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Susan O'Neill, Chair

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POSITION STATEMENT

House Bill 286 - Local Comprehensive Planning and State Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Policy -
Planning Principles
House Environment and Transportation Committee
February 4, 2025

The Rural Maryland Council SUPPORTS WITH AMENDMENT House Bill 286 – Local Comprehensive Planning and State Economic Growth, Resource Protections, and Planning Policy – Planning Principles. This bill replaces the 12 “visions” – that a local planning commission must implement through a local jurisdiction’s comprehensive plan – with 8 “planning principles.”

We appreciate the Maryland Department of Planning’s update of the State’s planning “visions” and its effort to simplify implementation of local planning principles. The current visions were adopted some time ago and the proposed principles provide a framework to foster resilient, economically thriving communities for current and future generations.

However, we feel that the principles as proposed miss some important concepts to include in future planning efforts. Namely, preservation and conservation of land, redevelopment and working landscapes. As currently described, the principles are focused on the municipal built environment while leaving out our unincorporated rural areas that contribute economically and environmental benefits to the State.

The State has adopted the goal to preserve 40% of our land. Currently, we have preserved 30% of our States’ lands and that includes our state parks that attract tourists to our rural areas as well as our agricultural land, our forests and our waterways that support our resource-based industries. These working landscapes are important to rural economies and we need local planners to identify those areas that should be considered for conservation.

We support the addition of adaptive reuse and mixed use under the economy principle; however, we would ask to include “redevelopment” to the principle. We think it important to incentivize the redevelopment of brownfields that exist throughout the State. We understand there are 4,700 abandoned gas stations riddled across the State. Redevelopment of those sites would further support efficient land use and limits development on green fields.

We appreciate the effort to make these principles universal, but as we all know because of the diversity of our state, one size does not fit all. For our rural areas, the biggest challenge to our growth is the lack of critical infrastructure particular water, broadband and energy. Our local planners can assist with ensuring that future needed resources are identified to support planned economic growth.

We ask the Committee to adopt the attached proposed amendment and to issue a favorable with amendment report on HB 286. Thank you for your consideration.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county, and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county, and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.

“A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland”

HB 286
Proposed Amendments

AMENDMENT No. 1

On page 3, line 8, after FACILITIES insert "**and preserve open spaces, agricultural lands, forests, and natural habitats to support working landscapes.**

Amendment No. 2

On page 3, line 6 after PRIORITIZE insert "**multimodal**".

Amendment No 3

On page 3, line 11 after FOR insert "**redevelopment**".

Amendment No. 4

On page 3, line 13 after INNOVATIONS insert "**and ensure growth areas have water, broadband and energy resources**".

- (1) LAND: OPTIMIZE LAND PRODUCTIVITY WITHIN POPULATION CENTERS AND IN PROXIMITY TO EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITIES **and preserve open spaces, agricultural lands, forests, and natural habitats to support working landscapes;**
- (2) TRANSPORTATION: PRIORITIZE **multimodal** TRANSPORTATION NETWORKS THAT CREATE ENERGY EFFICIENT, AFFORDABLE, AND RELIABLE ACCESS TO JOBS, HOUSING, AND SERVICES;
- (3) HOUSING: ENABLE A MIX OF QUALITY HOUSING TYPES AND AFFORDABILITY OPTIONS TO ACCOMMODATE ALL WHO WANT TO LIVE IN THE STATE;
- (4) ECONOMY: ALLOW FOR **redevelopment**, ADAPTIVE REUSE, MIXED-USE, AND CONTEXT APPROPRIATE NEW DEVELOPMENT THAT RESPONDS TO CHANGING MARKETS AND INNOVATIONS **and ensure growth areas have water, broadband and energy resources;**
- (5) EQUITY: ENGAGE ALL SECTORS OF THE COMMUNITY IN PLAN DEVELOPMENT TO ENSURE DIVERSE VOICES ARE HEARD AND THE NEEDS OF UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS ARE PRIORITIZED;
- 20 (6) RESILIENCE: INTEGRATE RESILIENCY MEASURES THAT WILL MINIMIZE THE IMPACTS OF RAPID AND UNEXPECTED NATURAL- AND HUMAN-CAUSED THREATS ON COMMUNITIES;
- (7) PLACE: PROVIDE FOR PUBLIC SPACES THAT ENCOURAGE SOCIAL INTERACTION AND VALUE CULTURAL, HISTORICAL, AND NATURAL RESOURCES; AND
- (8) ECOLOGY: PROTECT AND RESTORE SENSITIVE ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS.