

BALTIMORE CHAPTER

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Progress toward Sustainable Growth in Maryland: “Life Within Walking Distance”

Maryland is the 5th most densely populated state. The population has grown by 39% during the past 27 years, and still is growing. An additional 1 million residents or 42,500 households are projected by 2030. Baltimore City easily could absorb half of the forecasted increase. Yet, people may not have acquired the ‘gene’ for urban living, according to **Jon Laria, Chair of the Maryland Sustainable Growth Commission and partner in Ballard Spahr, LLP’s Real Estate Department**. The Commission’s mission is to assess and advise on efforts in the State to achieve economic growth resource protection, and sound planning.

Mr. Laria discussed the Commission and the 12 Visions, *Maryland Annotated Code, State Finance and Procurement Article, 5 – 7A – 01 and Article 66B. 1.01*. This permanent body considers and makes recommendations by creating a broader and established forum on growth and development issues. Chair Laria observed that given the abstract nature of sprawl, the Commission is looking to foster a “Smart Growth IQ”. This aspiration would have school kids and soccer moms demanding an ethos for conservation, similar to that for the Chesapeake Bay. Seven workgroups (including Funding, Concentrating Growth, Education, PlanMaryland, Watershed Implementation, Indicators, and Adequate Public Facilities) are focused on complicated and interwoven sets of policy issues dealing with guiding growth.

Maryland has one of the oldest planning commissions, founded in the early 1930s; and the state is an acknowledged leader in advancing smart growth. In spite of the legislated smart growth policy of linking public funding to designated priority funding areas, the results have fallen far short of the original intention. Since 1997, more than three-quarters of residential growth has occurred in land area outside designated areas.

Gov. Martin O’Malley is looking at smart growth as an economic development issue — to save jobs and ensure lasting economic prosperity through energy conservation and sustainable green building. To meet the challenge, the Governor has designated 14 Transit Oriented Development sites around the state. Through the MD Dept of Planning (MDOP), Greenprint Maryland is a first-in-the-nation web-enabled map showing the relative ecological importance of every parcel of land in the State. There is a counterpart for Ag Print. Recently, MDOP unveiled a draft of Maryland’s first state growth plan, entitled PlanMaryland. The Commission has been engaged with PlanMaryland’s development and review.

[Tara B. Clifford](#), Baltimore Chapter Scribe