MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

**MCPB**
**9/08/08**
**Item # 2**

August 28, 2008

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Jorge Valladares, P.E., Chief
Environmental Planning Division

FROM: Mary Dolan, Master Planner/Supervisor
Marion Clark, Planner/Coordinator
Environmental Planning Division

SUBJECT: **A Framework for Action: Healthy and Sustainable Communities Report**

**Summary Recommendation**

Staff recommends approval of the goals and indicators outlined more specifically on pages 8-17 of the attached report and to transmit the report to the County Council. In addition:

- Staff should assist the County Executive in coordinating health indicators with the rest of the Healthy and Sustainable Communities goals and indicators.
- Indicators from the Growth Policy report that are not included in the Framework for Action should be forwarded to the Executive to assure that they are considered in the indicator discussions on affordable housing, transportation, economy, safety and vitality.
- The Planning Board should determine which new indicators they would like to see added.
- The Planning Board should identify which indicators to disaggregate and what geography should be used.
- Establish a reporting period of every two years to coincide with the Growth Policy review.
- Staff to continue close coordination with County Executive staff to align actions to achieve the climate protection goal.

**Issues**

This is a report on an initial set of goals and indicators for use by the Planning Board, County Executive and County Council that should be used to guide public policy, programs and county budgets toward achieving a sustainable quality of life. Because the County Executive is preparing a comprehensive set of indicators for the county, this report covers a more limited set of indicators than first envisioned by the Planning Board. Issues for Planning Board discussion include:

- How to assure that indicators needed to guide the Growth Policy are included in the larger effort undertaken by the County Executive
- How much further research should Planning Department staff do on the additional indicators suggested by content experts and stakeholders
- How should the indicator data be further disaggregated to assist with Growth Policy discussions
- How frequently should the indicator data be collected and reported
- How should this work be coordinated with the efforts of the Sustainability Working Group appointed by the County Council

**Background**

The 2007-2009 Growth Policy was based on the principle Montgomery County should move toward managing growth and change in ways that are *sustainable* and monitoring their consequences for the County's economy, environment, and social equity. The Planning Board recommended monitoring the sustainability of the development that results from implementation of the Growth Policy. The resulting changes in economic/fiscal, environmental, and social equity outcomes would be included in its biennial report to the Council on Growth Policy. They recommended that a discrete set of indicators be selected that can measure changes in key outcomes or conditions that are objectives of the Growth Policy. The initial set of indicators should make intuitive sense, be supported by data that is available at appropriate geographic levels and time series, enjoys a high level of confidence in its accuracy, and has strong relevance to growth policy objectives. The illustrative list below was included in the Growth Policy report to show the kinds of information that would be useful in assessing progress on implementing the Growth Policy.

**Indicators of Facility Adequacy**
- Policy Area Mobility scores
- School Capacity
- Accessibility of residences to public transit
- Accessibility of residences to jobs
- Accessibility of residences to public parkland

**Indicators of Fiscal/Economic Sustainability**
- Unfunded CIP projects recommended in Master Plans
- Cost of Deferred Maintenance
- Per capita debt service
- Jobs: Housing ratio

**Indicators of Environmental Sustainability**
- Air Quality Action Days (Red & Purple)
- Stream Index of Biological Integrity
- Percentage of Impervious Surface
- Forest area/ tree canopy

**Indicators of Social Equity**
- Percentage of households paying more than 30% of income for housing
- The income gap between top and bottom quintiles
- Percentage of population with post-secondary education

- A public health index
- Labor force participation

The County Council discussion of these recommendations was generally supportive and the following task was included in the final resolution on the Growth Policy:

- **F10 Sustainability Quality of Life Indicators Program:** The Planning Board, with the aid of the Executive and with broad public participation, must develop a set of sustainable quality of life indicators, addressing issues of environment, social equity, and economy. These indicators must be suitable to guide land use and other public policy decision-making, including capital programming and design of public facilities. An initial set of tracking indicators must be prepared in time to inform the 2009-2011 Growth Policy review.

After it was adopted, a special appropriation was requested to complete the work, which was in addition to the FY09 work program. During that discussion, it became clear that the County Executive was developing indicators for each of his results areas including the following:

1. Affordable Housing in an Inclusive Community
2. An Effective and Efficient Transportation Network
3. Children Prepared to Live and Learn
4. Healthy and Sustainable Communities
5. Safe Streets and Secure Neighborhoods
6. Strong and Vibrant Economy
7. Vital Living for All of Our Residents

In discussions with the County Executive staff, it was agreed that the Planning Department staff would take the lead in developing indicators for the fourth results area in coordination with the Department of Environmental Protection. The County Executive would take the lead on the other areas, coordinating with Planning Department staff. This means that this report focuses mainly on the indicators of environmental sustainability, and including some measures of facility adequacy and economic sustainability. Indicators related more strongly to transportation, housing and economics will be the focus of the County Executive's efforts.

At the semi-annual review of our work program this spring, County Council agreed that we should produce a general policy framework for sustainability as an amendment to the General Plan. This would be integrated with our development of Sustainable Quality of Life Indicators. The planned workshop for the indicators was broadened to formulate countywide goals and recommendations for action related to environmental policy and energy issues. The goals of the workshop were:

- Develop a set of policy goals and action items to promote sustainability, completing the concept of an Environment and Energy Plan ahead of time.
- Quickly frame an amendment to the General Plan to incorporate those goals.
- Involve meaningful participation of stakeholders in a limited period of time.
- Solidify the Planning Department's partnership with the County Executive and the Executive Departments.
- Share potential Sustainability Indicators with stakeholder and the public and refine them to measure achievement of the goals.

- Promote the connectivity of plans, public and private expenditures, and actions toward achieving the Design and Sustainability directives of the Growth Policy and Council direction on climate change.
- Provide the overarching connections between the Green Infrastructure, Water Resources and Climate Protection Plans.

The workshop was conducted on June 25-26, 2008, and approximately 200 people attended. The discussions were led by independent content experts and professional facilitators. The results of the workshop and the comments received over the internet blog were used in the preparation of this report.

This report is a first step in developing a strong web of public, private and individual efforts toward a sustainable future. It is not a complete or comprehensive list of all the actions necessary to reach that future state. The results are not in any priority order, although the worksessions with the Planning Board and discussions with the County Council may highlight actions that should be a priority for public agencies.

Following approval of the goals in this report, they will be used to develop a draft amendment to the General Plan that will be prepared for Planning Board review at a later date.

**Analysis**

The workshop discussions and staff coordination revealed several issues that would benefit from further discussion by the Planning Board.

The expertise to formulate proper goals and indicators for the physical health of the residents of Montgomery County lies more within the purview of the County government and health interest groups and experts were not in attendance at the workshop. Health goals and indicators are not included in this report; however, the County Executive has agreed to facilitate that discussion. **Staff recommends that we assist the County Executive in coordinating health indicators with the rest of the Healthy and Sustainable Communities goals and indicators.**

The Growth Policy included a broad range of indicators that have been since reorganized to fit with the County Executive's indicators project. This project is on a different schedule and all elements that relate to the Growth Policy have not been completed. The Executive has asked us to designate Planning Department staff to participate in the other six results areas, and those staff members have been designated. Work is almost completed on the affordable housing indicators, but the others are just getting underway. **Staff recommends that remaining indicators from the Growth Policy report be forwarded to the Executive to assure that they are considered in the indicator discussions.**

The report includes suggestions for additional indicators under each goal. Most of these were not developed because there was not sufficient time or data to prepare them. **Staff recommends that the Planning Board discuss whether there are certain indicators they would like to see prepared and staff can report on the feasibility and effort required at a later date.**

Some of the indicators can be further disaggregated to provide more specific information about particular areas of the county. This information would be useful in judging the effectiveness over time of county growth policies. The following table shows which indicators have information only at the county level (in red), indicators that might have data that could be broken down further (yellow), and those that can definitely be further disaggregated (green). If there is a

specific geography that is especially appropriate, it is shown in the table. **Staff recommends that the Planning Board determine which indicators should be further analyzed and what geography should be used.**

| INDICATOR | COUNTY ONLY | BY SMALLER GEOGRAPHY |
|---|---|---|
| **Clean Air and Climate Protection** | | |
| Greenhouse Gas Emissions | | |
| Ozone Action Days | | |
| Ozone Levels | | |
| Vehicle Miles Traveled | | Policy Areas |
| Natural Gas Use | | |
| Electricity Use | | |
| **Clean Water** | | |
| Nitrogen Contribution to the Bay | | Watersheds |
| Phosphorus Contribution to the Bay | | Watersheds |
| Sediment Contribution to the Bay | | Watersheds |
| Percent of Streams Rated Good to Excellent | | Watersheds |
| **Green Economy** | | |
| LEED Registered Buildings | | |
| Farm Land | | |
| **Green Infrastructure** | | |
| Forest Cover | | |
| Paving and Buildings | | |
| **Smart Communities** | | |
| Access to Transit | | |
| Access to Parks | | |
| Jobs/Housing Ratio | | Policy Areas |
| Relative Mobility | | Policy Areas |

The Board should determine how often the indicators should be assessed. Staff is working with the consultant to assure that the data is well documented and that the contacts for updating the information are clearly identified and that data collection is automated if that is possible. For most of the indicators, the data is not collected on a yearly basis, and some have data only available every 10 years. Since the Growth Policy is reviewed every two years, **staff recommends that data be reported every two years to coincide with the Growth Policy review.**

The County Council has recently established the Sustainability Working Group as an ongoing committee with a charge to prepare a Climate Protection Plan by January, 2009. The Planning Board is represented as an ex-officio member. The group will use the Framework for Action as input to the Climate Protection Plan. The group will refine and advise the County on implementation of that plan in the following years. The climate protection goal and indicators in the Framework were prepared by the Department of Environmental Protection staff and should be consistent with the information to be used in the Climate Protection Plan. **Staff**

**recommends that close coordination continue between the Planning Board and County Executive staff to align actions to achieve the climate protection goal.**

**Staff Recommendation**
Staff recommends approval of the goals and indicators in this report and to transmit the report to the County Council by October 1, 2008. In addition:

- Staff should assist the County Executive in coordinating health indicators with the rest of the Healthy and Sustainable Communities goals and indicators.
- Indicators from the Growth Policy report that are not included in the Framework for Action should be forwarded to the Executive to assure that they are considered in the indicator discussions on affordable housing, transportation, economy, safety and vitality.
- The Planning Board should determine which new indicators they would like to see added.
- The Planning Board should identify which indicators to disaggregate and what geography should be used.
- Establish a reporting period of every two years to coincide with the Growth Policy review.
- Staff to continue close coordination with County Executive staff to align actions to achieve the climate protection goal.

Appendices
Draft report – A Framework for Action: Healthy and Sustainable Communities