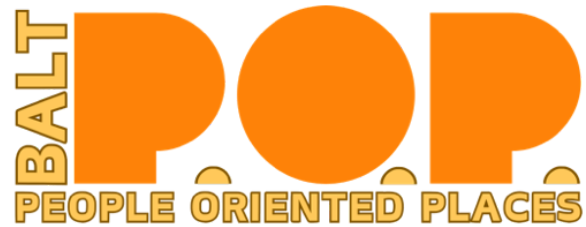


Bill: HB0286

Bill Title: Local Comprehensive Planning and State Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Policy - Planning Principles



Position: **Unfavorable**

Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee,

As a group which advocates for more people-oriented places for Baltimore through productive and sustainable transportation and land use practices, we oppose HB0286.

Truth is, before coming across this bill, we did not know the relevant portion of the Maryland state code existed. When reading through the existing “visions” and comparing them to the proposed “planning principles”, we find ourselves favoring the current text. The proposed planning principles in this bill are overly generic, indistinct, watered down, and vulnerable to competing interpretations.

We’re very surprised to see this bill being requested on behalf of the Maryland Department of Planning, especially in light of the excellent series of Sustainable Growth webinars [1] they have been putting on for the past couple of years. The content of these webinars has been on the opposite end of the spectrum of this bill’s proposed planning principles - bold, visionary, inspiring, and rather unambiguous.

We’re also very surprised that the Maryland Department of Planning did no outreach (as far as we know of) to gather public input on these proposed planning principles.

We aren’t clear why these changes are being pursued. In comparing the before and after, we surmise the following motivations:

1. Simplify the list of visions/principles by reducing their count from 12 to 8.
2. Include equity as a vision/principle.
3. Include housing affordability as a vision/principle.

These are laudable goals which we support. We take no issue with the inclusion of the equity and housing affordability aspects. However, it is the results of (what we suspect to be) the effort at simplification that we find disagreeable.

Our understanding is that the Maryland Department of Planning is trying to make these visions/principles broadly applicable to every community and region in the state. This includes urban, suburban, rural, growing, and shrinking communities. Trying to craft a short, simple, yet concrete set of visions/principles that applies equally well to Crisfield, Baltimore City, Columbia,

Cumberland, and all of the suburbs in between is a heavy lift. It seems to us that it would make more sense to follow the lead of the Maryland Department of Transportation's Context Driven Toolkit [2], which differentiates among five different land use contexts - from Urban Core to Rural.

Too much is being lost in the conversion from the existing visions to the proposed planning principles. The language and terminology lost in the conversion from the existing growth areas, community design, infrastructure, and transportation visions to the proposed land, transportation, and housing planning principles is especially objectionable, in particular the following:

1. Growth is no longer **concentrated** in **existing** population centers - featuring **compact, mixed-use, walkable design** and located near **transit** options. Instead, land productivity is to be **optimized** (for convenience? sustainability?) in (existing? new?) population centers in (walkable? driveable?) **proximity** to existing (transit? highway?) **infrastructure**.
2. The proposed transportation planning principle makes no mention of multimodality, which is prominent in the existing transportation vision.
3. The desired housing is no longer a range of **densities**, types, and **sizes**. Instead, it's a **mix of quality** housing types, which is completely open to interpretation.

We respectfully urge the Maryland Department of Planning to abandon this bill and let the existing visions stand for the time being. We further urge the department to engage with the public in drafting new planning principles and come back to this next session. If desired, add the proposed equity planning principle as vision #13 and edit the existing housing vision to call for a range of "densities, types, sizes, **and price points**".

We hope the committee finds these points helpful and convincing and we urge its members to **vote against HB0286**. Thank you for your efforts and the opportunity for us to testify on this legislation.

[BaltPOP - Baltimoreans for People-Oriented Places](#)

References:

[1] Maryland Department of Planning. "Sustainable Growth Webinar Series". As of January 30, 2025

<https://planning.maryland.gov/Pages/OurEngagement/Webinars/planning-webinars-archive.aspx>

[2] Maryland Department of Transportation. "Context Driven Toolkit". As of January 30, 2025

<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/769bd85416ff4e46bf3cb78a67ed4640>

