

Testimony on HB 286
Local Comprehensive Planning and State Economic Growth, Resource Protection,
and Planning Policy - Planning Principles
House Environment & Transportation Committee

Date: January 31, 2025

Position: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

The Coalition for Smarter Growth (CSG) advocates for walkable, bikeable, inclusive, and transit-oriented communities as the most sustainable and equitable way for the Washington, DC region to grow and provide opportunities for all. We are proud of Maryland's legacy of statewide planning.

While our organization supports the intent of HB 286 and some of its specific provisions, **we request amendments to HB 286 to ensure that Maryland's pioneering and still relevant smart growth vision and goals continue to be clearly articulated.:**

HB 266 strives to update Maryland's principles for local comprehensive planning and for state planning. CSG supports the intent of the changes. We are glad to see that the bill language:

- Simplifies the 12 visions into 8 principles,
- Includes Equity as a standalone principle in planning,
- Ensures applicability in various contexts (urban, suburban, towns, rural),
- Addresses housing supply, and
- Emphasizes access over mobility for transportation

However, we are concerned that some of HB 286 new principles are worded too abstractly, leave out key features of smart growth, and may be interpreted too broadly - thus providing insufficient guidance to local governments and state agencies as intended.

We recommend these amendments to HB 286:

- Land use principle #1 needs further elaboration, as it loses some essential smart growth features contained in the current vision.
- New natural resources, rural amenities, and open space language (as proposed only references "sensitive ecological systems") is too limited and should be expanded to incorporate more of the current terminology.
- Add "mode choices" and "safety" as Transportation priorities.
- "Housing" principle should also prioritize accessible location.
- Incorporate "sustainability" and "climate change" as explicit terms

See attached detailed comments and recommended amendments.

We ask for a **report recommending amendments for HB 286** by the committee. Thank you.

Attachment: Detailed Comments on HB 286

CSG supports the intent of the changes, and these specific elements:

- Simplifying the 12 visions into 8 principles
- Including Equity
- Ensuring that the principles are applicable throughout the state, not just in growing areas or suburban or urban contexts
- Providing sufficient housing supply and affordability
- Emphasizing access over mobility for transportation networks

However, CSG is concerned that some of the new principles are too abstract, leave out key features of smart growth, and may be interpreted too broadly.

Specifically, CSG asks for the following amendments to HB 266:

- **Land use principle needs further elaboration, as it loses some essential smart growth features contained in the current vision** – For land use, the new principle #1 "Land - optimize land productivity within population centers and in proximity to existing infrastructure and facilities"
 - Fails to state the converse rationale, articulated clearly in the current Vision #4 statement "preservation and enhancement of natural systems, open spaces, recreational areas, and historical, cultural, and archaeological resources."
 - By itself, the new language is abstract, and should elaborate the general features and design of smart growth communities. The current Vision #4 statement does this: "compact, mixed-use, walkable design consistent with existing community character and located near available or planned transit options". While this current vision statement can be improved, for example, to be more applicable for small towns and villages without transit or rail, it is readily understood by a variety of audiences.
 - "existing infrastructure and facilities" can be interpreted too broadly - for example, this could include highway interchanges away from towns and cities. And since the new principle language has deleted design principles for walkable, compact development, it allows for auto-oriented highway commercial development patterns at these locations.
- **New natural resources, rural amenities, and open space language is too limited** – The new principles remove references to "waterways, forests, agricultural areas, open space, natural systems, and scenic areas" (see current Visions #9 and 10), and only explicitly protect "sensitive ecological systems", a much narrower term that may be read as special well-preserved natural habitats. As pointed out above, the new principles

need to be revised to retain the smart growth principle of protecting prime agricultural lands and rural open spaces (both public and private) as well as sensitive natural areas.

- **Add mode choices and safety to Transportation** – "energy efficient, affordable and reliable" should also include "safe" and "with convenient choices to travel". And we think it would also benefit from including tangible examples, e.g., walking, transit, biking, especially in suburban areas, towns and cities, land use planning that provides shorter travel distances.
- **"Housing" principle should also prioritize accessible location**
- **Incorporate "sustainability" and "climate change"** – These essential concepts need to be explicitly incorporated. The proposed language on environmental sustainability is now very limited – the word sustainability is removed entirely. The new language only addresses resilience, protecting sensitive ecosystems, providing public spaces, and making transportation energy-efficient. Climate change needs to be named – this is a critical component of planning and a key challenge of this century for Maryland.