Senate Bill 197

Land Use – Comprehensive and General Plans – Alteration of Elements

MACo Position: **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

To: Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Date: January 21, 2026

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 197 **WITH AMENDMENTS**. This legislation from the Department of Planning seeks to align certain provisions in Maryland State law governing comprehensive plans with prior legislation transitioning local plans from a "visions" framework to a new "principles" framework.

For several years, the Department of Planning has been working with counties and municipalities to modernize the comprehensive planning process and update plan content. In 2025, this effort culminated in SB 236/HB 272, which formally phased out the former "visions" framework and replaced it with a more current and appropriate "principles" framework.

SB 197 builds on that 2025 legislation by updating additional sections of code that still reflect the former "visions" terminology and structure. The Department has worked closely with local governments throughout this process, and counties are grateful for both the approach and the strong partnership that has been fostered over the past several years.

Counties have three technical amendments to ensure the updated language remains implementable:

Amendment #1: Strike references to Places of Worship & Hospitals

On page 6, line 29; page 7, line 1; and page 30, lines 10 and 12, strike.

Including places of worship and hospitals is beyond the scope and purpose of comprehensive plans.

Amendment #2: Strike "design, and program" from the Place Element

On page 20, line 3, and on page 44, line 9, strike "design, and program".

The level of detail implied by this language is beyond the scope of a comprehensive plan and exceeds what is contemplated in the other newly formed principles. Additionally, other mandated plans already address comparable detail in a more appropriate format, including the Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plan (LPPRP).

Amendment #3: Grandfathering clause for counties and municipalities already updating, or that have recently updated, their Comprehensive Plan.

SECTION __. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That a county or municipal corporation that has amended, revised, readopted, modified, or has begun the process of amending, revising, readopting, or modifying a comprehensive plan before October 1, 2026, will not be required to implement the provisions of this Act until the next time that jurisdiction is required to review its comprehensive plan under Sections 1-416 and 3-301 of the Land Use Article.

Under current State law, each jurisdiction is required to regularly update its comprehensive plan, with counties and municipalities operating on largely individualized schedules. Additionally, jurisdictions may elect to update or revise certain plan elements earlier based on changing local conditions and community needs. Several counties are currently in the process of conducting these updates, with varying levels of progress. Counties request that plans already underway be grandfathered and that the updated principles framework be applied prospectively.

Counties thank the Department for a collaborative relationship that helps both levels of government better address the challenges facing our mutual constituents. These technical amendments are intended to ensure the updated provisions remain practical and implementable. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report for SB 197.