

Main Points from Focus Group Sessions – Priority Preservation Area Master Plan
Summer 2010

General Sense of Important Issues:

Accokeek:

- Preservation of undeveloped land—why have a goal of just 80%? We should preserve more of the Rural Tier, or the whole Rural Tier (State: we need to narrow our focus)
- Should preserve as much as possible, even a 5-10-acre parcel with a house on it can have viable agriculture enterprise (State: that's a "developed" parcel)
- Ag transfer tax alone is not enough to sustain preservation efforts
- There is land outside of the Rural Tier that should be preserved- biologically significant grasslands, forests, as well as farms (M-NCPPC: we are open to preservation policies in the Developing Tier, some of which is in the established Green Infrastructure Network)
- The 1 percent growth in the Rural Tier policy—is the PPA consistent with it? (M-NCPPC: it has fluctuated year to year. The PPA can help, but the 1% policy is more stringent; 80% is the standard for preservation statewide)
- Identify what the PPA adds to the picture, and the added value or benefit of being in the PPA. Nutrient trading and funding programs already exist. (M-NCPPC: Property in the PPA gets priority for certain preservation dollars: MALPF, HARPP, etc.)
- The funding that is available is not enough to compete with a developer
- Focus more on policies that support the agriculture economic sector. Find out what other counties are doing to support agriculture
- The Piscataway watershed is a stronghold watershed and is not included in the Green Infrastructure Plan.

Baden:

- PPA gives land within it a higher ranking for preservation funds; increases chances for obtaining MALPF funding, but landowners want flexibility to also sell their land to a developer if desired.
- Need more information on woodland conservation banking process—Is having easements overlapping on the same land area allowed? It's more attractive to landowners if this is allowed (The State allows it, both MALPF and DNR policy is open to overlapping easements on top of agricultural easements)
- Property inheritance issues regarding easements: understanding is that if the land is preserved, heirs are able to have an advantage to gain preservation funds, and they are paying a lower property tax due to it being agriculturally-assessed. If the property is not preserved, heirs can do what they want with the property, even if the farm is in the PPA.

- Should we focus on getting the funding, or in addition, note the other important reasons for preserving land (balance out the developed areas of the county and limit development in the rural areas; help maintain and restore water quality; provide environmental habitat; help manage climate change).
- State: The county should keep public water and sewer out of the Rural Tier in order to limit development.
- County Council will approve development where they see fit unless they get on board with the PPA Plan
- Small landowners may not meet MALPF criteria (M-NCPPC: but there are other options available to them).
- A study should be conducted to look at the county's development vs. preservation rate. (M-NCPPC: MDP Annual Report requires us to report on this. SCD: from 2007, 39,000 acres of ag-assessed land is in the county, consisting of parcels 10 acres or greater. On the whole, 60,000 acres of farmland in the county, more farmland than Anne Arundel, and Calvert Counties. We should aim to preserve 50% of that at least, realistically.
- Large parcels of land are not needed to make money in farming. What is required is research, development of properties in farming, and observation—an iterative process.
- Need young farmers; farmers are getting older. (We have training programs for farmers).
- The county needs to support agriculture (Co. Exec., County Council).
- M-NCPPC, including DPR, is a good partner to leases or tenant farming who are farming leased parkland. Phil Miller is a great example.

Patuxent River 4H Center:

- Landowners need to be aware of the PPA Plan.
- Information should be available on the costs to landowners who don't want to be in the PPA or preserve their land, as well as land use restrictions for landowners in the PPA.
- Older farmers are having difficulty finding others to take over the farming of their land once they reach retirement age.
- The PPA Plan will downgrade property. People see the PPA Plan as a negative because their land will not be worth as much as if weren't in the PPA. It will be worth more to a developer.
- M-NCPPC and the Council should focus on orderly development in the rural and developing parts of the county. But conservation subdivisions for the Rural Tier are the worst thing ever.

- Property owners want more information on what happens if they don't "opt into the PPA network." They don't want things shoved down their throats.
- What farmers get in terms of easement purchase price for their land must come close to what they would get from a developer.
- Some people feel that they will be forced to put their property into an easement if we can't accomplish the PPA goals on a voluntary basis.
- Nothing that the county has done in the past regarding farmers has been helpful.
- M-NCPPC is doing the right thing. It's the Council that makes bad decisions.
- There are concerns about where the PPA will be in Bowie and vicinity. People don't see that there are large contiguous plots to designated as the PPA.

Most Important Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats as Identified by Attendees:

Strengths:

- State and local legislation favoring the agriculture industry
- Potential for increased demand for locally grown food fueled by the urban agriculture movement
- Strong equine industry with a potential to grow, Prince George's County ranking fourth in the state for number of horses and total value of horses

Weaknesses:

- Concerns among land owners about the effect on their property value/equity of agricultural preservation (keeping land as working farms and forest enterprises) and minimizing future development in the PPA
- Lag behind neighboring counties in farmland preservation; lower percentage of land in farming compared to other counties
- Loss of farmland to development; lower value of land as cropland in comparison to value for development (housing, etc.)

Opportunities:

- Prince George's County's location in a thriving, wealthy region with a growing population, the fifth wealthiest region in the U.S.

- Growth in niche markets, such as organically produced fruits and vegetables, livestock, and poultry
- Increased demand for locally grown food, prompted by:
 - Growth in retail market (grocery stores, restaurants) demanding locally-sourced food
 - Increased knowledge about the benefits of locally grown food
 - Higher fuel costs
 - Food safety concerns
 - Other factors
- Preservation of land for agriculture, specifically near major cities, to supply future food needs

Threats:

- Difficulty of smaller farms to compete due to inability to achieve economies of scale, giving way to consolidation
- Lack of focus on redevelopment of existing population growth centers in the county