

SB 878 - Smart Growth: Visions and Performance Standards

A Collaborative Process: Local Solutions and Common Goals

Summary and Background

Bill Summary

Smart Growth – Visions and Performance Standards (SB878) creates measurable performance standards that ensure that the state's planning visions for smart growth are achieved. Local governments retain the flexibility to employ the tools that are most appropriate and effective given local conditions to reach the performance standards.

Local comprehensive plans must demonstrate progress toward the specific goals. Local plans that demonstrate they will meet the standards receive highest priority for state funding.

The result is a collaborative process in which local context and local solutions synchronize to achieve common goals. The five performance standards will:

- Direct 80 percent of residential growth to planned growth areas and away from the state's most valuable natural and agricultural lands;
- Reduce traffic congestion by about 11 percent below 2005 levels;
- Ensure 10 percent of housing is affordable for working families;
- Ensure 75 percent of new jobs are created near transit and in existing communities;
- Reduce pollution in our waterways – to levels that aren't harmful.

Bill information can be obtained at <http://mlis.state.md.us/2009rs/billfile/sb0878.htm>

Background:

Marylanders have the second longest commute in the country: 255 hours a year, the equivalent of six work weeks. They spend three times more time commuting than the average family spends on vacations.¹ In 1969, nearly 50 percent of all students walked or biked to school. Today, less than 15 percent do.²

But who has a choice? Affordable homes are often far from our jobs, schools, and local supermarkets. Maryland residents realize that living in a well designed community and state could save them time, money, and improve their quality of life. What's important is that we plan and make sure growth occurs where it delivers real benefits to the community as a whole.

(more)

Sprawl Destroys Environment, Jobs, Quality of Life

- Maryland's attempts to reduce sprawl around the state have been ineffective. More than 13,000 acres of forest and farm land are consumed each year in Maryland by new residential and commercial building – far in excess of the 8,600 acre annual state limit. The large majority of construction is in areas that the state has designated for conservation.³
- Stormwater runoff from urban and suburban development in Maryland adds to the nitrogen pollution that is killing streams and the Chesapeake Bay. About 14 percent of this pollution comes from such areas.⁴ Additionally, it is the only source of nitrogen pollution that is increasing.
- The crab population in the Chesapeake Bay has declined 70 percent in the past decade as pollution fouls the estuary, and the state's crab industry has lost \$640 million as a result.⁵

State Efforts to Control Sprawl Have Been Largely Ineffective

- Maryland tried to encourage counties and local towns to carefully manage growth through financial incentives. Ten years later, it is clear that incentives alone are not enough. What is missing are specific and measurable goals.
- Marylanders are looking for a better way of managing growth and making development work for their communities and the environment. Eighty-seven percent of Marylanders support prioritizing services to existing communities over new development in the state budget.⁶

A New Approach: Specific Goals, but Flexible Means

The legislation complements Governor Martin O'Malley's new Smart and Sustainable Growth legislation, yet also adds critical components: **specific and measurable goals** for growth – and **accountability**. The bill directs the state to produce these specific and measurable goals, known as **Performance Standards**. Local governments decide *how* to reach the goals, and the Maryland Department of Planning certifies that these solutions will work.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey and 2000 Census

² Safe Routes to School National Partnership

³ Maryland Department of Planning, 2009 General Assembly testimony

⁴ Chesapeake Bay Program website, *Stormwater Management and the Chesapeake Bay*

⁵ Chesapeake Bay Foundation, *Bad Water and the Decline of the Blue Crabs in the Chesapeake Bay*, (December, 2008)

⁶ Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates, *Marylanders' Attitudes toward Growth and Development* (2007)