

The Regional Environment: New Initiatives to Protect Town and Country

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CNU IX: From Neighborhood to Region

Notes for presentation made on 6/8/01:

Concern for the Chesapeake Bay acted as a catalyst for the Chesapeake Bay Agreement and Maryland's Smart Growth program. The Chesapeake Bay is fundamental to Maryland's economy and a source of pride for Maryland residents. Marylanders have claimed the Bay, but it is a regional resource. Land draining into the Bay touches six states and the District of Columbia. The watershed covers 64,000 square miles, with a 1990 population of 16.4 million.

There is a direct link between our sprawling patterns of development, the loss of agricultural and forest land, and the worsening condition of the Bay and local waterways. The Maryland Department of Planning Watershed Planning System found that best management practices could not achieve goals for water quality restoration without explicit growth management policies. The history of the Agreement and Maryland's Smart Growth program are integrally related. Both use land use as a tool for water quality.

Chesapeake Bay Agreement and Smart Growth Milestones

1983 – First Bay Agreement

- A study of the Bay determined that excessive nutrients from agriculture, residential land, and wastewater, sediment runoff from farms and development, and possible elevated levels of toxics contributed to the decline of the Bay.
- The Governors of Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania, the Mayor of the District of Columbia, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Chairman of the Chesapeake Bay Commission decided to coordinate restoration efforts, and created the Agreement.

1987 – 1997

- As the Agreement began to be implemented, it became clear that population growth – combined with the way we were growing – could eclipse the nutrient reduction and habitat protection gains of the past.

1997 – Neighborhood Conservation & Smart Growth Act

- Maryland adopted an innovative incentive-based policy to direct growth, support existing communities, and preserve natural resource lands. The strategy recognizes that quality of life in existing communities is key to land preservation.
- Priority Funding Areas (PFAs)*—Maryland offers an array of programs to encourage growth and support community revitalization in existing communities and areas designated for future growth. Inside PFAs, the State will pay for growth-related infrastructure, such as roads and water and sewer. Outside of PFAs, the State will spend no money on infrastructure.
- Rural Legacy*—The Rural Legacy program bolsters regional land preservation efforts.

2000 – Significant amendments to Bay Agreement

- For the first time, all signatories agree to explicit land use objectives, including preservation of 20% of the resource lands in the watershed, and a 30% reduction in rate of conversion to sprawl.

Water Quality Benefits of Smart Growth

Smart Growth conserves resource lands and sensitive areas, accommodating growth on fewer acres and limiting the impacts of growth to smaller geographic areas. This strategy minimizes nutrient loads from new development in several ways:

1. Smart Growth concentrates development on centralized waste treatment. Advanced treatment at waste water treatment plants contributes less pollution per capita than septic systems.
2. Smart Growth development occurs on smaller lots, which decreases stormwater runoff.
3. Smart Growth offers people alternatives to driving, which reduces the atmospheric deposition of nitrogen.