



Growth Action Network

of Anne Arundel County, Inc.

P.O. Box 748 • Arnold, MD 21012 • www.growthaction.net

2026 Priorities for The Growth Action Network

At the Growth Action Network, we begin this new year recommitted to our vision of *“environmentally sustainable, well planned and managed Anne Arundel communities and government-owned properties where citizens are engaged, neighborhoods thriving, development is limited, and redevelopment is a land use priority.”*

Our 2026 legislative and government priorities include the following:

- **Greatly increasing citizen input into land use legislation and text amendments to the code**, especially Articles 17 and 18. We've been calling for creating a Planning Commission or recommissioning the Planning Advisory Board to include citizen review and expert testimony on the fiscal, environmental, and quality of life impacts of legislation before consideration by the County Council. As one of only two jurisdictions in the state that does not have such a function, AACo continues to debate complex and confusing changes to zoning and land use policies that have profound and lasting impacts on life in the county in the brief 2-minute, 95-day constrained limits of a bill's life. Many of these bills have taken months to draft behind the scenes, often in consultation with development and real estate interests. The Council itself has complained of insufficient time and information to comfortably understand and act on the Transportation APF and Cottage Homes bills, both of which would have greatly benefited from independent review and citizen input prior to introduction to the Council. **Action: GAN will continue to advocate for a charter amendment to repair the oversight in the current charter which grants the PAB authority only on “rules and regulations” regarding land use and which would create a full, independent, citizen review of land use legislation, resulting in a non-binding but public recommendation to the County Council.**
- **Staggering the terms of members** of the Planning Advisory Board and possible Planning Commission would reduce the possibility of major, radical shifts in

direction upon change of administration. Currently the appointments of all 7 members of the PAB are co-terminus with the County Executive, which can lead to unplanned and unpredictable changes to a body and its work that should be working on a longer term horizon and transcend changes in administration. **Action: GAN will continue to advocate for a charter amendment to stagger the terms of PAB and possible Planning Commission members.**

- Recent changes to the code have **expedited development far beyond the capacity of the transportation infrastructure** to support it. The Council should take more seriously its obligation to require development to pay for itself, including the infrastructure needed to support it. **Action: GAN looks forward to a spirited review of the forthcoming Impact Fees legislation. We fear that traffic and transit fees, which haven't been increased in over a decade, will be shorted in favor of the addition of impact fees for parks and libraries.**
- There is an unlimited supply of people who want to live in AACo and **an increasing shortage of people who can afford to work here due to the high cost of housing.** GAN welcomes the county's efforts to require moderately priced dwelling units for sale and rent in future developments, but the percentages (10% of sales, 15% of rentals) is too small, given the huge need for more workforce housing and the large concessions made to builders. **Action: GAN will continue to urge non-market, more affordable housing targeted at 80-100% AMI, especially in redevelopment areas near employment and transit centers.**
- Over the past years, the county has **rapidly advanced plans for more development, especially housing while compromising the quality of life in those developments.** Recent legislation has added density and reduced open and recreational areas and now includes wetlands and steep slopes in computing the development envelope. While we applaud the commitment to increased housing in targeted areas, we believe these changes have a substantial negative impact on the quality of life of the very residents it is intended to serve **Action: GAN will continue to advocate to restore recreation and open areas, especially where family housing is most needed.**
- Consistent with our first priority, GAN continues to believe **that the legislative process in the County excludes many of the very people most affected by its work.** Most other jurisdictions in the state hold hybrid meetings, as do most commissions and committees in the County. **Action: GAN will continue to speak up at Council meetings and in our communications to call out the Council's continued inaction in opening its proceedings to people who do not have the**

means to travel to the Arundel Center to make a 2 minute statement on their own behalf.

Here's a side-by-side comparison of the **planning commissions** and equivalent planning bodies in **Anne Arundel, Howard, Baltimore County, Calvert, Frederick, Harford, and Baltimore City**. For each jurisdiction, I've outlined structure, responsibilities, membership and appointment, meeting schedule, and public role—drawing directly from official county/state sources, with citations.

1. Anne Arundel County

- **Planning structure:** The county has regional planning initiatives by **Anne Arundel County Department of Planning & Zoning**, coordinating growth across designated regions via the “region plans” model ([Reddit](#), [Reddit](#)).
- **Advisory boards:** The 7 member Planning Advisory Board makes recommendations to the Executive and Council following review of the county’s master plan and its 9 regional components, the water and sewer master plan, and the annual capital budget. **It has no role in review of land use legislation and text amendments to Articles 17 and 18.** Other advisory boards include an Agriculture Commission, Spending Affordability Commission, Police Accountability Board, and others. .
- **Public role:** The PAB allows citizen participation, and residents participate in region-based charrettes and surveys.

2. Howard County

- **Department of Planning & Zoning (DPZ)** oversees planning and carries out policy and long-range development ([Maryland Manual On-Line](#), [Wikipedia](#)).
- **Planning Board:** 5 members appointed by the County Executive with Council consent, serving five-year terms. **Reviews zoning**, general plan amendments, capital program impacts annually ([Maryland Manual On-Line](#)).
- **Advisory boards:** Includes an Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board, Historic Preservation Commission (7 members), Design Advisory Panel, Sustainability Board, Cemetery Advisory Board ([Maryland Manual On-Line](#)).
- **Public role:** Community input through “HoCo by Design” scenario planning, workshops and **advisory board meetings** ([Reddit](#)).

3. Baltimore County

- **Department of Planning** oversees planning and carries out policy and long-range development
- **Planning Board:** 15 members, 8 appointed by the County Executive and 7 by the Council consent, serving five-year terms. **Reviews zoning**, general plan amendments, capital program impacts annually
- **Support to:** Advisory role to provide recommendations to the Baltimore County Council, County Executive and Administrative Law Judges on **matters affecting land use, community development, and short- and long-range planning within Baltimore County**.
- **Backgrounds:** including, but are not limited to Business, Education and Baltimore County Public Schools. Law, Finance, Real estate, Research and data analysis

4. Calvert County

- **Planning Commission:** A seven-member citizen review body appointed by the Board of County Commissioners. Meets monthly (third Wednesday at 7 pm) in hybrid format .
- **Responsibilities:** **Reviews and recommends on** the county comprehensive plan, town-center master plans, **zoning changes, subdivisions, and site plans**. Its decisions inform the Board of County Commissioners .

5. Frederick County

- **Frederick County Planning Commission (FCPC):** **Reviews site plans, subdivisions, amendments to subdivision regulations, adequate public facilities; also advises the County Council on code changes, rezonings, and comprehensive plans** ([Frederick County MD](#)).
- **Membership:** 7 members, appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by County Council to five-year terms ([Frederick County MD](#)).
- **Meeting schedule:** Generally meets monthly at 9:30 a.m. (second Wednesday), with additional sessions as needed ([Frederick County MD](#)).
- **Public involvement:** Public comments allowed (3 min individuals, 10 min organizational), with written or live testimony required in advance for hearings ([Frederick County MD](#)).

6. Harford County

- **Planning Advisory Board and Historic Preservation Commission** operate within the Department of Planning & Zoning ([Maryland State Archives](#)).

- **Planning Advisory Board:** Five members appointed by the County Executive with Council consent, serving coterminous terms with the Executive. They make recommendations on master plans, zoning maps and regulations, and review the capital improvement program every year; also produce planning guidelines at least every eight years ([Maryland State Archives](#)). **Note:**This is the only other jurisdiction that has no prior review of land use legislation.
- **Historic Preservation Commission:** Eleven members plus two alternates, three-year terms, advising on historic property designation and maintenance of historic inventories ([Maryland State Archives](#)).
- **Development Advisory Committee (DAC):** Inter-agency committee that advises on major subdivision plans, convenes twice monthly, includes public and agency input ([harfordcountymd.gov](#)).

7. Baltimore City

- **Planning Commission (City):** Nine-member commission (six mayoral appointees, three ex officio). President appointed by the Mayor with Council consent. **Investigates land use, subdivision proposals, zoning changes;** adopts and revises a master plan; recommends capital budgets and long-range capital improvement program ([Maryland State Archives](#)).
- **Board of Municipal & Zoning Appeals:** Five-member board hears appeals and variances under City Code ([Maryland State Archives](#)).
- **Commission for Historical & Architectural Preservation (CHAP):** 13 members, appointed by Mayor and Council; advises on historic preservation and designations, works under Planning Department ([Maryland State Archives](#)).
- **Public process:** Planning Commission has recommended major proposals (e.g. Harborplace redevelopment), which then go to City Council. Public hearings are part of the process ([Reddit](#)).

Summary Table

| Jurisdctn | Commission Structure | Main Functions | Membershi p & Terms | Public Meetings & Input |
|-----------------|---------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Anne Arundel Co | Regional planning via OPZ | Regional plans, zoning, growth strategy Note: nothing here about land use legislation | 7 members, by district, 4 year terms, | Open testimony, online surveys, |

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|-------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| | | | co-terminus with CE | regional workshops |
| Howard County | DPZ + Planning Board | Zoning codes, general plan, capital review | 5-member board + advisory boards, 3–5 yr terms | Workshops (“HoCo by Design”), advisory boards |
| Baltimore Co | Planning Commission (often called Board) | Land-use/zoning planning | 15 members, up to 3 3-year terms | Hybrid public hearings |
| Calvert County | Planning Commission | Comprehensive/town-center plans, subdivisions, zoning | 7 appointed by BCC, 5 year terms. | Monthly meetings, hybrid public hearings third Wednesday |
| Frederick County | FCPC (advisory & decision-making) | Subdivision/site plan approval, zoning & code amendments | 7 members, Executive-appointed, 5-yr term | Monthly AM meetings; public comment periods |
| Harford County | Advisory Board, Preservation, DAC | Master plans, zoning, preservation, subdivisions review | 11 members ± 2 alternates, 3 year terms | DAC meetings bi-monthly; public testimony possible |
| Baltimore City | Planning Commission | Master plan, zoning, capital recommendations, historic preservation | 11-member PC, 4 year terms | Public hearings; recommendations forwarded to Council |

Key Takeaways

- **Howard, Calvert, Frederick, Harford, and Baltimore City** all have formal planning commissions or equivalent boards, typically appointed by the executive branch with confirmed terms.
- **Anne Arundel** emphasizes regional plans with public engagement, though its commission setup is less clearly defined.

- **Baltimore County** has a large 15 member planning body – 8 appointed by the Executive, and 7 by the Council.
- **Frederick and Calvert Counties** maintain relatively traditional meetings and public comment processes.
- **Baltimore City** operates a structured multi-body system, including appeals and historic preservation, feeding into the City Council via planning recommendations.
