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Reality Check *Plus* Event in Cambridge Focuses on Eastern Shore Challenges *Exercise About Affordable Housing, Jobs, Growth Patterns*

May 25, 2006 (Cambridge, Md.) – A diverse group of nearly 200 elected officials, government staff and community, civic and business leaders from nine Eastern Shore counties today participated an unprecedented dialogue about the pressing challenges facing the future of Maryland's Eastern Shore as part of the day-long **Reality Check *Plus*** exercise at the Cambridge Hyatt Hotel. Planned and hosted by a unique coalition of nearly 150 nonprofit, community and private sector organizations statewide, the May 25th **Reality Check *Plus*** event explored and fostered collective visioning about growth on the Eastern Shore and in the state overall.

During the morning, 200 individuals — including elected officials, government staff and community, civic and business leaders from throughout the Eastern Shore — participated in an exercise using blocks to represent the increment of new homes and jobs projected to come to the nine-county region by 2030. Invitees from across the Eastern Shore were selected by the Eastern Shore **Reality Check *Plus*** organizing committee specifically to represent all stakeholder interests throughout Caroline, Cecil, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico and Worcester counties.

Participants in the morning exercise wanted to maintain a high share of both employment and households within Priority Funding Areas. PFAs are designated growth areas established in 1997 as a result of Maryland's Smart Growth legislation. These findings were based on consensus principles that were established by each of the 19 tables, which included:

- Build around existing infrastructure or provide infrastructure for new development in a timely fashion (16 of 19 tables);
- Protect environmentally sensitive areas (15 of 19 tables);
- Concentrate development in existing communities (11 of 19 tables);
- Protect a "critical mass" of farmland (11 of 19 tables);
- Provide more affordable and workforce housing (10 of 19 tables);
- Locate new housing closer to jobs (9 out of 19 tables);
- Protect the Shore's rural heritage (8 out of 19 tables).

The afternoon session, which was open to the public, focused on the implications of growth and the implementation of a common vision. It began with a keynote address by Russell Brinsfield, Executive Director of the Maryland Center for Agro-Ecology, a coalition of agricultural, environmental, forestry, business, educational, government and other leaders dedicated to enhancing Maryland's farms, forests and other "working lands" through research, education and policy programs. Brinsfield has coauthored numerous publications focusing on ways to minimize the impact of agriculture on our natural resources. He manages the Brinsfield family farms, is mayor of Vienna, Maryland, and is cofounder and current Board of Directors member of the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy.

"After today, our task, our challenge, will be to take the principles and implementation ideas that we agree on and continue to find ways to make them happen—to bolster the elected officials who have the courage to support them, and to urge future candidates for public office to embrace them," said Brinsfield in his keynote remarks. "In order to accomplish this, perhaps we should be thinking in terms of 'watersheds' instead of political boundaries because the environment doesn't recognize political boundaries."

The afternoon concluded with a discussion about how the group's mutual vision could be implemented. Roadblocks to implementation identified included the need to educate public officials about land use issues and planning solutions; how comprehensive plans on the county or local level are often ineffective, and that zoning too often does not comport with the area's comprehensive plan; and the absence of county-municipal cooperation.

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Participants, asked to list their top ideas, recommended five strategies to implement the mutual vision:

- Develop local champions of the ideas that resulted from the day's discussions;
- Encourage more regional or inter-jurisdictional planning;
- Do a 'carrying capacity' analysis for the entire Eastern Shore;
- Put more emphasis on education and outreach on land use issues;
- Develop transferable development rights programs with sufficient receiving areas for the transferred density/development rights.

Next steps for **Reality Check Plus** will include creation of a Blueprint for Maryland based on the outcomes from the May 25th Eastern Shore exercise and the three ensuing Reality Check Plus exercises in Western Maryland, in Central Maryland and in Southern Maryland. A detailed implementation strategy will then be developed over the coming months, based on the ideas generated at each of the four regional exercises, that will feature the three key elements of research about policy and program options, issue-related education and advocacy for policy change.

Led statewide by the Urban Land Institute's Baltimore District Council, the University of Maryland's National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education, and 1000 Friends of Maryland, **Reality Check Plus** brings together a diverse group of organizations and various stakeholders, including politicians, developers, environmentalists, and business and civic leaders to consider Maryland's future growth

A broad-based coalition of nearly 150 sponsors and supporting organizations is guiding this effort, including the Home Builders Association of Maryland, the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, The Keith Campbell Foundation for the Environment, the Morris & Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, The American Institute of Architects - Baltimore, the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy, the Greater Baltimore Committee, St. Mary's College and the Mid-Shore Community Foundation, among many others.

A number of other jurisdictions around the country have already launched local or regional visioning exercises – Envision Utah in the Salt Lake City region; Blueprint in Sacramento, California; and Reality Check in Los Angeles, Dallas Ft. Worth and Washington, D.C. What distinguishes **Reality Check Plus** from previous visioning exercises in Maryland is that it is privately led, statewide and action-oriented.

For more information about **Reality Check Plus**, contact Beth Offenbacker at 703.933.0520, ext. 202 or Jack Lynn at 703.683.2996. Our website, www.realitycheckmaryland.org, provides additional information about both the overall **Reality Check Plus** exercise concept and specifically the May 25th Eastern Shore event.

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