



PlanMaryland

Local officials question wisdom of PlanMaryland strategy

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A state official Monday night urged Bainbridge Development Corp. to get with Cecil County and Port Deposit officials before they make comments to the state about the PlanMaryland strategy.

PlanMaryland is a new growth strategy the state hopes to adopt this fall. State officials are calling the plan a blueprint for a "smart, green and growing" Maryland, but some local officials question its wisdom.

The draft, released April 28, is currently under a 120-day public review and comment period, which ends Sept. 1.

"So far, the plan has upset a lot of people," said Mario Gangemi, a new member of the BDC board attending his first official meeting.

Cathy Mateer, a land acquisition and disposal official with the Department of General Services in Baltimore, said she attended interagency meetings during the development of PlanMaryland.

"I think it's all about things like Bainbridge," Mateer said Monday night. "They are urging comments from the public and developers.

"They've heard things like, let's find out where there is infrastructure and encourage growth there and where there isn't - preserve (land)," she said.

A color-coded state map prepared for each county under the plan shows the state government has already established priority funding areas as orange and newly established targeted areas as red.

"The red areas on the map are designated for higher density growth, or in-fill projects," said John Leocha, a planner with the Maryland Department of Planning. "The state calls them key priority areas."

The red areas appear to be restricted to town limits where infrastructure is in place.

"My advice to you is to review this and make your comments," he said, calling the plan a possible "policy shaper," but not a "new policy."

The map has drawn the most criticism among Cecil County local officials who see it as a signal the state government is about to significantly restrict growth here.

BDC Executive Director Donna Tapley told board members Monday that Maryland has left Bainbridge off its PlanMaryland growth map as a "targeted area," which has upset a lot of people.

Despite being included in Cecil County's designated growth corridor and in the state's priority funding area and one of the county's enterprise zones, Tapley said, "Somehow we missed being targeted as a growth priority."

"As a board we need to communicate our concerns to the state on this," said Tapley.

She explained to the board that much of the county's growth corridor is also not included in either the targeted or the priority funding areas.

"To have Bainbridge show up as orange and not red on this map is a slap in the face," said Port Deposit Town Commissioner Judy Leonard. "The town of Port Deposit has to grow. If you would develop every inch of Port's downtown, it's not going to help.

"We need Bainbridge," she said, calling it a model project.

"It may very well be that Bainbridge needs to be red instead of orange," said Mateer, cautioning her that this plan only shapes how Maryland needs to grow. "It's not necessarily hard and fast rules."

Cecil County Director of Economic Development Vernon Thompson said if the state intends to restrict funding to only the targeted areas on the map, it will be seriously restricting growth.

"This could be the single biggest mistake Maryland will make," he said.

Leocha told the BDC he thinks the state is trying to be more fiscally and environmentally responsible by launching this growth plan.

"This plan helps departments come together and channel our money in a more fiscally responsible way," Leocha said.

When Tapley asked Leocha if the new plan will also restrict permits, he said he didn't think it would, at least for water and sewer projects.