

HEARING DATE: February 1, 2024
BILL NO: SB 309
COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
POSITION: Support
FOR INFORMATION CONTACT: Andrew Wilson (443) 366-4224

TITLE: Department of Planning – Sustainable Growth Subcabinet and Repeal of the Office of Smart Growth

BILL ANALYSIS:

SB 309 includes amendments that will result in an accurate reflection of actual operation and leadership of the subcabinet; updates its title, purpose, and membership to better address today’s issues; and positions Maryland to lead the country once again in growth and development best practices.

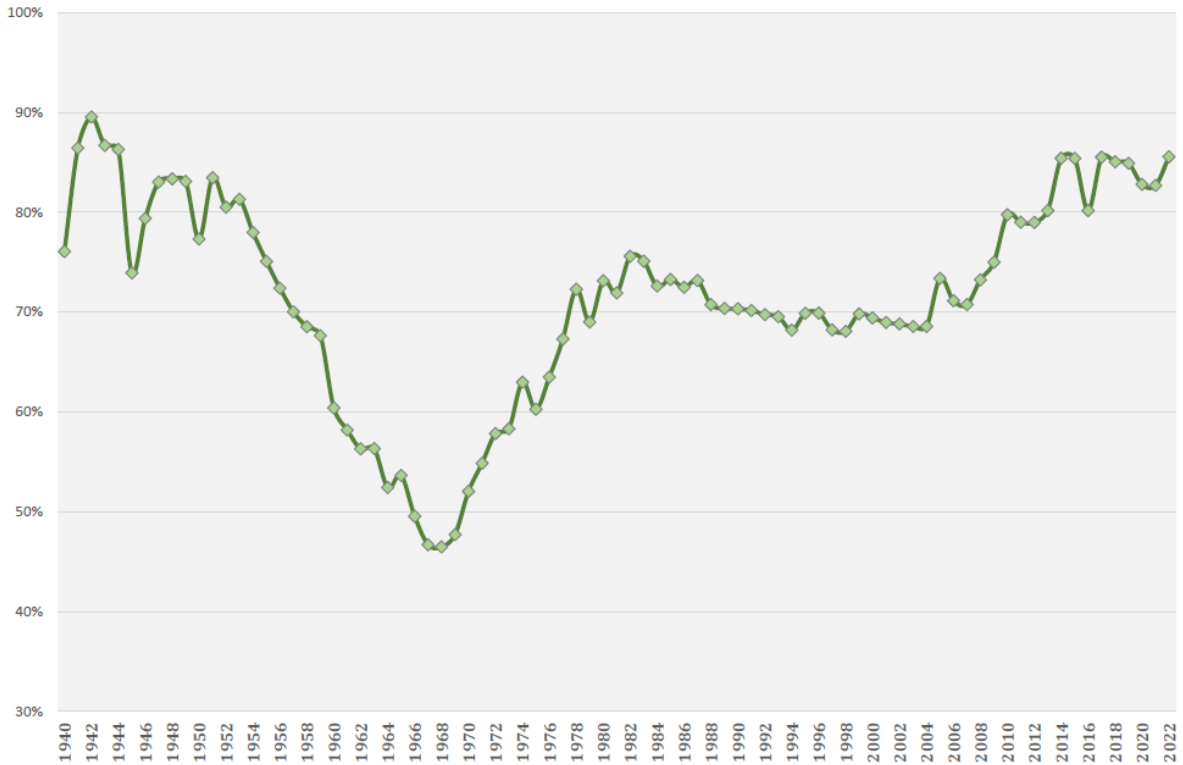
POSITION AND RATIONALE:

The Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) supports SB 309. MDP and its partner agencies on the Smart Growth Subcabinet, are committed to building on Maryland’s thirty-year legacy of targeted growth to both conserve our natural areas and revitalize existing communities. As noted in the chart below, Maryland’s post-WW II residential development pattern was between 75-90% compact development inside of locally designated PFAs, in the late 1950s and 60s compact development of single-family residential lots dropped to as low as 47% but returned for the next thirty years to the mid 70% compact development through the 1990s. It wasn’t until after the PFA law was passed in 1997, starting in 2004, when Maryland began to see a sharp increase in compact single-family residential development within PFAs, reaching 85% in recent years. Smart growth policies and residential market interest are some of the reasons for resurgence in compact development.

The Economic Growth, Resource and Planning Act was passed in 1992 (the precursor to the Smart Growth Act), when Smart Growth was just beginning to take hold in the US. Maryland was an early leader and consequently, the Smart Growth Subcabinet was formed in 2001 with the support of Governor Glendenning who established the Office of Smart Growth within the Governor’s office and named the first Special Secretary. Since 2003 the Subcabinet has operated within the Maryland Department of Planning and the Secretary of Planning has served as Acting Chair up through 2017. Under the Moore-Miller administration, the MDP Secretary is again serving as Acting Chair and has fully engaged the subcabinet members over the past year to enhance cross-agency collaboration. This amendment would name the MDP Secretary as Chair, and the DHCD Secretary as Vice-Chair and eliminate the position of Special Secretary and PIN that no longer exists within either agency.

The Subcabinet’s original focus was driven by conservation values to protect land and guide the location of development toward existing population centers. Since that time, fast moving market complexities, climate impacts and social needs have expanded the subcabinet’s need to also consider how we grow that is encompassed in the new title of “Sustainable” Growth Subcabinet. A sustainable approach to growth works to balance economic development with ensuring that there is opportunity created for all Marylanders along with upholding our responsibilities as natural resource stewards. As the “Sustainable” Growth Subcabinet members agencies will collaborate to balance these sometimes-conflicting objectives to reach the best possible outcomes for all

Chart 3: Percent of Compact Improved Single-Family Residential Parcels in Maryland by Year Built, 1940 - 2022



Source: Maryland Department of Planning, Planning Data Services, from MD Property View

MDP’s State Data & Analysis Center

(https://planning.maryland.gov/MSDC/Documents/pfa/resid_growth/parcel_analysis_2022/Chart3.pdf)

The Subcabinet includes thirteen Cabinet Secretaries, the director of MEA and the National Center for Smart Growth director as ex-officio. The amendment would also add the Department of Emergency Management to ensure the pressing topics of all types of resiliencies are fully represented in deliberations regarding growth and development. In addition to resiliency, the topic of equity has been added to the description of activities to ensure we consider the human factor in all our cross-agency decision making.

The newly named and re-invigorated “Sustainable” Growth Subcabinet is uniquely positioned to serve as an executive leadership group that collectively, through this amendment, actively engages and supports the creation of lasting neighborhood vitality for all.