

## CHEAT SHEET TO PREPARE YOU FOR THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS IN BALTIMORE COUNTY

### What Is the Issue? Growth and Development

In 1967, the county adopted the Urban Rural Demarcation Line (“URDL”), which identified the area of the county that could be serviced by city water and sewer. This area is one third of the county, and today 90% of residents live within the URDL. While the URDL was an early attempt at smart growth, it was not enough to push all development into one area of the county and step away.

For growth to benefit all, it needs to be well-planned and consistent with a holistic vision of growth that is produced by a vigorous, collaborative and extensive planning process. That is the very reason why we have a master plan. However, the master plan is **not** being followed by our elected officials, who regularly ignore the master plan to make decisions in a way that is (a) on-demand, ad-hoc and project-by-project, (b) often political and emotional and (c) not inclusive of residents.

### We have reached the breaking point. The effects of this have been far reaching.

*Lack of open space:* 65% of residents lack access to adequate open space within walking distance of their homes. And none of our 16 inner suburbs are considered walkable.

*Pollution:* All but one of the 14 county watersheds are polluted.

*Housing shortage:* There is a critical shortage of housing in the county, including housing that is affordable to working families.

*Existing housing is old:* The median age of county housing is 48 years, compared to 39 years nationally. Almost half of homes were built prior to 1970.

*Declining suburbs:* Overlooked older suburbs (built after World War II) have continued to decline, reducing our viable housing stock.

*Increased housing costs:* As supply dwindled, housing costs increased, reaching a decade high for the Baltimore region in March 2021.

*More ALICE households:* ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) measures the true amount of poverty in an area. ALICE households in Maryland increased by 57% from 2007 to 2018 as a direct result of housing costs.

*History of discrimination:* The county entered into a 2016 HUD settlement agreement to address its long history of racial discrimination in housing. The county is not on pace to meet its obligations to build affordable homes for low-income African Americans.

*Population loss:* It is projected that the county will register a population loss for the first time since the 1920 census.

### What Can We Do During this Election Season? Get Candidates on the Record!

#### **For State Candidates**

1. *Closing the “Priority Funding Area” Loophole to Make the Master Plan Controlling.* We can ask whether state candidates support closing the “Priority Funding Area” loophole in state law. State law says that local land use decisions must be consistent with master plans, except if they are being made in “Priority Funding Areas.” This is a major loophole, because almost all of the land within the URDL has been designated as a “Priority Funding Area.”
  - ***Does the candidate supporting closing this loophole?***

#### **For Local Candidates**

(Caveat: While the following topics are most relevant to local candidates, they also pertain to state candidates who are residents of our communities can influence local decision-making.)

1. *Change the Sequence of the Master Plan and CZMP.* The Comprehensive Zoning Map Process (“CZMP”) is intended to be used by the county council to look at the county as a whole in order to make zoning decisions that are holistic, comprehensive and lasting. It occurs once every 4 years, whereas the Master Plan occurs once every 10 years. This is nonsensical.
  - ***Does the candidate support changing the sequence of the Master Plan and CZMP so that the CZMP takes place shortly after the Master Plan is adopted?***
  - ***And does the candidate support requiring an update to the Master Plan at year 5?***
2. *Support By-Right Development.* If the Master Plan process was truly collaborative and extensive, and the Master Plan was legally binding, it makes sense to expand the use of “by-right” development. This means fewer projects would be subject to special discretionary review, which would reduce costs for homebuyers and others.
  - ***Does the candidate support more by-right development if the proposed development is consistent with the Master Plan?***
3. *Create PUD Task Force.* With its abundance of fully declined suburbs – which do not have the amenities of complete communities – the county must make it easier to reinvest and to redevelop into well-planned, mixed-use communities. Right now, the PUD process – or the “planned unit development” process – is a primary tool to promote such development. However, developers have said the process is not efficient, and advocates have said that it is not effective (in that it is abused and does not produce meaningful public benefits and amenities).
  - ***Does the candidate support creating a PUD task force to reform the PUD process, or replace it with another type of process for mixed-use development?***
4. *Create a Green Network.* We The People supports the creation of a Green Network plan so that the county can improve the connectivity among green hubs, and thereby make the most of the open space, parks, trails and greenways that currently exist.
  - ***Does the candidate support the creation of a Green Network?***
5. *Create Simpler, Better Zoning Laws, Regulations and Processes.*
  - The web of laws, regulations and processes governing land use and zoning in the county are complex and outdated, often requiring an attorney to make sense of them. This is a major barrier to participation and effective advocacy. The county should perform a wholesale review of this structure and simplify it.
  - In addition, the county council should be required to subject (i) any zoning bills to a 90-day review and comment period by the Planning Department and the Planning Board, and (ii) any amendments to those zoning bills to a 30-day review period.
  - ***Does the candidate support a wholesale review of laws, regulations and process, and requiring the county council to subject zoning bills and amendments to mandatory review periods?***
6. *Update Community Plans.* Many local community plans are outdated, with some being decades old.
  - ***Does the candidate support allocating resources as necessary to help communities update their local plans, which will then flow up into the Master Plan?***

We The People is a community organization founded by Pat Keller and Nick Stewart in 2021. Pat was the planning director for Baltimore County for more than 22 years, while Nick is a partner at Saul Ewing Arnstein & Lehr LLP, who serves on the board of the Southwest Visions Foundation, a 501(c)(3) dedicated to community revitalization in Southwest Baltimore County. To learn more, please visit [wethepeoplebaltco.com](http://wethepeoplebaltco.com).