



May 17, 2019

Robert S. McCord  
Secretary  
Maryland Department of Planning  
301 West Preston Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Wendi Peters  
Special Secretary of Smart Growth  
Maryland Department of Planning  
301 West Preston Street, Suite 1501  
Baltimore Maryland 21201

Dear Secretary McCord and Special Secretary Peters:

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) offers the following comments to the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) on the draft version of the new state development plan, *A Better Maryland*.

### **In General**

*A Better Maryland* addresses MACo's four primary concerns that MACo also raised with the previous version of the state development plan, *PlanMaryland*.

1. **A "Bottom Up" Approach:** Rather than taking a "top down" managerial approach to the state development plan, MACo is pleased that *A Better Maryland* is adopting a "bottom up" approach that builds on local governments' robust comprehensive planning and zoning process. Local governments invest significant time, resources, and data analysis to draft their comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances. State laws and regulations already require local government to consider numerous factors and requirements as they draft their plans and ordinances. It is appropriate that their work should form the foundation of *A Better Maryland*.
2. **Horizontal Integration:** One of the best potential benefits of *A Better Maryland* is horizontal integration – stronger coordination and communication between state agencies regarding land use and transportation decisions. Currently, local governments may receive disparate or even conflicting positions from different state agencies. The references in *A Better Maryland* about addressing horizontal integration are greatly appreciated.
3. **Focused and Simple:** *A Better Maryland* will be most effective if it remains as simple and focused as possible. One of the major failings of *PlanMaryland* was that it created an unnecessary and complicated "place designation process" that was layered on top of existing land use designations with minimal incentives for local government participation. In contrast, *A Better Maryland* uses and builds on existing planning designations and programs. The result will be more understandable and accessible for local governments, stakeholder groups, and the general public.

4. A Collaborative Effort: MACo is also pleased with the collaborative focus of *A Better Maryland*. Collaboration is extensively referenced in the executive order creating *A Better Maryland* and the plan's vision statement. The public outreach process also reflected an inclusive and transparent approach that allowed for meaningful participation by local governments, stakeholders, and the general public. The outreach process included specific steps to identify local priorities and factor them into the plan's development.

### **Implementation Processes and Tools**

MACo is pleased with the general structure and objectives contained with the Implementation and Processes and Tools section of the draft (page 7). In particular, the objective of "Respect Regional Distinctions" avoids a "one size fits all" mentality.

However, in addition to regional differences, MACo also believes that it is important to acknowledge the differences in rural, urban, and suburban areas. These areas, even within the same region of the state, have very different needs and growth patterns. The recent report of the Maryland Sustainable Growth Commission, *Reinvest Maryland: Accelerating Infill, Redevelopment and Community Revitalization*, explicitly acknowledged these differences and MACo believes *A Better Maryland* should do so as well. This could be accomplished through: (1) the creation of one or more new objectives; (2) expanding the language of specific topics; or (3) the creation of more general language at the start of the plan.

### **Topics and Strategies**

MACo offers the following comments on specific topics and strategies found in *A Better Maryland*.

1. Sustaining Environment into the Future: Clarify under Strategy 4 (page 9) that this strategy only applies where a local jurisdiction wants to enact or carry out the regulations. This strategy should not impose a mandate on an unwilling local government.
2. Preserving Land: No comment.
3. Adapting and Becoming Resilient to Climate Change: In Strategy 3 (page 12), allow the adaptation planning assistance to apply to other local programs beyond hazard mitigation plans, comprehensive plans, and capital improvement programming. Some counties have established specific programs outside of the three listed in order to address climate change adaptation.

Strategy 6 (page 13) is somewhat vague on what it would actually do. The language should be rewritten to provide greater clarity.

Include transportation and utility infrastructure adaptation and resilience either as a separate strategy or incorporated into one of the existing strategies.

4. Improving Economic Growth and Development in Existing Communities: Strategy 4 (page 15) should be modified so that it is clear the data and online resources are meant to assist local community development planning and programming.
5. Tackling the Economic Development Needs of the Next Century: MACo believes one critical component is missing from this topic and that is agriculture. Agriculture remains a top industry in rural areas of the state and is undergoing significant technological and business changes in order to remain viable in a 21st century economy. There should be an additional strategy devoted to the modernization of agriculture or agriculture should be included in several of the current strategies where applicable.
6. Meeting Clean and Renewable Energy Goals: Strategy 3 (page 19) should reference the inclusion of specific county examples that have successfully gone through a rezoning process to accommodate utility scale solar.
7. Addressing Maryland's Transportation, Infrastructure, and Technology Challenges and Opportunities: Given the infrastructure funding challenges facing both the State and local governments, MACo recommends creating an additional ninth strategy:
  9. *Review and study ways to increase infrastructure funding sources for state and local roads, transit, water and sewer, information technology, and other critical infrastructure to strengthen communities and enhance economic development potential.*  
*State Visions: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12*  
*Schedule: 0-2 years; 2-4 years; 4-6 years*  
*Agencies: DBM, MDOT, MDP*  
*Objectives:*
    - *Build Capacity in Communities*
    - *Improve the Delivery of Programs and Services to Local Jurisdictions*
    - *Respect Regional Distinctions*
8. Creating Workforce/Affordable Housing: Modify the strategies in this topic as appropriate to reflect the passage of HB 1045/SB 917 during the 2019 Session which requires local governments to include a housing element that addresses workforce and affordable housing in their comprehensive plans. The strategies should be consistent with the new comprehensive plan requirements.
9. Protecting Historic and Cultural Resources: No comment.
10. Creating Quality Places: Strategy 3 (page 27) would “promote projects that enhance accessibility over mobility in local jurisdictions” but it is not clear what “accessibility” means in this context. There is accessibility under the Americans With Disabilities Act, accessibility to multi-modal transportation options, accessibility to destinations, etc. The Strategy should be rewritten to provide greater clarity.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, MACo is pleased to be able to offer these positive comments and constructive criticisms on the draft of *A Better Maryland*. MACo would be happy to work with MDP and any other relevant stakeholders to address the concerns raised in this letter.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at 410.269.0043 or [lknapp@mdcounties.org](mailto:lknapp@mdcounties.org) if you have questions or need further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Leslie Knapp Jr.".

Leslie Knapp Jr.  
Legal and Policy Counsel  
MACo