



ALLIANCE

FOR LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

Green Infrastructure Master Plan released for comment



Public comment period open until September 26

The Green Infrastructure Master Plan Draft has been released for public comment. The draft Plan with all supporting information and a draft map of Green Infrastructure is available at the County GI web page.

[Visit the Green Infrastructure web page](#)

Following is an invited article by ALC Steering Committee member, Jim Lyons.

Anne Arundel County Needs a Green Development Plan

The county's Green Infrastructure (GI) Master Plan provides an opportunity for citizens, communities, builders, and businesses to understand the benefits of our undeveloped landscapes and engage in a discussion regarding how we continue to grow as a county without damaging our environment. The County's overall vision for the GI Plan is to create an interconnected system of forests, parks, trails, farms, streams, wetlands, waterways, and watersheds that conserves plant and wildlife habitat, increases quality of life for residents, provides greater recreation and transportation options, improves water quality, enhances aesthetics, and reduces pollution for present and future generations. In fact, we can use this open space to help us and our communities become healthier; to be more resilient to the effects of climate change; restore the health of our waterways and the Bay; and make our neighborhoods safer, more livable, and more valuable.

In the past, the county has focused mainly on "greenways, parks, and open space. But the new "Green Infrastructure Network", as the county's plan refers to it, provides a more complete and comprehensive inventory of our lands and natural resources as a basis for creating "an interconnected network of the most significant remaining natural lands in the county [that can] assist in improving water quality, air quality, and wildlife habitat while sustaining a community's social, economic, and environmental health". If used wisely this

new Green Infrastructure Plan can serve as a blueprint (or better yet, a “green” print) for a safer, healthier, more resilient, and prosperous county.

Identifying each element of the green infrastructure network by the watershed in which it occurs should help county residents appreciate the fact that green infrastructure is not simply parks and trails but rather a functional part of a healthy landscape. The county’s GI plan also identifies 47 “critical connections” where there is only one location where two segments of the Green Infrastructure Network can connect. Maintaining these connections will benefit walking and biking trails as well as wildlife movements. Mapping these critical connections should help developers and county officials avoid “cutting off” these connections.

According to the GI Plan nearly 40,000 acres of potential green infrastructure remain in the county but only 65% of the existing GI Network is conserved. The county is only planning to protect another 5000 acres over the next 10 years. If the County’s remaining green infrastructure is to be protected and its values preserved, then the county needs to set more ambitious goals and find the means to achieve them.

I recommend that a new partnership between county leaders, developers, communities, conservationists, and elected officials be created to develop a strategy and set priorities to protect remaining green infrastructure and critical connections in the county. If not, I fear that the current planning process is likely to focus on development and view green infrastructure as a constraint to development rather than an opportunity to complement and enhance growth. Deciding first what green infrastructure should be protected and preserved and creating a map of these lands to guide the 2040 planning process and regional plans would help highlight and preserve their values and could help accelerate future development by reducing costly delays in the permitting process.

An important addition to the GI Plan is the long overdue recognition of inequities in the location of open space, trees, and “nature” across the county, especially in neighborhoods occupied by black, brown, and poorer communities. In fact, the large majority of the sub watersheds ranked as highest priority for restoration by the County are in North County and around Parole. This information should help guide strategies to conserve additional green infrastructure and open space as well as tree planting efforts so that these communities can realize the benefits.

This “blueprint” for conservation of lands and resources provides an important foundation for making informed land use decisions based upon their environmental, economic, and human health consequences through the 2040 GDP and Regional Plans. **Citizens, developers, county leadership, and our elected officials need to recognize that green infrastructure is not simply an amenity but benefits the health and safety of all our citizens, our environment, and a vibrant economy. In fact, a healthy green infrastructure is fundamental to creating a prosperous future for Anne Arundel County.**

Jim Lyons has worked at senior levels in the federal government in several administrations in the fields of conservation and natural resource management. He was recognized as a distinguished alum for his contributions in these areas by the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, and until recently, he was a lecturer there in natural resource policy.

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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