

## Maintaining Our Momentum in Environmental Protection



*Based on an article by Jim Lyons, Edgewater, MD*

**We live in a beautiful place – the “land of pleasant living” – as Anne Arundel County has been called, and its appeal is clearly connected to the health of our environment.** We have more than 500 miles of coastline, forests, and farmlands, and seven rivers that flow into the Chesapeake Bay. This appeal has fueled growth pressure. Currently, the County is home to nearly 600,000 residents and adds approximately 5,000 new residents every year.

Not all County citizens feel that they benefit from population growth. According to an [April 8, 2022, survey](#) by Anne Arundel Community College professor Dan Nataf, 42% of the Anne Arundel County respondents believed there was no need for new residential development in the county and 36% saw no need for additional commercial development. However, history suggests that the pressures for growth and development in Anne Arundel County will continue. If so, how and where we grow and whether that growth will complement or detract from the quality of life and health of the environment will be a critical issue.

**Over past four years, the health of our environment has been a priority.** A new executive position was created that brought an experienced and capable person in to serve as Environmental Policy Advisor. This person has recently taken a new position, and a replacement is urgently needed. A [Citizens Environmental Commission](#) was also formed consisting of citizens representing each of the watersheds in the county to seek council from community members.

During this time, several efforts were also initiated to protect our environment. A new Forest Conservation Act was adapted to protect remaining county forests and mitigate future forest losses due to development. The [Green Infrastructure Plan](#) created a network of connected natural lands that work together to protect the health of our environment and our communities. An effort to protect and reforest smaller green spaces in more urban and underserved communities in the county was also initiated by engaging citizen volunteers in the replanting effort. Efforts to improve access for county residents to forests, waterways, parks, trails, and open spaces are underway, and future acquisition of important lands and natural resources has been addressed in an updated [Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plan](#).

**We have developed momentum in our environmental protection efforts, and our challenge now is how to maintain it.**

**First, we should revisit the Forest Conservation Act** to further strengthen it and eliminate loopholes. Both Howard County and Annapolis now have more stringent requirements on tree loss and fee-in-lieu payments. We should upgrade our own requirements to further minimize forest loss. Also, we have seen that the grandfathering clause in the County's forest conservation code has allowed clearing of dozens of acres of otherwise-protected trees. This needs to be revised.

**Second, the Green Infrastructure Plan has outlined admirable goals of preserving 5000 acres of Green Infrastructure by 2030** through a combination of public land acquisition and easements. However, this will likely require County investment of tens of millions of dollars, and this funding does not seem to have been given high priority in recent budget cycles. In the past, Green Infrastructure protection has also suffered from lack of effective outreach to landowners. Outreach must be improved, and, as we consider the County budget in the coming months and years, and we must be sure that adequate funding is available for protection of Green Infrastructure.

Other efforts addressing water protection and climate change have also been initiated and will be discussed in a forthcoming newsletter.

**If Anne Arundel County is to continue to be the “land of pleasant living”, then we must continue efforts to protect and restore our natural resources. Our quality of life depends on it.**

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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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