



SMART GROWTH



The rapid development that has taken place in and around Ocean City, Maryland, over the last several decades made Worcester County the state's most rapidly growing coastal region. With more people expected and demands for development on the horizon, the County was faced with two major issues: how should the County prepare for growth, and where should that growth occur?

THE NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM IN ACTION

Beginning in 2004, using EPA grant funding, the Maryland Coastal Bays Program (MCBP) brought scores of builders, county planners, architects, engineers, and other stakeholders to the table, a collaboration that enabled the MCBP to create a viable plan that would replace years-old planning and zoning laws with ones that mandate low-impact development (LID) elements into any future building projects. Officially adopted by the Worcester County Commissioners in March 2006, the County's new Comprehensive Plan for smart growth will introduce greener development processes across 3,300 acres over the next 20 years—it will also

help preserve 20,000 acres by pushing growth away from the forests, wetlands, and flood-prone areas and into and around existing infrastructure absent of hazardous and sensitive areas. During the initial planning stages, all municipalities within Worcester County played an integral role in developing the new design with concerted efforts to stay focused on what would be best for the County as a whole in order to meet smart growth objectives. Numerous speakers groups, public meetings, and workshops kept everyone on the same page and MCBP also developed a course to teach real estate professionals about the environmental impacts of vari-

ous types of development. In the field, individual analyses of each of the eight watersheds in the County were conducted to help determine how growth should be directed away from sensitive areas and toward marginal agricultural land adjacent to existing towns. Nutrient reduction efforts and Total Maximum Daily Load implementation were also incorporated into the plan and information was shared with state officials during presentations—an effort that has expanded and enabled MCBP to work with neighboring counties in Delaware and Virginia to examine their watershed planning. Soon, Worcester's outmoded zoning ordinances — now attached to

Maryland Coastal Bays Program



EFFECTIVE



EFFICIENT



ADAPTIVE



COLLABORATIVE



large lot zones—were terminated and found inconsistent with the Plan’s eye toward greener development—allowing just enough growth (2,700 acres per parcel) to accommodate the estimated 18,000 people who are expected to move into the County over the next decade. To help residents understand the importance of changing zoning laws and the benefit they have toward preserving the region’s character and environmental integrity, the MCBP launched a \$20,000 public education campaign. Divisiveness in communities is often the unfortunate result of discussions about growth and development. Maryland Coastal Bays, however, successfully brought opposing views to the table through the NEP governance plan in order to protect the bays and waters where freshwater meets the sea in coastal Maryland. The product of this collaborative effort, the

Worcester County Comprehensive Plan, not only is an important model for watersheds across the country, but has won an American Planning Association award.

Vsist www.mdcoastalbays.org to learn more about this and other MCBP efforts.

EPA’s National Estuary Program (NEP) is a unique and successful coastal watershed-based program established in 1987 under the Clean Water Act Amendments. The NEP involves the public and collaborates with partners to protect, restore, and maintain the water quality and ecological integrity of 28 estuaries of national significance located in 18 coastal states and Puerto Rico.

For more information about the NEP go to www.epa.gov/owow/estuaries.