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January 18, 2025

To: Chairman Brian Feldman and members of the Maryland Senate Committee on Education, Energy and the Environment

From: Jim Brown, Policy Director, Audubon Mid-Atlantic

Subject: Favorable Testimony for Maryland SB 266 Local Comprehensive Planning and State Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Policy – Planning Principles

Audubon Mid-Atlantic submits this testimony in support of Senate Bill 266. Audubon Mid-Atlantic is the regional office of National Audubon Society, representing over 35,000 Marylanders who advocate for the protection of birds, bird habitat, and policies aiming to protect both birds and human communities in the face of increasing environmental challenges, habitat loss, pollution, and climate change.

Updating Maryland's planning principles offers the ability to use the lenses of climate preparedness, quality of life, and natural resource conservation to strengthen planning efforts equitable growth while protecting vulnerable bird habitat. Special Maryland landscapes such as forested land, meadows, wetland marshes and other undeveloped land provide critical habitat to threatened bird species while improving the livability and quality of life for all of Maryland's residents. These proposed planning principles promote the efficient use of public resources in planning for growth and community building by leveraging infrastructure investments in transportation and housing to maximize returns on efficiencies in spending and land use. This investment in ecologically sensitive and socially inclusive planning is an investment in Maryland's future.

Science tells us birds are in decline due to habitat loss and climate change. 1/3 of all Maryland bird species experienced significant population declines in the past 50 years. SB 266 will enable Maryland to slow this habitat loss while also protecting the priceless natural climate solutions that undeveloped spaces and preserved land offer.

The transportation, water resource availability, ecology, environmental protection and economic growth aspects of this bill define planning principles which will support the coexistence of thriving human communities alongside an ecologically diverse, and climate resilient Maryland. These recommendations show that planning for economic growth and preserving special natural places for the value they bring do not need to happen separately. With thoughtful consideration and a well-resourced Planning Department, they can be mutually supportive of each other.

Audubon believes the provisions within the bill will enable planners to address the state's most pressing environmental, economic, and climate challenges by:

- Encouraging the concentration of growth in or adjacent to existing population and business centers, and transportation networks, thus preventing the loss of important natural habitat and minimizing the fragmentation of such habitat

- Emphasizing that a high quality of life is achieved through universal stewardship of the land, water, and air resulting in sustainable communities and protection of the environment
- Considering environmental protection of land and water resources; conservation and restoration of natural systems, waterways and living resources in planning processes
- And providing for public spaces that encourage social interaction and promote the value of cultural, historical and natural resources.

SB 266 will lay the framework for creating more climate-resilient communities for our residents and visitors. It will also continue to hold Maryland up as a leader in climate action, inclusive growth, ecosystem preservation, and the protection of birds now and in the future.

Audubon Mid-Atlantic respectfully urges a favorable review of this legislation.

Thank You,

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