

Tuesday, February 4th, 2025

TO: Marc Korman, Chair of the Environment and Transportation Committee; and Committee Members

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

POSITION: Support HB 286 Local Comprehensive Planning and State Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Policy – Planning Principles

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports HB 286, Local Comprehensive Planning and State Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Policy – Planning Principles. We see HB 286 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.

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. HB 286's proposed changes to Maryland's Comprehensive Planning and State Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Policy are important to building and sustaining a society that can adapt to future hazards and uncertainties. HB 286 simplifies the 12 visions of smart growth into eight principles and aims to help local governments improve comprehensive plans for their jurisdictions in ways which enhance quality of life and protect natural resources.

TNC is particularly enthused that these proposed 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.

TNC also recognizes that local comprehensive plans are a powerful tool to advance our state's long-term resilience. While we are supportive of the eight principles and their broad applicability throughout the state, we would also support further specificity to ensure that these principles' implementation aligns with long-term state climate resilience goals. In this regard, TNC supports the amendments that the Coalition for Smarter Growth has recommended to improve upon the eight principles offered in this bill. We recommend specifically including **climate change** in the bill language; current language does not name climate change, and we believe it is a critical component for planning and it is important that our state's policy reflects this.

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. The amendments to the bill language submitted by the Coalition for Smarter Growth will improve HB 286's implementation. We commend MDP's leadership in putting forth this legislation, and **urge a favorable report on HB 286.**