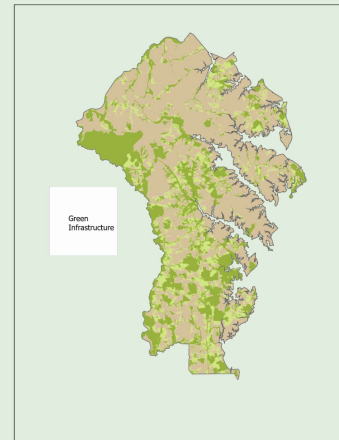




Make Green Infrastructure the centerpiece of development planning



It is important to understand that "green" infrastructure is not just trees, parks, and open space but a tool to achieve critical public health and safety, environmental, and related objectives. For example, it plays a role in reducing flow of polluted runoff into rivers and streams due to development; contributes to efforts to address climate change by capturing and filtering air pollutants, and provides the physical and psychological benefits of open space and greenways. It gives us places to escape our increasingly developed landscape and relax.

The Green Infrastructure network also provides new opportunities for a connected trail network that enables more human-powered mobility (walking/biking), reducing our reliance on motor vehicles that create traffic congestion and pollute our air and water. Home prices are clearly linked to proximity to green spaces. And tree lined streets provide a sense of place in communities. In short, Green Infrastructure isn't just environmental "stuff"... it is smart development that leads to less traffic, cleaner environment, public health, greater quality of life, and economic benefits.

Given all of the above, planning should begin with a focus on how to maximize those benefits by thinking about these elements as a part of designing growth and development from the outset. Let's see trees and open space as tools of development, not impediments to development. We suggest that rather than figuring out how to cram as many houses, commercial buildings and "gray" infrastructure into a community to maximize commercial and residential square footage, development should start with considering how best to use existing trees and open space. They are assets to complement and enhance both residential and commercial spaces and to improve the health of the Bay and our waterways. Let's design an environment that promotes both healthy people and a healthy economy – and allows us to be less worried about the "flesh eating" bacteria in our water described in a recent of Capital article. After all, OUR economy is directly linked to the health of our Bay. And, let's not risk killing the goose (the Bay) that laid the golden egg.

To sum: start designing our future with consideration of the green we need and want to keep FIRST, then determine how and where to expand the grey

infrastructure. Clearly, the Green Infrastructure is precious, and we must be sure that it protected by conservation easements, purchase of development rights, outright fee simple acquisition or other approaches. Full advantage of state, federal and private grant programs should be taken to accelerate protection of our natural areas, and Green Infrastructure preservation funding should be given high priority in the County budget.

Green Infrastructure is a key element of functional, livable, and healthy landscapes that benefit all citizens. Let's give it the importance that it deserves.

Content provided by Jim Lyons and Jon Korin

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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