

County Council for Anne Arundel County
44 Calvert Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

March 1, 2021

Dear Councilmembers,

As members of the Anne Arundel Citizens Environmental Commission (CEC), we are pleased to submit our staunch support for the General Development Plan (GDP). We believe that the environment and natural resources management strategies presented in the Plan are key to achieving the County's goals of smart growth and redevelopment and we urge the County Council to adopt the GDP..

The CEC appreciates the opportunity to work with the County Executive, the relevant County Departments, and the GDP's Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) to inform the outcome of the GDP, particularly the chapter on 'Planning for the Natural Environment'. Over the past two years, the CEC has participated in joint meetings with the GDP's Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), we had many presentations from County agencies regarding long-range planning in the County, and we reviewed and adroitly analyzed the DRAFT Natural Environment Chapter of the GDP. The CEC also met with County Executive Steuart Pittman to discuss our debated, yet consensus, recommendations. Throughout this period, the CEC also worked closely with Matt Johnston, Environmental Policy Director, who assisted the Commission with the detailed review and thorough understanding of the recommendations put forth. During this very collaborative process, the CEC conducted a thorough review on every policy and strategy presented in the Natural Environment chapter.

Overall, our detailed comments on the GDP environmental policies and strategies fell into six themes that are necessary to achieve Smart Growth:

- **Identify** – mapping existing natural resource features in order to best understand different types of ecosystems and natural resource areas across Anne Arundel County, and where they currently exist. For example, mapping of sensitive habitats in non-tidal wetlands is incomplete at this time.
- **Protect** – policies and strategies that seek to preserve our existing sensitive natural resources, specifically in areas that are most vulnerable to development, climate change impacts and equitable access
- **Preserve** – policies and strategies that seek to preserve natural resources across the County. There are opportunities to preserve our existing natural resource infrastructure in order to protect water quality, air quality, habitat, and quality of life for the citizens of Anne Arundel County.
- **Restore** – In areas where natural resources are being destroyed due to development or , seek to restore natural systems in order to re-connect our ecosystems to provide ecosystem functions into the future.

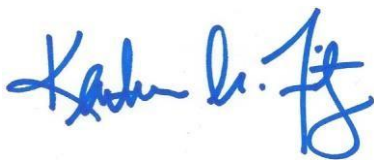
- **Report** – It is important that Anne Arundel County is able to report on the progress of identifying, protecting, preserving, and restoring our natural resources. This GDP should include reporting mechanisms to effectively socialize the public understanding and progress of this plan.
- **Organize to Accomplish** – We believe it is important for the GDP to organize the disparate staff and resources spread across many agencies that have some responsibility in implementing the natural resource-related policies for the GDP.

Along with these six themes, the Commission recommended the creation of a **natural resource map, which displays the true vision of the GDP on where to preserve, restore, or enhance natural resources.** The Commission welcomes the GDP’s reference to the Green Infrastructure Master Plan, which is being updated, and which can fill this role. Creating such a map that clearly lays out areas of protection, preservation, and restoration, will help to elevate the management of our ecosystem to be on par with development and growth goals and vision. It can also be utilized as an analytic tool when making or evaluating recommended land use changes, zoning changes, and other smart growth-related policies outlined in the GDP. If the Green Infrastructure Master Plan is made available to the public it will also promote citizens' active and informed participation in this process.

The Commission believes that the environmental policies and strategies expressed in the GDP portray a clear and concise vision for where and how the county will protect its natural resources – and provide a road map that will guide development into areas that do not destroy our existing natural resources. In particular, **we strongly support the emphasis on restoration and enhancement in addition to preservation.** With this more comprehensive environmental strategy spelled out in the GDP, and once incorporated into the Green Infrastructure Master Plan, the County will have a very important framework in place that can be used to inform future visioning discussions regarding growth and density in priority places in Anne Arundel County. As a Commission, we feel strongly that having sound policies and detailed maps in place for protecting environmental resources are necessary in order for the county to avoid incentivizing sprawl and refocus development where it is needed the most.

As an advisory committee, we are appreciative of the opportunity to help inform and shape the protection, restoration, and preservation of the County’s natural resources. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or comments.

Sincerely,



Kate Fritz, Chair
Citizens Environmental Commission