



ALLIANCE
FOR LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

Patience can be a virtue in the GDP process

Topics and issues for long range planning ...



*Guest commentary from Bob Gallagher
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The GDP Process - A Different Perspective

For me, any mention of the general development plan triggers stress. That is probably because the word that most often comes to mind when these subjects are raised is "hypocrisy" - the past hypocrisy of county government when it comes to land use decisions.

The GDP process was intended to be the mechanism for citizens to control, subject to narrow constitutional limitations, how their communities are developed. Until November 2018, the county executive, and too often a majority of the county council, demonstrated a cynical contempt for the will of the people. The county executive did his or her best to limit and manipulate citizen input. The county executive publicly stated that the GDP was merely advisory and unenforceable. Small area plans were ignored. Planning and Zoning officials routinely handed out administrative waivers and routinely recommended or approved variances or other changes that were clearly inconsistent with the GDP. Some county council members shamelessly traded their votes to approve spot zoning in their districts.

Runaway development was a defining issue in the 2018 county election. The county executive and a number of members of the county council ran on a platform of reform. Several important reforms have been put in place through legislation or administrative actions. I believe that the county executive and a tentative majority of the new county council are committed to restore integrity to the planning and zoning processes.

Nonetheless, in light of the sordid history of land use planning in the county it is not surprising that there is impatience to complete reform of the GDP process and get a new GDP in place.

County Executive Pittman has said that he wants to make sure that there is adequate opportunity for citizen input and, as a result of the pandemic emergency, that may take more time than originally budgeted. While any delay may be disappointing to those who have worked so hard to see the results of reform, Mr. Pittman's reasoning makes sense to me. Moreover, the pandemic emergency may result in changes to the way we think about planning and preferences for where we live and work.

Here is a link to an [article in Wired magazine](#) that considers how planning can affect our susceptibility to pandemics. For example, because hotspots often start and accelerate in neighborhoods with a high density of disadvantaged people, providing them with safer options may become not only a social justice imperative but a more general public health imperative. Individual choices, as well as public health and planning policy, also may affect how we approach the GDP. This [article from Bloomberg](#) describes how the pandemic may be affecting where people choose to live and the impact of those changes on real estate markets. I don't think any of us know how this might or might not affect our county.

All of your hard work in reforming the GDP process could be devalued if we charge ahead with out giving adequate consideration to these new and extraordinary potential changes.

Patience still can be a virtue.

Virtual CAC meetings

The next CAC meeting will be held virtually in July on a date to be determined.

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.

Anne Arundel Alliance for Livable Communities



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