

A Sustainable Chesapeake

BETTER MODELS FOR CONSERVATION

Edited by David G. Burke and Joel E. Dunn

THE CONSERVATION FUND



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Valleys Planning Council

Using Smart Growth, Ecology-Based Planning and Community Advocacy to Preserve a Treasured Landscape in Baltimore County, Maryland

The Valleys Planning Council served as the catalyst for the legendary 1964 ecology-based *Plan for the Valleys* by Ian McHarg—laying the groundwork for a 47-year track record of achievement in resource conservation, land preservation, and growth management in northwestern Baltimore County, Maryland.

CASE STUDY SUMMARY

People traveling through northwestern Baltimore County within the territory covered by the Valleys Planning Council (VPC) will be struck by the marked transition from urban to rural land use as they cross the county's Urban Rural Demarcation Line (URDL) (See sidebar on the following page). Within a mile of the Baltimore Beltway, drivers heading north cross the demarcation line, into that portion of the county zoned for resource conservation. The suburban surroundings quickly change into a rural environment: narrow, two-lane roads winding through rolling countryside, forested ridgelines, and lush valleys. The land uses outside the URDL are primarily large-lot residential, horse farms, forests, and crop fields. The rural area also houses a number of private institutional uses that serve as an effective transition zone from urban to rural in many locations.

The effectiveness of the growth boundary, conservation zoning, and easements is apparent to even the casual observer. Planners who marvel at the success in containing sprawl often ask how Baltimore County

established growth management tools at such an early and critical stage of the county's development. Why was Baltimore County decades ahead of other jurisdictions in its ability to envision the need and mechanisms for growth management? A significant contribution to the county's early land use vision came from a proactive and forward-thinking group of residents who cherished the valleys' landscape and realized the looming threat to it from swelling population centers on all sides and decided a regional plan was needed.

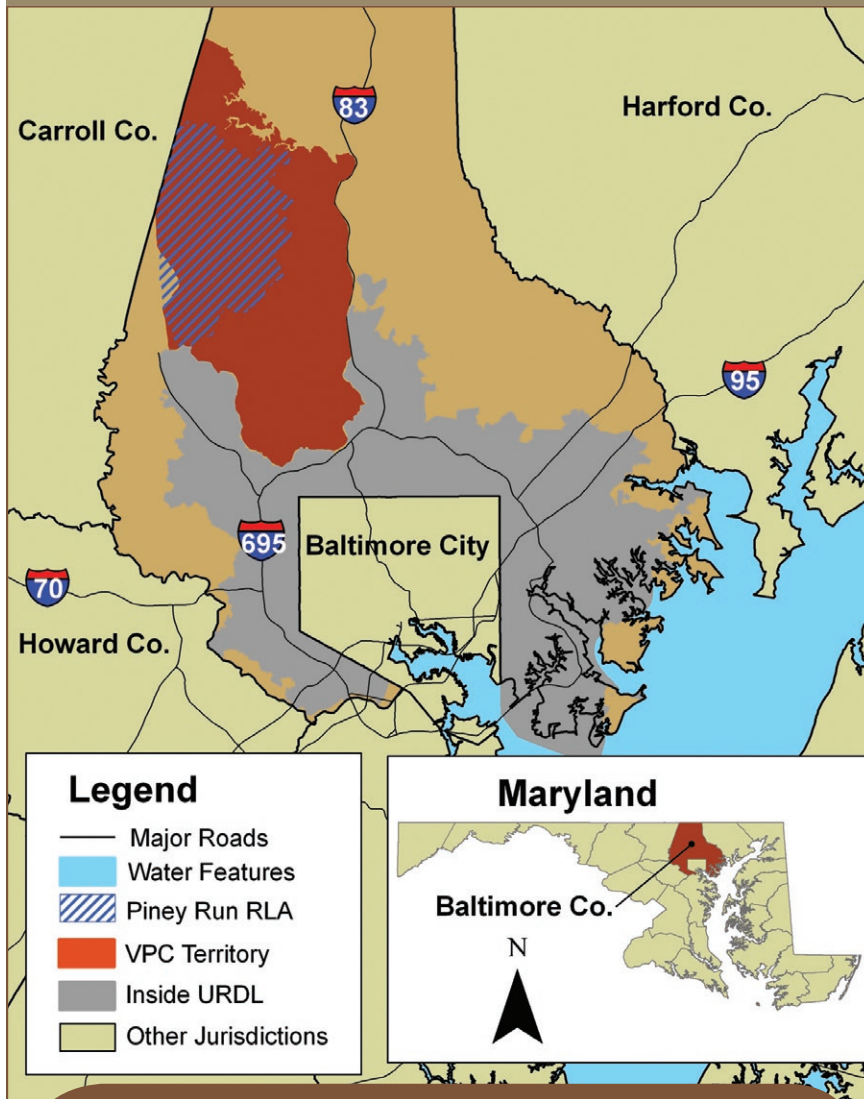
In 1962, the group formed a non-profit, and raised \$100,000 for a land use study to protect the valleys in northwestern Baltimore County and direct future growth to appropriate areas. Renowned landscape architect Ian McHarg and urban planner David Wallace were hired, and the *Plan for the Valleys* was published in 1964.¹ It was a landmark document in its day, and is still highly regarded as a breakthrough in ecology-based landscape planning. It was featured as a chapter in McHarg's 1967 acclaimed work *Design With Nature*.²

Almost 50 years later, the Valleys Planning Council is still going strong—maintaining its well-regarded role as “the eyes and ears” of the valleys. The Council's work is frequently strengthened by partnerships with land trusts and local community associations who are often aligned on issues. In 2009, the Council returned to its roots by hiring Wallace, Roberts and Todd, the current incarnation of the firm that prepared the original *Plan for the Valleys*, to assist VPC in preparing recommendations for an update of the Baltimore County Master Plan.

While it would be difficult to duplicate the entire effort forged over decades by the Valleys Planning Council, there is much that other citizen-led groups can learn from this organization's experience. Important natural and cultural landscape features, open space, streams, drinking water supplies and other shared resources can be protected with minimal funding by an engaged and dedicated set of supporters.

The widely recognized and respected organization helps shape local land use and environmental laws and

Valleys Planning Council Location Map



The Valleys Planning Council territory covers 130 square miles in the north-west quadrant of Baltimore County, MD. The VPC territory lies outside the county's Urban Rural Demarcation Line or URDL, and includes the Piney Run Rural Legacy Area.

decisions by informing and mobilizing the public, utilizing local media coverage to spotlight particular issues and actions, and maintaining regular contact with elected officials and agency staff.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE

When the *Plan for the Valleys* was initiated in the early '60s, the VPC's territory was only about half the size it is today. The area was described in the *Plan* as follows:

Its 70 square miles and almost 45,000 acres contain great sweeping valleys, wooded ridges and plateaus, an intricate pattern of streams, farms, rural roads, and copses of trees. It is a beautiful inheritance, a serious responsibility, an area threatened, a challenge and opportunity.

Today, VPC's 130-square-mile territory extends further north to the Prettyboy Reservoir and includes portions of three major watersheds: Jones Falls, Loch Raven, and Prettbody. The Jones

THE URBAN RURAL DEMARCATION LINE

Established in 1967, Baltimore County's growth boundary is called the Urban Rural Demarcation Line. Known locally as the URDL (rhymes with "girdle"), the boundary separates urban and rural areas. Areas inside the URDL are served by public water and sewer systems and have higher-density zoning. Areas outside the URDL rely on wells and septic systems and have low-density resource conservation zoning.

Baltimore County has no municipalities. Instead, the county's urban area is inside the URDL. The entire county is governed by the Baltimore County Council. The effectiveness of the URDL and the restrictive rural zoning is evidenced by the fact that 90% of the county's population lives within the URDL on 33% of the county's land area. The remaining 10% of the population lives outside the URDL on 67% of the land.

Falls and Loch Raven watersheds contain portions inside the URDL, and much of the development in these areas predates stormwater management regulations. The Prettyboy watershed remained more rural until recent decades when subdivision activity gained momentum. About 50% of the watershed is agricultural and nearly 40% is forested. All three watersheds contain "impaired" surface waters, meaning they have stream segments that fail to meet one or more federal water quality standards.

The VPC territory contains several stream segments that today qualify as high-quality, Tier II waters (See



An aerial view of a portion of the VPC territory along the Falls Road corridor illustrates the mix of large-lot residential, agricultural, and forest cover which typify the land uses in the valleys.

Land Management Features Map). There are 85 Tier II stream segments in Maryland. These stream segments exceed federal water quality standards and fall under an “antidegradation policy” that calls for greater protection from harmful impacts. Land preservation efforts in the valleys have undoubtedly contributed to the existence of these Tier II stream segments, and adequate protection is now a requirement.

Water quality is of particular concern in the Prettyboy and Loch Raven watersheds as they contain large reservoirs that, along with Liberty reservoir, supply the drinking water for 1.8 million people in Baltimore City and five surrounding counties. About another one million residents in the metropolitan area watersheds have wells and depend on groundwater supplies. Baltimore City owns the three reservoirs and operates the central regional water system, but it owns only about six percent of the watershed. The bulk of the reservoir watershed lands are in Baltimore and Carroll counties. Water quantity and quality is a resource of critical importance to the Valleys Planning

Council and many other groups working on land use, conservation, and environmental issues. Residents are concerned about the health of streams, reservoirs, and the Chesapeake Bay.

Protection of the prolific Cockeysville Marble Aquifer was identified as an important need in both the 1964 *Plan for the Valleys* and the 1989 *Supplement to the Plan for the Valleys*.³ It remains a key concern for VPC. Should the county ever have to supply its own public system of water, this aquifer would be the source, not to mention the many wells that already draw from it.

CONSERVATION VISION

The vision that united the supporters of the Valleys Planning Council was a plan that would spare the valleys from sprawl development and preserve farming, the rural landscape, and natural resources. It set the direction for a large area, which influenced the direction of the county and led to legislation, ordinances, and a strong focus on easements for the permanent preservation of agricultural and resource lands.

The *Plan for the Valleys (Plan)* was an ecology-based study and landscape plan that contained recommendations to create growth patterns that preserve water, forests, farmland, and other natural resources. The “Basic Amenity” map in the *Plan* focused on the valley floors and valley walls (areas of steep slope) of three valleys: Worthington, Caves, and Green Spring. The floors of the valleys were deemed to be most vulnerable due to the physiography, zoning at that time (one-acre lots), and land values. The *Plan* provided the foundation for limiting sprawl and retaining much of the natural, green infrastructure that makes the area both beautiful and productive. The *Plan* linked resource preservation and intelligent use of the landscape to an enhanced quality of life. The *Plan* helped inform and motivate a large constituency that has gained considerable recognition and influence.

The VPC leadership saw the need to curb sprawl by directing growth. The idea was to achieve an optimum land use that would accommodate growth but preserve the rural character and special resources of the area.

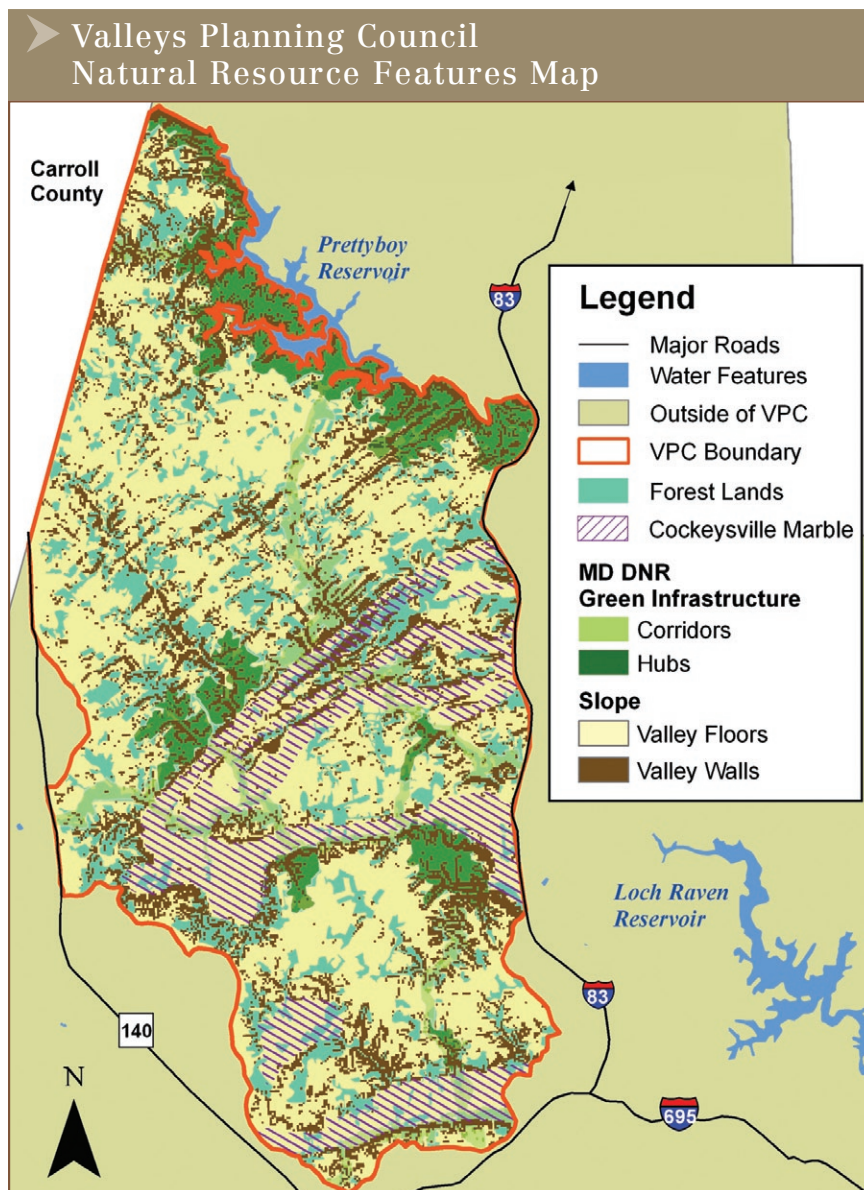


Preselecting areas to receive public water and sewer was a primary tenet of the plan. This was viewed as an effective barrier to growth. VPC also saw the need for conservation zoning that would preserve sufficient land to support farming, and VPC worked with farmers and others to get initial resource conservation zoning in place and later helped make incremental improvements. As a result, Baltimore County is among the leaders nationally in rural preservation and effective conservation zoning, and for a county in a metropolitan area, it has a high percentage of forest (34% of land cover).

The original plan called for several plateau areas to be more heavily developed and to be served by public water and sewer. This concept was later scaled back by the county's designation of the more restrictive URDL. At the time the *Plan* was developed, only three subdivisions out of a total of fifty-five were served by water and sewer, and five were served only by water. The URDL was established in time to prevent connections to outlying subdivisions, thereby limiting sprawl and encouraging development in existing service areas.

The growth boundary alone was not enough to control and direct growth.

directing growth away from prime and productive soils, steep slopes, and sensitive resource areas. A major focus of VPC's work in the early days was helping to create and apply effective resource conservation zoning. Although zoning is a temporary measure that can change over time, it is an important way to limit and direct development and has been a stable and effective tool in Baltimore County. Permanent protection through perpetual conservation easements is the best way to achieve land preservation, and VPC has worked continuously to create and support land trusts and to promote and defend easements.



IMPLEMENTATION RESOURCES

VPC currently operates on a modest annual budget of less than \$250,000. The budget covers basic operating expenses of maintaining an office and paying two full-time and one part-time staff persons. Additional funds for specific activities are raised on an as-needed basis. For example, in 2005 almost \$50,000 was raised to prepare a study and recommendations on Rural Road Design Standards. Funds were used to hire two transportation engineers to conduct the study. As a second example, between 2004 and 2009, over \$41,000 in individual contributions was raised to challenge the approval of a development plan for a major subdivision in a sensitive area.

Studies and development challenges like these are treated as "special projects" by the organization, and these funds are not included in the operating budget. Instead, funds are raised on an as-needed basis to pay for legal, stormwater, traffic, environmental and other experts who help challenge plan approvals or conduct targeted studies. Although the bulk of the funds for these actions are raised by individual contributions for a particular project, VPC occasionally



The Caves Valley is less than five miles outside the Baltimore Beltway. The valley floor overlays the Cockeysville Marble aquifer. The Caves Valley Land Trust has obtained conservation easements covering 75% of this 2,000-acre valley. In the '70s and '80s large subdivisions were proposed for this area, as well as changes to zoning that would allow greater density than RC2. The VPC successfully challenged those efforts and eventually worked out a compromise for a golf course on a portion of the valley floor. The VPC holds covenants with the golf course that restrict development and provide for monitoring of wells. In 2005, the VPC challenged another proposed development of a forested tract in the Caves Valley. VPC won that case and that property (49 acres) was put under easement in 2007, bringing the total easement acreage in the Caves Valley to 1,443.

receives grants from local foundations for this work.

VPC raises about \$200,000 each year in annual contributions from individuals. In 2008, five contributors gave at the highest level, which is \$5,000. That year, roughly 45% of the contributions to VPC's annual fund came from individual families who gave \$1,000 or more (the recommended amount for annual board member contributions). Like many non-profits, the category with the most contributors was for gifts between \$10 and \$149. The full spectrum of givers is needed to keep the organization viable.

Raising the annual operating budget is a year-round task for the staff.

VPC is fortunate to have many long-standing members who have been consistent supporters. However, there is always attrition, so new supporters are needed. Also, operating costs tend to gradually rise over the years, but contributors do not generally increase their annual giving amounts from year to year. Thus, it is not unusual for there to be a gap between operating income and operating expenses. To address this, the organization holds a special event in most years. Such events are significant time commitments for a small staff but a necessary element of solvency.

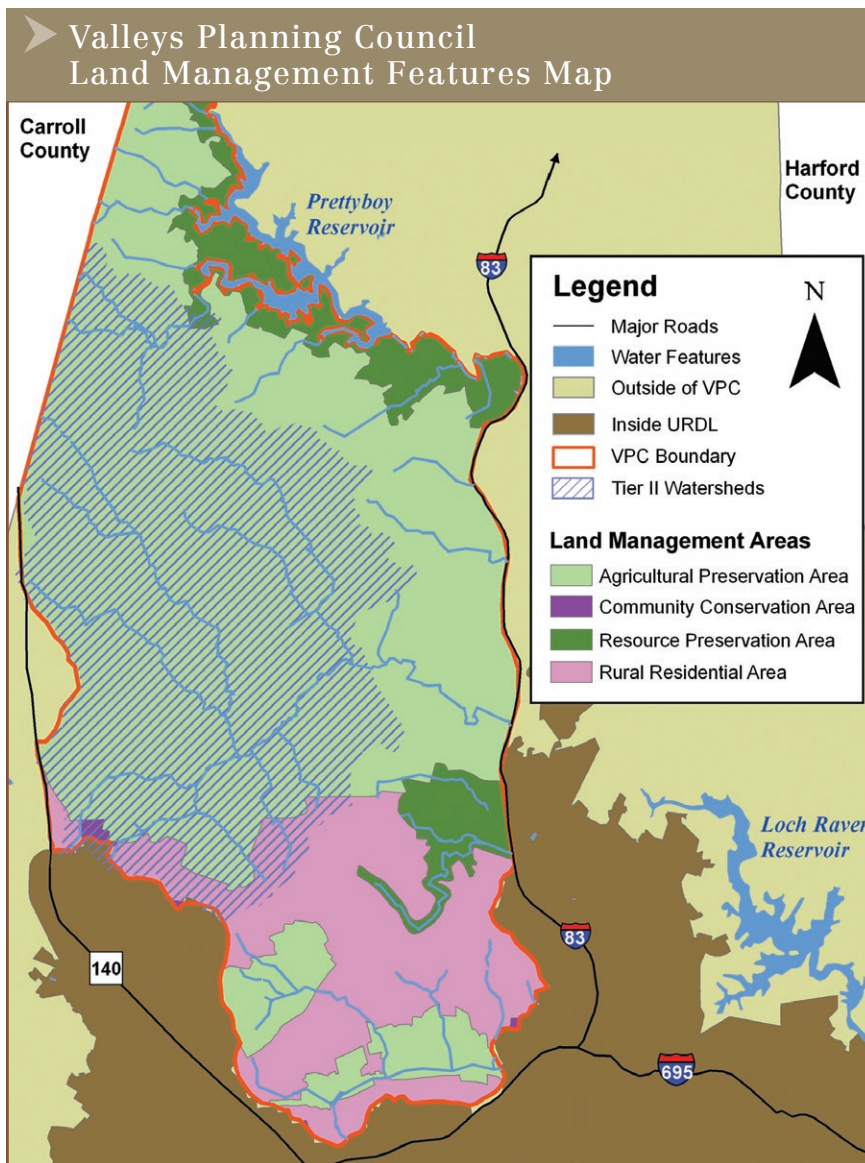
CONSERVATION STRATEGY

As a result of the *Plan for the Valleys* and subsequent actions by Baltimore

County and state government, many plans, policies and land use controls are now in place to ensure that basic conservation and development goals in the *Plan* are achieved or improved upon. The fundamental conservation strategy of VPC is to leverage and direct public land use and conservation policy to preserve farming and protect the resources and scenic beauty of the valleys.

Three operational principles guide the organization's day-to-day conservation strategies:

- ▶ Maintaining a group of informed and dedicated residents who use all available tools to promote resource conservation and manage growth in accordance with sound plans and policies.



PLANNING AND SMART GROWTH

The *Plan for the Valleys* was the study that galvanized the residents of northwest Baltimore County, gained the respect of county agencies and elected officials, and laid a foundation for moving in the direction of smart growth. It included concepts such as directing future growth to the most suitable areas (plateaus), limiting growth on valley floors, and preserving forested steep slopes. It recommended limiting growth by controlling the provision of public water and sewer. It presented the landscape as an interconnected system that is kept healthy by maintaining fully functioning ecological systems.

The cutting-edge ecological analysis and land use planning employed in the *Plan* laid the groundwork for the creation of Baltimore County's Resource Conservation zones, which the VPC vigorously supported and continues working to improve, defend, and support. The URDL was another early planning milestone instituted after the publication of the *Plan* and supported by the Council.

VPC supported the creation of the first Baltimore County Master Plan in 1972 and participates in all updates to the plan. The plan serves as the guide for development and conservation, and all county land use laws and policies must be consistent with the Master Plan. The Baltimore County Master Plan includes an acreage goal for land preservation (80,000 acres in a county that is roughly 383,000 acres in size), describes designated scenic roads and historic districts, and sets the framework for urban and rural growth, inside and outside the URDL. The Master Plan, referred to in many jurisdictions as the local comprehensive plan, can be a major asset to groups like VPC.

- Monitoring and challenging inappropriate or inconsistent actions that would undermine sound land use policies and preservation programs and/or create harmful precedents.
- Initiating steps to create new or improved tools, such as zoning amendments, administrative policies, or regulations, when new threats are anticipated or a need for increased protection is realized.

The conservation and development tools available in Baltimore County may or may not be like those in other local jurisdictions in the Chesapeake region. However, it is important to realize that the strategy

of shaping these tools to meet local planning goals can be successfully implemented anywhere. These tools can generally be grouped into the following categories:

- Planning and Smart Growth
- Land Conservation
- Historic Preservation
- Zoning and Regulation
- Monitoring and Activism

The discussion below describes how the Valleys Planning Council works to promote conservation and to limit the impacts and intensity of development in the rural area.

The State of Maryland has passed several important pieces of legislation that have helped move the counties in the direction of smart growth and resource protection. The state's growth management laws have been complemented with well-funded easement and open space programs. Concerns about the deteriorated condition of the Chesapeake Bay have led to many regulatory changes, most recently an overhaul of stormwater regulations and a new requirement for a Water Resources Element in local comprehensive plans. VPC supports state efforts like these, as they provide added tools to use at the local level and added oversight at the state level to ensure compliance.

LAND CONSERVATION

As recommended in the *Plan for the Valleys*, the VPC launched a local land trust in 1986, the Land Preservation Trust. In 1988, it helped create the Caves Valley Land Trust. Both orga-

nizations have been very successful in obtaining conservation easements. VPC does not hold any easements itself, but works closely with local land trusts and the state's Maryland Environmental Trust (MET) to help facilitate and enforce easements.

VPC takes every opportunity to support the county in its preservation activities, including encouraging continuation of state and local preservation funding programs and expansion of federal incentives for donated easements. VPC hosts informational meetings on the benefits of conservation easements for landowners, and supports a part-time staff person who assists interested residents in exploring their options. Information on easement programs and new easement properties are regularly featured in the VPC newsletter.

VPC also initiated the first Rural Legacy grant for the area and

provided the up-front administrative costs for the first several years. The Piney Run Rural Legacy Area is one of the most successful of the designated areas in Maryland and has been awarded over \$22 million since the program's inception. The Rural Legacy Program provides state funding for easements in designated large-block areas, designed to protect a critical mass of farmland.

Historic Preservation: The VPC supported the formation of several historic districts within its territory, and spearheaded the applications for the Greenspring Valley National Register Historic District in 1980 and the Caves Valley Historic District in 1988. Also, VPC is sometimes involved in promoting individual properties for the county's landmark list.

Historic designation of structures and areas can be a very useful tool. The VPC has used such designations effectively to prevent the erection

The VPC initiated the first Piney Run Rural Legacy Grant in 1998. The local Land Preservation Trust took over management of the rural legacy grants and has been successful in obtaining over \$22 million from that state program. Over 16,000 acres have been protected within the Piney Run Rural Legacy Area, a portion of which is shown in the photo below.



of unsightly cell towers, to oppose inappropriate development within a historic district, to support downzoning requests and oppose upzoning requests, and to save individual structures. Protecting a historic area or site generally protects associated land and resources that were not adequately protected by other regulations.

Zoning and Regulation: A primary tool used by the VPC and many other groups in the county is conservation zoning. Baltimore County initiated progressive changes to local zoning in 1975 when it created Resource Conservation (RC) zones. VPC's support of RC2 zoning in the early '70s was instrumental in its passage. This was perhaps the most restrictive zoning in the country at that time. Getting this conservation zoning in place for a large portion of the county allowed time for further planning, analysis, and creation of the finer-tuned tools

that followed and provided even greater protection.

The regulations for the RC2 zone evolved over time, starting out with a density of 0.2 or 20 houses per 100 acres. This was a hard-fought battle at the time, but it was soon realized that such density was not sufficient to protect farmland. The present-day RC2 allows a maximum of two lots on any parcels sized between 2 and 100 acres. As science and analysis tools progressed, more restrictive zones were created starting in 2000 with the RC6, RC7, and RC8 zones, which provide for greater protection of the most sensitive areas, also known as "green infrastructure."

An unusual aspect of Baltimore County zoning regulations is the quadrennial Comprehensive Zoning Map Process (CZMP). During the CZMP, any person or community association can request a change in zoning on

any piece of property, regardless of ownership. This process results in hundreds of requests for zoning changes in each four-year cycle. Due to proactive groups like VPC, most of the requests in the rural area of the county (which is 2/3 of the county) are for downzoning. Thousands of rural acres have been downzoned through issues raised during the CZMP cycles.

Baltimore County has many effective and progressive environmental regulations designed to protect streams, forests and other resources. The *Plan* pointed to the need to protect forests and streams and called for wide stream buffers. Today, Baltimore County has complex environmental regulations that address many of those early goals. Regulations and plans are so complex that when evaluating a proposed development plan, VPC must often hire its own expert to check calculations and measurements. VPC has won several notable development plan challenges by proving that a planned stormwater outfall was not suitable, that a planned stormwater pond was not of sufficient size, that an outfall would result in an unacceptable rise in temperature of a trout stream, or other issues related to stormwater management.

A lawyer is generally needed for such a challenge. In many cases, VPC also uses the services of the People's Counsel. This is a lawyer housed in the county Planning Office who reviews all zoning cases to ensure that the zoning code is properly upheld. Citizens and groups like VPC often work with the People's Counsel to challenge zoning decisions that appear to be flawed or based on an odd interpretation of the regulations. VPC has worked with the People's Council on numerous cases involving issues inside and outside the organization's territory, sometimes testifying on projects in other parts of the county

BALTIMORE COUNTY'S RESOURCE CONSERVATION ZONES (FOUR OF TEN RC ZONES ARE DESCRIBED.)

RC2, an agricultural protection zone, is designed to foster conditions favorable to a continued agricultural use of land with productive soils. Over 30% of the county is zoned RC2 which has a density of two lots for any parcels between 2 and 100 acres, with a minimum lot size of 1 acre.

RC6, a rural conservation and residential zone, is a relatively new and complicated zone designed to protect total ecosystem function of sensitive areas and foster creative site planning. The most sensitive portions of a given RC6 property are designated as Primary Conservancy Areas and afforded greater protection, and this area is netted out of the acreage used for the density calculation of 0.2 lots per acre (1 house per 5 acres). It also has a 10% impervious surface cap for most uses.

RC7, a resource preservation zone, was created to provide a true one lot per 50 acre zone. It has a density of 0.04 lots per acre for tracts > 50 acres. Tracts < 50 acres cannot be subdivided in this zone.

RC8, an environmental enhancement zone, is designed to protect forests, reservoir watersheds and extensive natural areas. Allowed density is 0.02 lots per acre (1 lot per 50 acres) for tracts ≥ 51 acres. One to three lots are allowed on tracts up to 50 acres in size, depending on the size of the parcel.



Baltimore County enjoys a healthy agriculture sector, in large part due to the actions that have preserved large blocks of farmland. Approximately 37 percent of the county is designated as Agricultural Preservation Area under the County's land management areas. There are over 53,000 acres of land under perpetual conservation easement. Baltimore County also has the state's largest equine population valued at over \$121 million.

that could set a bad precedent for a particular RC zone or other issue of concern countywide.

MONITORING AND ACTIVISM

VPC is known in the local community as "the eyes and ears of the valleys." VPC monitors and participates in activities affecting land use including development plans, comments on proposed changes to policies and regulations, testifies at public meetings, serves on planning committees, and stays in close touch with elected officials and county staff. Many citizens with an interest in such matters cannot keep abreast of complicated issues and often do not have the flexibility in their schedule to attend hearings or meetings. Having VPC track land use issues and provide concise updates to constituents keeps interested persons in the loop. They are also advised when direct action is needed and what kind of action is

likely to be effective. VPC provides information on signing petitions, letter-writing campaigns, attendance needed at public hearings, and sometimes suggests calls to elected officials. Sharing information has been greatly enhanced by the use of email and the website. A periodic newsletter and action alerts are also utilized.

VPC staff monitors all development proposals, development plan amendments, and water and sewer plan amendments submitted to the county and routinely comments on proposed projects within its territory. Staff also regularly attends review meetings, zoning commissioner hearings, planning board meetings, and county council sessions, expressing opinions and positions as appropriate.

SUMMARY

VPC is able to motivate citizen action through communications that describe the potential impacts to

their community, property, and future quality of life. VPC has found that local families willingly and generously support the organization knowing it is there to help sort out complex issues and provide practical solutions. Part of the continuing mission and conservation strategy of VPC is to push the county towards excellence in the areas of smart growth, land conservation, and watershed protection.

RESULTS

After more than 45 years at the helm of planning, outreach, education and advocacy work, the VPC has a long list of individual accomplishments. The organization has been part of a collective effort by many groups and public agencies to curb sprawl, preserve sensitive and productive lands, and accommodate reasonable growth. As a result of partnerships with the VPC, land trusts, and other local groups, and by conducting and





Control of the size of local roads was identified by VPC as an unaddressed component of Smart Growth that unwittingly accommodates sprawl development. In the absence of design standards for local roads, federal highway guidelines are typically substituted, resulting in inappropriately and unnecessarily wide roadways. VPC published a study and recommended rural road design standards in 2005. A version of those standards was adopted by Baltimore County in 2008. The goal of the standards is to maintain the rural character of the roads and to complement, rather than conflict with, local land use policies and preservation programs.

sharing extensive environmental analyses and studies, Baltimore County has become a leader in environmental planning and growth management. Collectively, this work has resulted in very effective preservation of rural lands, natural resources, and rural character.

The proof of VPC's effectiveness is best observed on the ground, seeing the large expanses of forests and open space that still exist in the valleys. Highlights of successful actions

taken over the years by VPC in the effort to preserve the valleys include:

- ▶ Published the *Plan for the Valleys*, an inspired ecology-based land use plan that laid the groundwork for the county's URDL, effective rural conservation zoning, variable buffer widths, protection of steep slopes, and other environmental and land use regulations.
- ▶ Recognized that road development and expansions were generally omitted from smart growth and

conservation planning, often resulting in road improvement proposals that would be counterproductive to the county's rural land use policies and goals. To address this the VPC fought many individual battles such as an early concept for an outer beltway; numerous proposed road, bridge and intersection improvements that were either dropped or significantly scaled back; and attempts to use land under conservation easements for expanding roadways and/or bridges. Ultimately, the VPC hired

engineers to develop rural road design standards which led to the County Council adopting standards in 2008.

- ▶ Maintained the integrity of the URDL by routinely opposing requests for water and sewer extensions in the planned non-service area.
- ▶ Took actions that helped preserve farmland and maintain a viable agricultural industry.
- ▶ Contributed to successful easement efforts by helping to create two local land trusts (Caves Valley Land Trust and the Land Preservation Trust), hosting easement workshops and events, and initiating the first application for the Piney Run Rural Legacy Area.
- ▶ Supported creation of several historic districts, preparing the successful applications for two districts (Greenspring Valley National Register Historic District and Caves Valley Historic District).
- ▶ Helped downzone hundreds of acres of rural lands by initiating and/or supporting issues filed during the Comprehensive Zoning Map Process.
- ▶ Prevented development of many sensitive areas by successfully challenging residential and institutional building proposals that would have had an adverse impact on natural resources; two recent illustrative cases prevented development of houses (18 on one site and 13 on another) on sensitive parcels that were instead purchased by conservation buyers.
- ▶ Preserved the rural and historic character of the valleys by supporting only well-camouflaged, stealth cell towers and opposing proposals for towers that intrude on the scenic landscape, and by enforcing sign ordinances, limiting outdoor lighting, and insisting on the least amount of guardrail possible along roadways.

- ▶ Assisted in enforcement of environmental and zoning regulations by reporting unpermitted actions and failures to adhere to laws and court decisions. Actions such as clearing trees; illegal grading or paving; unapproved withdrawals from or discharges to streams; and uses not permitted by zoning are routinely reported and challenged as appropriate.
- ▶ Limited future development of private institutions, commercial operations, and subdivisions by entering into restrictive covenants that set student caps, designate building envelopes, limit parking, require tree planting or other buffers, and other provisions to control the scale and design of large facilities and developments in the rural area.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

- ▶ Planning at the landscape level with a bold vision for the future has been a major catalyst to achieving results and has provided a foundation for sound regulation and policies.
- ▶ Taking action to achieve broader policy and regulation solutions, rather than participating in endless project-by-project battles, is efficient and effective and has the desired long-term effect.
- ▶ Using a combination of conservation zoning and conservation easements provides the tools for effective growth management and long-term land preservation.
- ▶ Maintaining the organizational structure of VPC with professional staff, a large board, and committed membership has assured deep-rooted community involvement and steady financial support.
- ▶ Maintaining a non-partisan status keeps a strict focus on land use issues.
- ▶ Fostering relationships and frequent contact with public agency staff and elected officials is

BALTIMORE COUNTY LAND USE AND LAND MANAGEMENT RESULTS

- ▶ 90% of the county's population lives inside the URDL on 1/3 of the county's land area and is serviced by public water and sewer;
- ▶ 10% of the county's population lives outside the URDL on 2/3 of the county's land area, utilizing wells and septic systems;
- ▶ Over 50,000 acres are protected under easement throughout the entire county;
- ▶ Baltimore County adopted Rural Road Design Standards in 2008, initially prepared and recommended by the VPC;
- ▶ Baltimore County has created an effective stream buffer regulation that requires a varying width of protection based on soils and slopes, with a minimum width of 75' on each bank, but in some cases may require 100-200' or more;
- ▶ Fifty-five miles of stream in Baltimore County have Tier II status (exceptional quality waters that must receive a higher standard of protection); 62 sites have known trout populations;
- ▶ Baltimore County has established a Forest Sustainability Committee, on which VPC participates, that is supporting new initiatives to protect and restore forested areas, prevent further fragmentation, and promote better management of forests.



essential to staying informed and providing timely input/action.

- Developing a stable of reliable, credible and affordable experts to help evaluate development plans and regulations helps the staff and board understand and address complicated issues and proposals.
- Ensuring that messages of concern from VPC are leveraged through cultivation of the media, local community groups, and others who can apply pressure helps build momentum when it is needed to affect outcomes.
- Establishing a willingness to stand united behind the basic principles of the landscape plan and using well-reasoned arguments creates a solid reputation that commands respect and consistently earns a seat at the table on important issues.
- Having a full-time, qualified staff creates a professional impression and provides a steady contact for both public agency staff and contributors.



Much of the VPC's work is evidenced by what has not occurred on the landscape. Due to the combination of early regional planning and the subsequent rural conservation zoning and easement programs, much of the valley walls and floors have been spared from development and remain in agricultural or forested land uses.

PHOTOS AND FIGURES

All photos by Valleys Planning Council
All figures by Burke Environmental Associates/The Conservation Fund

REFERENCES

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