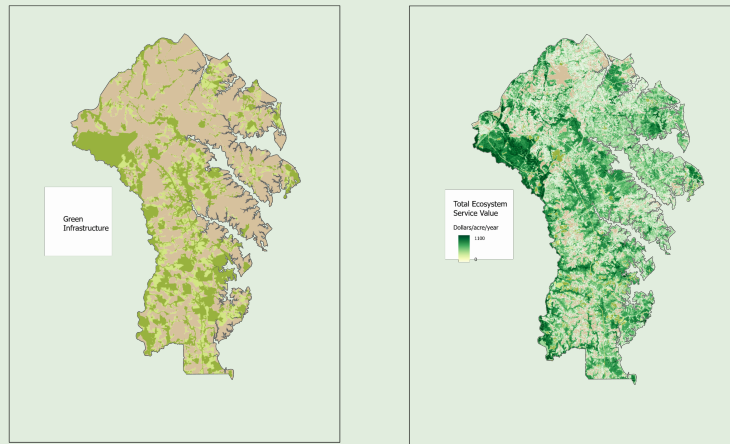




Green Infrastructure brings value to everyone



Green Infrastructure Ecosystem Services Value

Anne Arundel County has completed the public comment period for its new **Green Infrastructure Master Plan**. This Plan is a guide to conserving an interconnected network of the most significant remaining natural lands in Anne Arundel County.

The lands identified in the Green Infrastructure Network help protect water quality and air quality, provide habitat for plants and wildlife, create opportunities for recreation, and support mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change. All of these services are known as ecosystem services, and they bring valuable additions to the quality of life of everyone in our County. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources, has calculated and mapped the estimated value of ecosystem services for much of the land in Anne Arundel county (see [DNR webpage](#)). In some areas, typically forests and wetlands, DNR's [GreenPrint map](#) shows that the value of ecosystem services provided by the environment exceeds \$1000 per acre per year,

The maps above show the locations of Green Infrastructure (GI) in the draft Plan and the areas in the County that provide highly valued ecosystem services. It is clear that designated Green Infrastructure in the draft map typically provides a high level of ecosystem services.

Development of Green Infrastructure areas dramatically reduces the ecosystem services provided. Fortunately, about 65% of the Green Infrastructure Network is protected from development by various types of easements and County acquisitions. About 35% of the Network, however, is privately owned and subject to the land use choices of the owner. The landowner controls an asset that has value both to himself and the general public. Owners' perspective on their property often changes over time and over their lives. There is risk of an owner choosing to convert some or all of his equity in the land into a more liquid asset and destroying many of its ecosystem services in the process.

The coming Regional Area Plans should prioritize protection of Green Infrastructure and avoid land use or zoning changes that will allow more intensive development of land in the GI Network. Up-zoning of these properties or conversion from residential to multiuse or commercial zoning is clearly not in the public interest. However, GI property owners in search of an exit strategy have the options of conservation/preservation easements or possible outright fee simple sale to the County.

The GI Plan targets protection of an additional 5,000 acres of the GI Network by 2030 through conservation easements administered by the County or private land trusts or through fee simple acquisition of properties by the County using County, State, and Federal funds. Because property values, easement costs, and available State and Federal funding can vary widely over time, the cost of protecting 5,000 acres is difficult to accurately estimate. The GI Plan states that \$40 million of funds were expended over the past decade for fee simple acquisition of 1,800 acres. Per acre costs for conservation easements are usually lower, since the landowner retains use of the property.

Ultimately, achieving protection of an additional 5,000 acres will depend on the political will of the Administration and County Council to allocate the necessary funding to the project. County taxpayers should be prepared to strongly encourage their elected representatives to budget sufficient funds to assure protection of Green Infrastructure and its valuable ecosystem services. In a County with a \$1.7 billion annual budget, allocation of a few million dollars per year for Green Infrastructure preservation is easily justified and should be readily manageable.

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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