique sense of place
- Transportation choices like light-rail to Waldorf
- Housing choices like walkable communities
- Protects the economy, the environment, & rural heritage
Smart growth was within reach!
But was stopped by allies of a developers’ lobby!
Smart growth was within reach!
But stopped by allies of a developers’ lobby!

Public Process! (2011)

Comprehensive Plan

Elect

Board of County Commissioners

Smarter growth plan!

Comp Plan worse than business as usual

Tied together

Approved

Appointed Planning Commission

“Tier Map” growth plan

“Balanced Growth Initiative” (BGI) developers’ lobby

Septic/Sewer Plan

“Tier Map”
Smartest-growth scenario.
Public favorite

Compromise (Merged)
Scenario

* BGI: the developers’ lobby cynically named Balanced Growth Initiative
Draft Comp Plan before County Commissioners

• Retains sprawling development district larger than D.C.

• Major subdivisions everywhere but dark green.
  - MDP: inconsistent with state law.

• Increases minor subdivision density by 40%
  - Avoids adequate public facilities ordinance

• No “Priority Preservation Areas”
  - We now lose state preservation $$$ when farmland sold for development.

• Adds Cross County Connector (CCC):
  permits already denied by Army Corps.
What experts are saying about the draft Comprehensive Plan
“...public and private cost of almost $2 billion more for roadway construction and maintenance as compared to the Smart Growth Scenario.”

“Millions of dollars in state financial resources... have been provided to support the county’s past planning efforts.

That level of support from the state is now jeopardized by a plan that moves the county in an unsustainable direction.”

Jeopardize U.S. 301 upgrade funding?
Traffic

- Commute time

“…vehicle traffic on major highways will continue to grow rapidly, e.g., traffic on US 301…”

“Adversely affect future Federal transit funding…”
“opening new rural areas to proposed growth and additional development will compete with the proposed mixed use development in the Transit Corridor.”

Employment in a revitalized Waldorf with walkable Transit-Oriented Development

Transportation

Jobs

- Commute time
- Jobs per household
- Poor prospects for mass transit to Waldorf

Waldorf sub-area plan

MDOT

Maryland
Subsidizing inefficient sprawl means less $$ for:

- schools,
- teachers,
- sidewalks,
- sheriffs, fire fighters, etc....
Sprawl development

- Acres lost to large-lot development
- Forest cut per unit
- Growth in areas receiving no state $ support
- 3rd lowest for preserved land

“...land use policies are contradictory to farmland and woodland conservation.”
Mattawoman Creek & aquatic resources

- Best in Bay
- Increasingly dirty water
- Loss of purifying forest

"...inconsistent with preserving Mattawoman's economic value"

"...will provide little protection for the Mattawoman watershed."

"the... Development District virtually assures continuing and dramatic deterioration."

"... will result in increased sediment and nutrient pollution in the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay."

Interagency Chesapeake Bay Program

MD Dept. Natural Resources

Mattawoman Interagency Task Force

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Paved the same as Anacostia River!

Tier Map
Safety on Billingsley Road

Traffic studies foretell:
Cross County Connector would make Billingsley *less* safe!

- Induced growth increases *all* traffic.
- A new highway *induces* new car trips
- Connecting roads see *increased* traffic

Road unsafe?
You don’t build a four-lane highway connecting to it.
You fix it.
Permits for Cross County Connector denied by:

- Maryland Dept. of Environment
- Army Corps: “Contrary to the public interest”

- Yet, the CCC is back in the draft Comp Plan.

- 1 million taxpayer dollars to study a way around the permit denials inserted in budget by Commissioners Rucci, Davis and Collins.
In summary, experts are saying the draft Comp Plan is...

“the wrong choice”

What’s the right choice?
The smartest-growth scenario considered could provide for future growth & job creation

- No sprawling development district - most is disqualified for state $$$
- Bryans Road a village as once intended
- Encourages revitalization of Waldorf “urban core” supported by rail
- Provides for residential and employment
- Includes mixed-use village concepts
- Agriculture preservation areas
- Protects stream valleys and natural areas
What about the capacity for JOBS?

- Jobs: “…more than adequate land area to support projected employment through 2040, as well as considerable employment beyond 2040.”

Employment in a revitalized Waldorf with walkable Transit-Oriented Re development

Waldorf sub-area plan
What about the capacity for GROWTH?

- Residential: “... enough capacity to accommodate residential growth…”

Fully accommodated in Waldorf Activity Centers, needed to support mass transit!

Bryans Road- zoned for 8000+ in the town center alone. Needed for the Cross County Connector!

Return Bryans Road to a village!
What are the benefits of a smarter growth plan?

A stronger “downtown” with rail economically feasible
- New housing opportunities
  - Appeals to new demographics
  - Affordable near transportation

New business opportunities & local jobs by invigorating Waldorf around rail.

Better schools + rail + green space = business attraction

Alleviate traffic:
Smart growth aligns with state & federal goals: attracts $$$
  → U.S. 301 in-place upgrade
  → Rail to Branch Avenue metro
More benefits of a smarter growth plan

**Stretches tax dollars to:**
- maintain infrastructure
- pay teachers, police, EMS, fire.

**Smaller government.**

**Enhances property values**
- A greener county
- Stable schools
- No housing glut

**Boosts options for rural landowners**:
- Zoning favors Transfer of Development Rights

Arrests decline of great outdoors!
A strong majority supports this new vision

Pace of growth
- Too slow
- About right
- A little too fast
- Much too fast

- 62% Growth too fast

Does preservation improve quality of life?
- A lot
- A little
- Not at all

- 94% Improves quality of life

Cross County Connector
- Strongly favor
- Somewhat favor
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose

- 71% Oppose CCC

Vision for the future
- Put growth where infrastructure exists
- Open new areas for development

Detailed summary: http://friendsofmd.org/ > publications & reports
Overwhelming opposition to BGI plan:

Speakers: 3 to 1 against

Written: 2000 to 30 against

A hot potato!

What to do with the Tier Map?

Commissioners Rucci, Davis and Collins voted to appoint a special workgroup.

Avoid accountability?
Tier Map

• Required by the Sustainable Growth & Agricultural Preservation Act to:
  - curtail sprawl development of farm and forest lands
  - reduce pollution from septic fields
  - right-size residential development area

BGI Map Planning Commission sent to Commissioners

Presented by special workgroup to BOCC for an up/down vote

Commissioners Rucci, Davis, & Collins forced changes

9000 acres
Dense development (Tiers 1 & 2) = 1 ½ D.C.s!

“Will irreparably harm” Mattawoman Creek!

Extra 9000 acres for dense development*

Dense development (Tiers 1 & 2) = 1 ½ D.C.s!

Twice the land needed for future growth to 2040!

And...

Encrusts Rail Trail with dense development.

Bryan Road a city, & more (?!)

Minor subdivisions on septic (no adequate public facilities review!)

*9000 acres is same size as St. Charles, which is only ½ complete!

“It’s docket 90 all over again!”
What can be done?

1. Learn about your local officials.

   - SaveCharlesCounty.com  *Sign the on-line petition!*
   - Candidates forum, June 4, 7 – 9 PM, Jaycees Waldorf

2. Inform your friends and neighbors!
What can be done?

Hearing!
Tier-Map Growth-Plan
May 13  6:30 PM
Government Building
La Plata

3. Speak-up! Ask Commissioners Rucci, Davis, and Collins why they always back developers and want dense development sprawling over an area larger than Washington D.C.

4. Schedule this talk for your neighborhood
Which Future for Charles County?

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Business as usual

Smarter vision