



Maryland DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

HEARING DATE: March 25th, 2025

BILL NO: SB 266

COMMITTEE: Environment and Transportation

POSITION: Support

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TITLE: Local Comprehensive Planning and State Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Policy – Planning Principles

BILL ANALYSIS:

SB0266/HB0286 amends the state’s current twelve Planning Visions and the State Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Policy with an updated set of eight Planning Principles.

POSITION AND RATIONALE:

The Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) supports SB 266. This bill replaces the state’s current 12 Planning Visions and the State Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Policy (Policy) with an updated set of more aptly named “Planning Principles” (Principles). This amendment seeks to build on the past success of Maryland’s smart growth policy and evolve toward a sustainable growth model for Maryland. It also adds clarity, improves alignment and simplifies the core planning principles for sustainable growth policy to make it more accessible in practice for those engaged in growth and development. Finally, through negotiations on the Senate cross file which have since been adopted in the House version, introductory language has been added to the amendments in §1–201 of the Land Use Article. This introductory language states collectively the overarching goal of the principles is to foster a high quality of life for all Marylanders, and to accomplish this goal residents should be active partners in the planning and implementation of community initiatives.

Originally adopted in 1992, the legislatively endorsed Policy and Planning Visions have been amended two times before, in 2000 and 2009. After MDP’s series of regional roundtables in the summer of 2024 with planning commissions and departments from across the state, MDP concluded, via feedback from attendees and additional engagement with local officials and their planning staff, that the current 12 planning visions were overly complicated and vague making them difficult to assess and align with the required comprehensive plan elements. As a result, the existing visions are not always used in the preparation of local plans, and when they are, they are often only added as a perfunctory measure to meet the letter of the law rather than truly embrace and implement the intent of the visions.

This bill adapts these Visions, making them more concise, consolidating redundant and overlapping visions, and renaming them as Principles a term more appropriate for how they are intended to be utilized. MDP has purposefully kept each Principle statement concise with the intent of including broader underlying topics and methods through the development of non-regulatory guidelines for use in implementation that are adaptable

to varying scales and typology of communities. Further, the Principles better align with eight current topics of highest priority state-wide that can be partially addressed through approaches to land use policy – Land, Transportation, Economy, Housing, Ecology, Place, Equity, and Resilience. It is the goal of MDP that this amendment of the Policy will facilitate alignment and implementation within plans and practices statewide.

While consolidation of some topics into the Principles occurred for clarity, the addition of equity as a Planning Principle brings focus to the need for inclusive planning processes and plans that go beyond traditional public participation approaches to prioritize the active engagement of underserved populations and areas most in need that have often been left behind and not adequately considered in plans and investments. Similarly, the addition of resilience as a Planning Principle addresses the need to identify risk factors and plan for reduction measures and the associated cost of recovery, as well as improve social connections and response systems that can help mitigate the negative impacts of natural- and human-caused threats. Combined, the eight planning principles aim to support the realization of thriving communities through a sustainability lens that balances the core pillars of economy, human well-being and ecological health.

The legislative framework to implement the Planning Principles remains unchanged in §5-7A-02 of the State Finance & Procurement Article (SFPA) and §1-201 and §3-201 of the Land Use Article (LUA). MDP will be working with our state agency partners to ensure State public works, transportation, and major capital improvement projects further the Planning Principles. Local planners and jurisdictions will be encouraged to align their planning projects and practices with the new principles laid out in this bill, and this will cause an operational shift for local governments on planning related matters. MDP is committed to providing any assistance desired to make the transition to the new principles one that will not impact local government finances and minimize impacts to operations. Updating of local comprehensive plans to incorporate the updated Planning Principles will incrementally occur during the mandated 10-year review (per § 1-416(a) LUA for charter counties and § 3-301(a) LUA for non-charter and municipalities).

Of note, the added language to the Ecology Principle adopted in the House cross file is not present in the Senate version as of the submission of this written testimony. MDP prefers the House version of this bill and wishes for the Senate version to align with it. With this, MDP respectfully requests this alignment to occur and for the bill to be given a favorable report.