



ALLIANCE  
FOR LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

## Planning for the People Here Now



**From a high-level view, local governments are formed and paid by citizens to perform services that improve quality of life for the majority of residents.** Salaries and support costs are paid through taxes incurred by current residents, who are basically purchasing services with the goal of improving their current and future quality of life. Planners employed by local governments should therefore focus on the wishes of the current residents when planning for the future. They must plan for the People Here Now, the current residents at the time of planning. Trendy abstract concepts not fully supported by the current population should be avoided.

**Given these constraints, one of the largest challenges facing planners and legislators is understanding fully what the desires of current residents are.** This requires extensive outreach, and effective planning demands allocation of substantial resources to outreach activities. Unfortunately, private citizens are often focused on current demands in their lives and can be difficult to engage. Simply posting information requests on websites or holding listening sessions will seldom generate a response from a significant portion of stakeholders. Enlisting the assistance of professional polling organizations will likely be useful for obtaining a credible overview of citizen desires.

**Fortunately, there are also citizens and organizations in most communities who are concerned about the current and future well-being of the community and are willing to spend time enhancing it.** These citizen planners and their organizations can serve as an interface between professional planners and the general population. They can draw from social and professional connections in their community to gather local data needed for planning from local individuals and small groups. If they are brought into the planning process early and fully utilized, they can help to assure that the resulting plan represents the general will of the community.

**The planning process itself needs to be data driven and removed from direct political influence.** We should explore the idea of a state-chartered commission like the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC). It would have its own tax line item, further removing it from the influence of county executives, who will change over time. This commission should be capable of understanding issues like the true lifecycle costs of development (planning, construction, maintenance, destruction), know the limits of environmental resources (especially land), monitor current economic trends, etc. It could maintain a live dashboard to see not only overall county trends, but also let citizens see the local impact on their community. This dedicated land-use authority would be chartered to provide current unbiased public information about land-use and its

conformity with GDP goals. A qualified citizen advisory board should provide oversight and guidance.

**A large challenge faced by residents is understanding as well as possible the realistic future options that may open to them.** A robust planning commission working closely with citizen representatives could provide information to the general citizenry that would let them more thoroughly understand the implication of current trends and envision realistic future options. **Ultimately the People Here Now at the time of planning must choose the route to the future, but they should be able to do so with as much knowledge as possible.**

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***About the Alliance***

*The Anne Arundel Alliance for Livable Communities is a non-partisan coalition of 25 local and state organizations advocating for sustainable growth and environmental protections to safeguard and enhance residents' quality of life.*

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**Anne Arundel Alliance for Livable Communities**

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