

# Smart Growth Platform 2010 for Prince George's County

Building shared, sustainable prosperity for Prince George's County by creating safe, walkable, inclusive and transit-accessible communities.

## An Economic Development Opportunity

With 15 Metro stations in close proximity to one of the nation's leading employment centers, Prince George's County has the best economic development opportunity in the Washington, D.C. region. A central issue in the 2010 election should be how to capitalize on these assets. Strategic economic development can build the strong tax base needed to support quality schools and public safety programs, while increasing the number and quality of employment opportunities available to residents.

### Smart Growth Platform Summary

1. Increase the county's investment in inner Beltway communities by focusing at least 66 percent of all new development countywide in the Developed Tier.
2. Commit to building great walkable communities around the county's 15 Metro stations as a top investment and policy priority.
3. Support transit-oriented centers with policies that ensure new urbanist design, green infrastructure, interconnectivity, and pedestrian/bicycle friendliness.
4. Reduce the development capacity of the Developing Tier and conserve the Rural Tier, protecting farmland, open space, forests and natural areas by restricting public infrastructure extensions and supporting land conservation.
5. Target public funds to address backlogs in maintenance, repairs, and service upgrades in all existing communities.
6. Build a multimodal transportation system that fosters reinvestment in existing communities, fully utilizes the county's 15 Metro stations, and supports sustainable economic development for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy.
7. Create inclusive housing and workforce policies to ensure all Prince George's residents share in the emerging prosperity.
8. Build green buildings and green communities.



Coalition for Smarter  
Growth



Prince George's Advocates  
for Community-based Transit

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# Introduction

Prince George's County is poised to take advantage of major trends in the Washington metropolitan region and across the country. As the area continues to attract growth, providing quick, reliable transportation to connect workers to jobs and customers to businesses is essential to maintaining the region's desirability. Prince George's already has 15 Metro stations with ample room to host new offices, stores and residences to meet the demand of the region's robust growth. Strategic planning to guide high quality development to the county's Metro stations promises to benefit all Prince George's residents, as well as the region, while reducing traffic and providing greater choices for housing and business locations interconnected with the rest of the region.

Development that is spread out across the county cannot be well-served by transit and results in overburdened roads and longer commutes. When combined housing and transportation costs are considered, the burden on families of long auto commutes can be significant. In contrast, jobs, housing, and investment around existing Metro stations increases access to travel options (e.g., walking, biking, transit, or driving) for workers, reduces overall transportation costs, conserves commuting time, lessens the need to build additional (and wider) roads, and allows people to spend more time with their families.



## An Economic Development Opportunity

With 15 Metro stations in close proximity to one of the nation's leading employment centers, Prince George's County has the best economic development opportunity in the Washington, D.C. region. A central issue in the 2010 election should be how to capitalize on these assets. Strategic economic development can build the strong tax base needed to support quality schools and public safety programs, while increasing the number and quality of employment opportunities available to residents.



It is an opportune time. The Obama Administration has made sustainable communities and the integration of housing, transit, and the environment – particularly through transit-oriented development – a top investment priority. The market for walkable, mixed-use, and transit accessible development continues to grow as our demographics change. By 2025, 72 percent of U.S. households will be empty nesters, retirees and young professionals without children.<sup>1</sup> With public resources strained, the national and state focus also has to be on the use of existing infrastructure, such as our Metro stations, and on renewing aging water, sewer, road, and school infrastructure in existing communities.

Targeting public policy and resources to the revitalization of the Prince George's "Developed Tier" and its 15 underutilized Metro stations would capitalize on these opportunities and should be a local, regional, state, and national priority. This cannot be achieved without the unified commitment of the next County Executive and County Council.

## The Cost of Scattered Development

Despite many county land use policies that make revitalization of the Developed Tier and transit-oriented development top priorities, too many land use decisions have fueled scattered development. This comes at a high cost—both financial and environmental—including increasing traffic congestion, making jobs and housing less accessible, and undermining investment in existing communities and Metro station locations.



Development that is spread out across the county results in overburdened roads and longer commutes. The scattered subdivisions cannot be well-served by transit. When combined housing and transportation costs are considered, the burden on families of long auto commutes can be significant. In contrast, jobs, housing, and investment around existing Metro stations increases access to travel options (e.g., walking, biking, transit, or driving) for workers at all income levels, reduces overall transportation costs, conserves commuting time, lessens the need to build additional (and wider) roads, and allows families to enjoy a higher quality of life.

Public and private funding required for new infrastructure in spread out locations diverts precious financial resources that could be applied to revitalization inside the Beltway and ongoing maintenance of communities and infrastructure. Like the county's existing infrastructure, all of this new infrastructure will eventually age and will require even more of the county's limited resources (not private developer funds) to maintain over time. With exploding water mains and equally aged sewer systems in the older suburbs of Prince George's County and surrounding jurisdictions, private investment in redevelopment projects must be encouraged because private developer contributions can assist with replacement of this critical infrastructure.



Scattered development also undermines the quality of Prince George's rural communities and natural areas. Rural historic lands and an impressive network of parks, trails, and nature preserves, such as the Patuxent River corridor, are valuable natural assets that help to attract people and businesses to Prince George's.

## General Plan Goals Have Not Been Realized

The 2002 Prince George's County General Plan<sup>2</sup> identifies the area inside the Capital Beltway, an 86 square mile area, as the "Developed Tier." This area is 25 square miles larger than the District of Columbia. The General Plan designates the Developed Tier as the top priority area for medium to



high-density, mixed-use, transit- and pedestrian-oriented development. In particular, the General Plan calls for growth to be focused primarily at transit stations and other designated focal areas called “centers,” as well as at selected points along key corridors. Less than one percent is designated to take place in the 150 square-mile Rural Tier in the southern part of the county.

However, the General Plan also allowed for an oversized “Developing Tier,” an astounding 237 square miles. This area could easily accommodate over one million people (the entire population of Fairfax County), a number which is far more than projected growth. The plan also fails to provide effective protection for the 150 square mile Rural Tier, and offers little incentive to invest in the Developed Tier or at Metro stations. With so much land open to development, growth has been scattered and cannot be efficiently served by transit, school, police and fire services.



Even by the General Plan’s own standards, growth and development in Prince George’s County has not occurred in the manner envisioned by the document. For example, between 2002 (when the General Plan was adopted) and 2007, the Developing Tier received 79 percent of the County’s new housing development instead of its projected

maximum of 66 percent. Furthermore, contrary to the General Plan guidelines, much of the development in the Developing Tier was scattered, falling short of the plan’s principles of land efficiency and transit connectivity. Only five percent of growth has occurred in designated centers and corridors, even though the General Plan goal called for directing 20 percent of growth to Developing Tier centers.

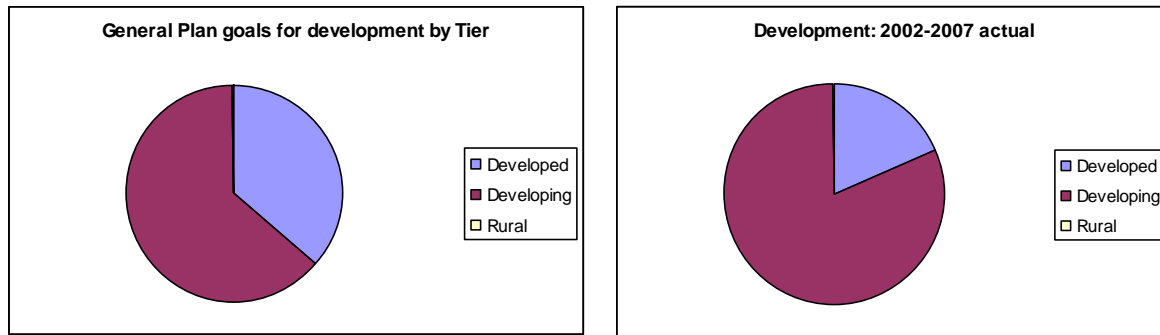
Only 18 percent of new housing development occurred in the Developed Tier during that same period, although the General Plan set a minimum development goal of 33 percent.<sup>3</sup> The Rural Tier, where very little development was supposed to occur, received three percent of housing units — three times the one percent goal set by the General Plan. Land area consumed by new development is not documented in the General Plan update report. Since adoption of the General Plan, the County Council has adopted numerous plans and projects that further increase the already extensive development capacity of the Developing and Rural Tiers. With so much land open to development, coupled with a permissive planning and development review process, there is little incentive to invest in the transit-rich Developed Tier. Moreover, given the increasing sprawl, the county has experienced challenges in providing adequate transit, school, police, and fire services to all its residents.

**Development Pattern:**

**General Plan Goal vs. Actual (2002-2007) (in new dwelling units)**

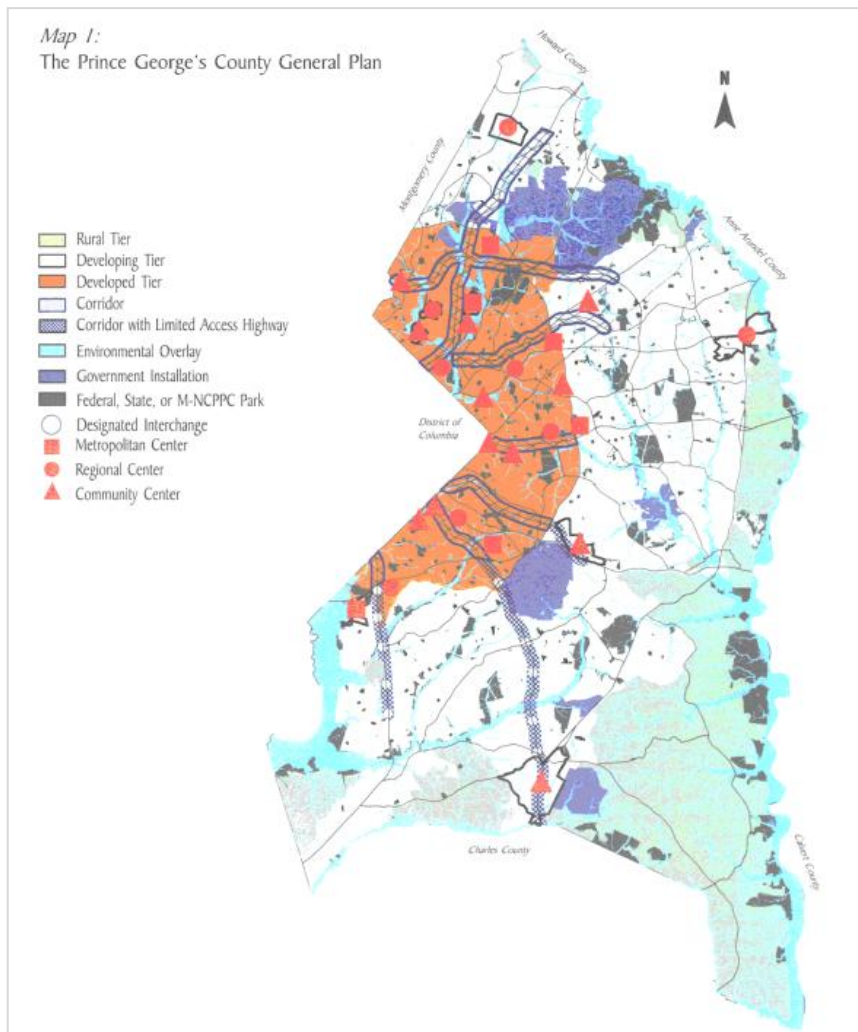
Tier	Goal for percent of overall development captured in Tier	2007 actual	Goal for percent of development in centers & corridor nodes	2007 actual
Developed	Over 33%	18%	Over 50%	34%
Developing	Less than 66%	79%	Over 20%	5%
Rural	Less than 1%	3%	--	--

Source: Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, *The General Plan Growth Policy Update*, September 2008. <http://www.pgplanning.org/Resources/Publications/Studies.htm>



The General Plan called for designating 15 existing communities as Revitalization Overlay Areas that would receive special attention for reinvestment. Yet, it was only after 2007 that the first revitalization overlay was established. The General Plan also set a goal that half of all development occurring in the Developed Tier would be directed to centers and corridors, but only 34 percent was achieved.

Most development in the county is currently projected to occur outside Regional Activity Clusters as designated through a joint local-regional process at the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG).<sup>4</sup> Prince George's has no "mixed use centers" identified in the COG Activity Centers & Clusters Map, only "emerging" and "future employment centers."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, only five of the 15 Metro stations are identified as future centers.



## Recommendations

Prince George's County has the opportunity to fund and implement smart growth policies that will save money and enhance economic competitiveness. These same policies will reduce the financial strain on households, improve access to jobs, attract a well-trained and educated workforce, and create a shared and sustainable prosperity for all county residents.

Therefore, we urge Prince George's County officials and candidates to commit to the following:



### 1. Consistent with General Plan objectives, increase the county's investment in the inner Beltway region by focusing at least 66 percent of all new development countywide in the Developed Tier.

- A majority of new housing and commercial development in the Developed Tier should be concentrated in Centers and Corridor nodes, which include all Metro station areas and most existing towns and cities.
- Establish most of the 15 Revitalization Overlay areas called for in the General Plan in other established and aging communities outside of Centers and Corridor nodes, and focus the remaining new housing and commercial development in the Developed Tier in those areas. (The Marlboro Pike Sector area is one example of such an area.)

### 2. Commit to building great walkable communities around the county's 15 Metro stations as a top local and state investment and policy priority.

Growing demand for transit-oriented development will make these stations the county's top economic development asset, grow the tax base, attract good-paying jobs, and provide a variety of housing choices and quality retail. Transit-oriented development will also reduce the traffic impact of new development in the county.



- Incentivize private investment at all 15 Metro stations by coordinating with state and local agencies to remove barriers and encourage revitalization. Provide economic incentives such as targeted tax increment financing (TIF) districts, low-interest loans, expedited development review, and reduced development review fees.
- Focus initially on those station areas that provide the most immediate opportunities for near-term development and stations



with greater economic development benefit potential. Develop comprehensive urban design, pedestrian/bicycle access, economic development, and land assembly strategies for each station area.

- Reprioritize state and local transportation funding to focus on repairing and maintaining existing infrastructure (“fix it first”), and on projects supporting transit-oriented development, including upgraded local street networks with complete pedestrian and bicycle facilities, priority bus lanes, water and sewer upgrades, and stormwater management retrofits.

### 3. Support transit-oriented centers with policies that ensure new urbanist design, green infrastructure, interconnectivity, and pedestrian/bicycle friendliness.

- Implement urban design policies such as form-based codes (“Urban Centers & Corridor Nodes Development Code” & “Mixed Use Zone” design standards) to ensure transit- and pedestrian-oriented building and neighborhood design.
- Adopt complete and green streets standards to ensure walking and bicycling can become safe and convenient modes of travel, while reducing polluted runoff. At Metro stations and other centers, street design standards should provide sidewalks, bicycle facilities, narrowed crossing distances and travel lane widths, and other low-speed design features to increase the safety and attractiveness of walking and bicycling.
- Adopt minimum multiple street connectivity standards for any major development or subdivision connected to state or county roads. Local street connectivity is essential to reducing traffic and providing shorter travel routes.
- Adopt transportation demand management requirements for major new developments to reduce vehicle trips and traffic, and increase the share of walk, bicycle, transit, and carpool trips. For urban centers and corridor nodes, use multimodal level/quality of service performance measures that include service for pedestrians, bicycles, and transit.
- Incorporate adequate pedestrian and bikeway facilities standards as a part of all development review, and require all developers to construct such facilities in and around the area of their development.



#### 4. Reduce the development capacity of the Developing Tier and conserve the Rural Tier protecting farmland, open space, forests and natural areas by restricting public infrastructure extensions and supporting land conservation.



- The Developing Tier should contain no more than 33 percent of new housing and commercial development countywide, and most of this growth should occur in designated centers and corridor nodes within the Developing Tier.
- New development in the Rural Tier should be highly restricted, as currently contemplated in the General Plan.
- Protect undeveloped lands in the Developing and Rural Tier by restricting sewer and water extensions, upzonings, road extensions, and other public actions that encourage land conversion.
- Commit to protecting farmland, forests, open space, and natural areas by increasing funding for open space, sensitive lands, and agricultural preservation.
- Create a transfer of development rights (TDR) program which significantly reduces development capacity in the Rural Tier and protects farm and forest lands from development by requiring Developing Tier development to pay an impact fee or purchase development rights.

#### 5. Target public funds to address backlogs in maintenance, repairs, and service upgrades in all existing communities.

With the fiscal strain on local, state and federal government, the county cannot afford to meet the demands of extensive new infrastructure in the Developing and Rural Tiers, and also address aging infrastructure in all tiers.

- Commit public infrastructure funds and services to reinvestment and growth in the Developed Tier, Metro stations, cities, and towns, while also addressing the backlog of public service needs in existing communities in the Developing and Rural Tier.
- Ensure that sewer and water capacity is sufficient in existing communities and target investment to renewing aging sewer infrastructure in need of repair and reconstruction.
- Commit to preventing the extension of sewer and water services to the Rural Tier or undeveloped parts of the Developing Tier outside centers.





- Reassess existing plans for substantial new development of designated centers and corridors outside of the Developed Tier for their fiscal impact on the county.

## 6. Build a multimodal transportation system that fosters reinvestment in existing communities, fully utilizes the county's 15 Metro stations, and supports sustainable economic development for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy.

- Adequately fund local transit services. The county lacks sufficient funding for a high quality bus system. The capital purchases needed are substantial – for number of buses (one time cost) and the operational costs (which must be maintained annually). Recent cuts in service for The Bus and Metrobus, and elimination of programs such as “Kids Ride Free” continue to move the county in the wrong direction. This needs to be reversed.
- Commit to land use decisions that ensure viable transit service. If the county continues to permit and encourage scattered development outside the Beltway, there will be no economic way to provide transit service with sufficient frequency to encourage ridership. Funding and service will be diluted while trying so serve far-flung developments, leaving residents – especially commuters, seniors, and children -- without sustainable transit options.
- Increase frequency. With better, more compact and walkable development, the county can and should improve bus service frequency so travel is more convenient and appeals to and attracts “choice riders,” in addition to transit-dependent riders.
- Support rail on the Wilson Bridge (with dedicated bus lanes in the interim), and construction of the Inner Purple Line Light Rail as top priorities for our region. County officials should work with state and Congressional representatives to secure necessary funds. Plan future Purple Line extensions to connect Developed Tier communities and Prince George's Community College Largo Campus.
- Support the region's Bus Priority Corridor Network. The Prince George's lines included in the regional 24 line Metrobus system should be a county priority. The priority strategy will improve travel time, reliability, and customer experience, while reducing the operational costs of bus service. Key lines in Prince George's include: Southern Avenue to National Harbor, University Boulevard/East-West Highway, Rhode Island Avenue to Laurel, and Eastover to Addison Road Metro station. The county should give priority to bus movements in these corridors by adding queue jumpers at intersections, signal priority, dedicated transit lanes, and improved boarding times. The county should also identify other high-ridership potential corridors and routes for priority treatments.



## 7. Create inclusive housing and workforce policies to ensure all Prince George's residents share in the emerging prosperity.

- Establish a county-wide inclusionary zoning law (also known as “Moderately-Priced Dwelling Unit” program) that requires 12 percent of units in residential developments to be moderately-priced (affordable to households earning 65 percent of the area median income (AMI)) in exchange for a density bonus.
- Establish housing affordability preservation priorities. Identify federal and state resources to maximize efforts to rehabilitate and maintain affordability of key apartment buildings, especially those near transit. Housing policies should be designed to ensure that high value transit-oriented development fosters and protects a diversity of housing choices, including housing for low wage workers.
- Require local workforce development and hiring for all government-assisted development projects.

## 8. Build green buildings and green communities.

- Direct development to existing impervious vacant and underutilized sites.
- Restrict land conversion in watersheds with less than 10 percent imperviousness. For development that does occur, require full mitigation of impacts.
- Encourage and fund stormwater retrofits in existing developed areas. Establish an ongoing fee on acres of impervious surface and a substantial one time conversion fee when land is converted to impervious.
- Require all government projects to be LEED Silver and encourage all major new developments in the county to be LEED Silver, or at least certified.
- Create Green Streets by integrating environmental site design (ESD) stormwater management techniques into routine road construction and reconstruction to reduce polluted runoff from county roads.





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## References

<sup>1</sup> Nelson, A. C. 2006. Leadership in a New Era. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Vol. 72, Issue 4, pp. 393-407. Also see Kaufmann, G. 2009. *Housing Market Outlook for the Washington, DC Region*. Presented at the ULI Washington Trends Conference on March 31, 2009. Available: [http://www.rclco.com/archivepdf/Mar312009250\\_featurenews.pdf](http://www.rclco.com/archivepdf/Mar312009250_featurenews.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, *Prince George's County Approved General Plan*. October 2002. [http://www.pgplanning.org/Projects/Prince\\_George\\_s\\_County\\_Approved\\_General\\_Plan.htm](http://www.pgplanning.org/Projects/Prince_George_s_County_Approved_General_Plan.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, *The General Plan Growth Policy Update*, September 2008. <http://www.pgplanning.org/Resources/Publications/Studies.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.mwcog.org/uploads/pub-documents/z1dfVw20080117203640.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> A mixed use center is defined as areas up to two square miles (1,280 acres), containing more than 15,000 jobs and greater than 25 job/acre in 2030, it also contains greater than 10 housing units per acre. <http://www.mwcog.org/planning/planning/activitycenters/default.asp>

Coalition for Smarter Growth: [www.smartergrowth.net](http://www.smartergrowth.net)

Prince George's Advocates for Community-based Transit: <http://sites.google.com/site/princegeorgesact/>

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