

Tuesday, January 21, 2025

TO: Brian Feldman, Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee, and Committee Members

FROM: Humna Sharif, The Nature Conservancy, Climate Adaptation Manager; Cait Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, State Policy Manager

POSITION: Support SB 266 Local Comprehensive Planning and State Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Policy – Planning Principles

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports SB 266, Local Comprehensive Planning and State Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Policy – Planning Principles. TNC is a global conservation organization working to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Maryland, our work focuses on delivering data-driven, on-the-ground solutions that secure clean water, air, and healthy, secure living environments for our human and natural communities today and in the generations to come. We see SB 266 as a positive addition to the suite of climate-conscious legislation that Maryland has already passed and will need to pass to prepare our state for the future.

SB 266 incorporates principles of sustainable growth and planning that will help our state meet future challenges related to environmental risks, shifting growth patterns, and new development needs. Maryland's [Climate Pollution Reduction Plan](#) calls on the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) to accelerate sustainable growth in the state. MDP's recent [Climate Implementation Plan](#) also identifies sustainable growth as a strategic approach to equitably consider economic, social, and environmental implications for existing and future generations' wellbeing. SB 266's proposed changes to Maryland's Comprehensive Planning and State Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Policy are key to building and sustaining a society that can adapt to future hazards and uncertainties.

SB 266 introduces eight additional principles into existing Maryland law that aim to help local governments improve comprehensive plans for their jurisdictions in ways which enhance quality of life and protect natural resources. TNC recognizes that local comprehensive plans are a powerful tool to advance our state's long-term resilience. We support the new principles of sustainable growth included in this legislation.

TNC is particularly enthused that these principles include clean and affordable transportation, equitable and community-focused development planning processes, resilience measures that will help Maryland adapt to climate change and associated environmental risks, access to public spaces, and a focus on ecological restoration and protections for sensitive habitats. Guidance from [US Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA), [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#) (NOAA), [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#) (FEMA) all reference comprehensive plans as an important avenue for hazard resilience and smart growth.

Our state faces many challenges to mitigating climate emissions, building ecosystem and community resilience, and delivering environmental justice to our overburdened and underserved residents. These challenges require diligent coordination from all sectors of the government and MDP's role in this coordination effort cannot be over-stated. Our legislators and state agencies have continued to demonstrate your commitment to identifying and implementing collaborative approaches to address these challenges, and SB 266 seeks to advance those efforts. We commend MDP's leadership in putting forth this legislation, and urge a favorable report on SB 266.