

Results from the Future Calvert Survey: Preserving Rural Character and Directing Growth to Designated Areas

Introduction

A series of surveys have been conducted to correspond with topics presented in the winter and spring 2017 Comprehensive Plan Update workshops. For the fourth workshop, Preserving Rural Character and Directing Growth to Designated Areas, a survey was released which was comprised of two open ended questions. There were 12 respondents to the survey. All respondents but one answered both questions. The results are below.

Overview

There was consensus throughout the responses that preserving the county's rural character and directing growth to designated areas are important endeavors. There were a variety of suggestions for how the county can preserve farm and forest land, as well as how the county can attract growth to the designated areas. While there was no consensus on how to fund incentives and programs, it was evident that the majority of respondents agreed that finding ways to preserve land and designate growth is an important task.

Survey Questions, Summaries, and Responses

Question #1:

Preserving farm and forest land has been a priority of Calvert County for over 40 years. What actions would you support the county taking to preserve even more land? How could those actions be paid for?

Summary of Responses to Question #1:

The suggestions for preserving farm land included increasing the number of land preservation districts, providing incentives for farmers that are similar to the tobacco buyout, and placing moratoriums on rezoning farmland for multi-residential use. One respondent also suggested, "If tax base improves issue tax credits for land in exchange for limited tax credits pro-rated over 10yrs." It was also suggested for there to be more transferable development rights (TDRs) be purchased and retired. Another common suggestion was to direct growth to designated areas by creating walkable Town Centers that attract development away from rural parts of the county. There was not a consensus on how to fund the incentives. There were advocates both for and against tax increases.

Responses:

- Stop developing. Create enormous incentives for farmers/large landowners to preserve their parcels as open space or ag preservation. Similar to the tobacco buyout, allow them to receive incentives if they continue farming for x number of years. Or don't allow subdivision of large tracts. That way if they are sold, they are to individuals who can only put a certain number of structures on the entire tract. Means of paying for the preservation might have to come from property taxes, excise taxes on "vice" products, etc.
- Limit the amount of development brought into the county and proposed by the commissioner. Once our farmland is gone, there is no replacing it.
- I would say that my #1 priority is lower taxes. Create parks with trails/biking/kayaking and charge a fee for non-county residents. You can preserve the rural field by making town centers that are nice versus low end strip malls and leaving other parts of the county rural.
- Should ask: Is more farmland preservation necessary to the demographic and economic needs of the county now and in the future? Is farmland preservation for agricultural use a need for the county in the future?
- I support all actions that are taken to preserve farm and forest land. First and foremost, there needs to be a moratorium placed on rezoning farmland for multi-residential construction. This action costs the county nothing, and goes a long way to preventing subdivisions of hundreds of homes from popping up in our county. The second action I recommend is to designate more areas as protected forest conservation areas. Do not allow building within these areas. This action is also a no-cost option to the county.
- Sustain the current strategy slowing the pace outside town centers/village provided gov employees and teachers pensions are fully funded. Allow Ag land to be made managed forest for 25 years. If tax base improves issue Tax credits for land in exchange for limited tax credits pro-rated over 10yrs.
- I would support a combination of a livable workable town with plenty of open space and land preservation. In preserving land, we need to have areas where the community can gather and individuals and families can dine and shop. If we spread everything out (shopping and housing) then we will always have the issue of half of the community wanting to live in a community with access to shopping and dining and the other half wanting to preserve land. If we can bring in walkable areas (main street types with shopping and dining that encourages walking or biking) the community will stay in the area to shop and dine bringing in revenue and helping small brick and mortar businesses. If we continue to structure the shopping and dining options so that they are spread so far throughout the county, individuals will continue to spend their money outside the county where activities are more conveniently located to one another.

- Do not implement the place types as their descriptions all open the door to higher density housing and commercial development by expanding the boundaries of the place without changing the comprehensive plan.
- Buy more TDRs and retire them. Help make farming a profitable and desirable career. A place for a farmers market in every town center.
- Pay for retirement of TDRs
- Limit growth even within the designated areas. We didn't move 40 miles outside of DC & PG County to be plagued with the same issues they now struggle with.

Question #2:

One way to protect farm and forest land is to direct growth away from them and into designated areas. What incentives would you support the county providing to encourage and attract direct growth to designated areas?

Summary of Responses to Question #2:

Many of the respondents thought that creating Town Centers that were more pedestrian and bicycle friendly, either through the layout of the Town Centers or by adding a bypass, would encourage more growth within them. Additionally, many respondents thought that growth should be limited to the designated areas so that the county can continue to preserve its rural character. Other ideas included having a central building that reflects the county's character as a focal point in Town Centers, limiting big box stores, even within Town Centers, improving accessibility to affordable high speed network communications, and improving or adding infrastructure to the designated areas.

Responses:

- Don't deviate from the current plan. NO apartments in Prince Frederick. Too much traffic already, needs a bypass.
- I don't really support much additional development within town centers. Prince Frederick is well on its way with becoming a smaller version of Waldorf with the higher density housing that is not reflective of Calvert County. I really think that the population of the county should look to be capped at 100,000 or less. Calvert has "unfortunately" gotten "lucky" in the sense that Calvert Cliffs and Cove Point LNG exist and are enormous tax payers, allowing the county to expand its infrastructure and development at a rapid pace, especially from the 1970s-2000. Charles County (mostly Waldorf) and Southern PG (Brandywine) is an indication of how things should not be done. And don't expand the town center borders or come up with new catchy names for places to direct growth there as well.

- We do not need growth in Calvert County. Many of us moved to the county to be in a rural environment.
- Doesn't the county make the rules? I thought that was the whole purpose of zoning...
- Financial incentives for higher density development within established growth centers. Regulatory tools to encourage development there are necessary.
- I am unclear why the county would need to provide any incentives. Those cost money and direct taxes raised away from other areas of need. The county needs to take less of a "carrot" approach and more of a "stick" approach here and mandate new growth occur only in designated areas. Otherwise, levy higher property taxes and building fees for those who request to build outside of designated areas.
- Community/ banks providing lower interest loans stipend to law enforcement and new teachers. County-- None other than improvements to infrastructure, power, mobility and affordable high speed network communications & public safety with emphasis on sustainability that avoids Big box/ brick & mortar businesses that don't provide a unique service /product will fail due to Amazon.
- I love this idea but the stores we are attracting are too large and therefore, spread out. If we build main street areas where individuals can park and walk to dine and shop and their shopping and dining needs are met this would be the perfect solution. Also, hosting more events throughout the year that encourage individuals to relate to the local farmers and to buy local (including helping individuals to build restaurants that serve locally grown food) would do wonders for our area.
- Why do we need to offer incentives to direct growth? Simply stick with the current comprehensive plan. Eventually property in the areas designated for higher density development will become more scarce, prices will rise, taxes will rise accordingly. On the other hand, if you expand the area eligible for higher density development, you'll get less pressure, lower rents, marginal to negative revenue and an unbalanced ratio of contributors vs poor.
- Financial incentives, to encourage development in town centers are important if land is more expensive in the town centers. Create a sense of place in town centers with a landmark, a unique interesting building, or a structure that reflects the community. This will encourage/attract/direct growth to designated areas
- Install the necessary infrastructure (roads, sewer, sidewalks, etc. and have the builders pay it back over time, as a front footage assessment.
- 1 - Public water instead of septic in high density areas that are expected to bear the largest negative impact because of crowds/traffic.
- 2 - Quality schools to accommodate higher density populations
- 3 - Expanded parks & recreation centers for higher population density areas
- 4 - Roads and infrastructure to support the added traffic.

5 - More evenly distributed growth for each of these designated areas.

Conclusion

There was a large consensus over the importance of preserving the county's rural character and directing growth to designated areas. Many of the respondents voiced suggestions for preserving land. Some suggested increasing the amount of preservation districts, while others suggested deflecting development from rural areas by attracting the development to Town Centers. It was also suggested to have a farmers market in each Town Center farming and direct growth to Town Centers. In regards to directing growth to designated areas, many suggested making the Town Centers more pedestrian and biker friendly, either through the layout of the Town Center or by adding a bypass. Many suggestions also included improving or adding infrastructure in the Town Centers. While there was not a consensus on how to pay for incentivizing the preservation of land, there was agreement throughout the responses that advocated for preserving the county's rural character and directing growth to designated areas.

Prepared by the Calvert County Community Planning & Building, May 4, 2017