



Maryland

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

HEARING DATE: February 4th, 2025

BILL NO: HB 286

COMMITTEE: Environment and Transportation

POSITION: Support

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT: Andrew Wilson (443) 721-6789

TITLE: Local Comprehensive Planning and State Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Policy – Planning Principles

BILL ANALYSIS:

HB 286 amends the state’s current twelve Planning Visions and the State Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Policy with an updated set of eight Planning Principles.

POSITION AND RATIONALE:

The Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) supports HB 286 and asks for a favorable report. This bill replaces the state’s current 12 Planning Visions and the State Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Policy (Policy) with an updated set of Planning Principles. This amendment seeks to further evolve past smart growth policy toward a more comprehensive sustainable growth model. It also adds clarity, improves alignment and simplifies the core planning principles for sustainable growth.

Originally adopted in 1992, the legislatively endorsed Policy and Planning Visions have been amended two times before, in 2000 and 2009. After MDP’s series of regional roundtables in the summer of 2024 with planning commissions and departments from across the state, MDP concluded, via feedback from attendees and additional engagement with local officials and their planning staff, that the current 12 planning visions were overly complicated and difficult to assess alongside the required comprehensive plan elements. As a result, the visions are not always used in the preparation of local plans, and when they are, they are often only added as a perfunctory measure to meet the letter of the law rather than truly embrace and implement the intent of the visions. This bill rebuilds these visions, making them more concise, consolidating redundant and overlapping visions as needed, and renaming them as planning principles. MDP will develop tangible methods which counties and municipalities can use to implement the principles. Further, this rebuilding aims to align the Policy with Governor Moore’s administrative priorities, particularly with its focus on equity, housing, transportation, economy, ecology, and land use. It is the goal of MDP that this rebuild of the Policy will help realize the Governor’s priorities and allow planners and local governments to more easily align their practices and projects with them.

The addition of equity as a Planning Principle brings focus to the need for inclusive planning processes and plans that prioritize underserved populations and areas most in need for capital investment and the development of plans and policies. Further, the rebuild of the Policy, and the implementation of the planning principles, is aimed to address and redress issues of equity in the areas of life that most deeply impact

Marylanders. Similarly, the addition of resilience as a Planning Principle addresses the need to identify risk factors and plan for reduction measures and the associated cost of recovery, as well as improve social connections and response systems that can help mitigate the negative impacts of natural- and human-caused threats. This bill's implementation will engage planners at the local and State level to enable a mix of quality housing types and affordability options, promote adaptive reuse, mixed-use, and context appropriate new development, heighten the resiliency of communities, and prioritize affordable, reliable, and energy efficient transportation networks. Combined, these planning principles aim to support the realization of more equitable health, educational, economic, and life outcomes in Maryland communities through the deliberative plan development process.

The legislative framework to implement the Planning Principles remains unchanged in §5-7A-02 of the State Finance & Procurement Article (SFPA) and §1-201 and §3-201 of the Land Use Article (LUA). MDP will be working with our state agency partners to ensure State public works, transportation, and major capital improvement projects further the Planning Principles. Local planners and jurisdictions will be encouraged to align their planning projects and practices with the new principles laid out in this bill, and this will cause an operational shift for local governments on planning related matters. MDP is committed to providing any assistance desired to make the transition to the new principles one that will not impact local government finances and minimize impacts to operations. Updating of local comprehensive plans to incorporate the updated Planning Principles will incrementally occur during the mandated 10-year review (per § 1-416(a) LUA for charter counties and § 3-301(a) LUA for non-charter and municipalities).