

Keynote Address Delivered at the
Eastern Shore Reality Check event
in Cambridge, Maryland
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Thank you, and good afternoon. I want to welcome you to this event, and thank you for attending. This meeting is part of a statewide effort of critical importance to the future of Maryland. The results of the four Reality Check Plus regional exercises—here on the Eastern Shore, and in Western, Central, and Southern Maryland—will provide the basis for an unprecedented, statewide vision for growth.

This exercise is supported by an impressive array of organizations. I'm not going to read their names to you, but please take a moment today to look through the list of them starting on **page 4** of your program. We thank them for making this important day possible.

We have a unique opportunity today to help chart the future for the Eastern Shore—to preserve not only what makes this place special to us but also to plan for and manage its growth.

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Each of us is here because we're concerned—maybe even alarmed—by the rate of change that is occurring in our region and across the state. For myself, I have watched our farms and forests disappear. I've seen how rapid, sporadic growth without region-wide planning can change—even threaten—a community. As mayor of Vienna, and a longtime resident of the Shore, I see new threats almost daily.

I was born and raised on a farm near the Nanticoke River. Outside of serving in the military, I've lived in Maryland all my life. Following graduate school in 1982, I had the good fortune of becoming the first director of the University of Maryland's Wye Research and Education Center near Queenstown. Being a resident of Vienna, my daily commute takes me north on Route 331 through Hurlock to Preston, across the little Choptank River Bridge, and north of Easton on Route 50. What a beautiful drive! Well-defined towns with vast open fields and forests dominated the landscape.

Beginning in the late 1980s, however, I began to notice some troubling changes. The first signs were orange flags and PVC pipes for perc tests popping up in fields, miles from the nearest town. I began wondering why. That experience started me down the road of looking at land-use issues and led me to become the co-founder of the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy.

And because you're here today, I know these trends trouble you as well. Development has consumed large amounts of farm and forestland. The Shore's infrastructure is becoming strained. Traffic congestion, something unheard of here twenty years ago, is becoming common.

Don't misunderstand my thinking here. I'm *not* against growth OR change. In fact, if there is one thing I've come to realize, it's that growth is going to occur—*no matter what*. As citizens, business owners, government officials, and residents who love the Shore, we need to accept this fact—and a few others.

Fact: Maryland is already the fifth most densely populated state in the nation. And it's rapidly becoming more crowded. Our state's population will *grow* by 1.5 million people and 500,000 jobs by 2030, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Fact: Six of the Shore's nine counties will experience a higher percentage increase in population from 2005 to 2030 than is anticipated for the state as a whole, according to recent

Maryland Department of Planning projections. The department's estimates range from nearly 17 percent in Somerset County to more than *64 percent* in Cecil County. For comparison, consider that the Department of Planning expects a statewide population increase of 19.5 percent by 2030.

Fact: The federal government's Base Realignment and Closure program will bring between 40,000 to 60,000 jobs to Maryland over the next decade. Some of these jobs will be filled by Maryland residents. Many of them will be filled by people who move here. The influx of tens of thousands of new workers will put an even greater strain on county roads, water and sewer systems, and schools.

Fact: The flow of new residents represents an increase of 500,000 beyond current state estimates. It means that the state's population could expand from 563 people per square mile to 716 per square mile.

Fact: A Chesapeake Bay Foundation report called *Vanishing Lands: The Erosion of Rural Character in Wicomico County, Maryland*, notes that wetland acreage in Maryland has declined by nearly 75 percent since the 1600s. In addition, the 2002 Agricultural Census reported that, for Maryland, harvested cropland acres declined by seven percent between 1997 and 2002. This represents a loss of more than 95,000 acres. To put these numbers in perspective, that's slightly more than the total number of cropland acres currently harvested in Worcester County. When you consider the growth projected for just the next few decades, how will it impact the Bay and the future of farming and forestry?

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These statistics are more than a little scary to me. But I have to tell you, even in the face of such daunting numbers, *I believe deeply that a positive future for the Eastern Shore is still*

within reach. I look at the future of the Eastern Shore, and I can still envision a place where towns are well-defined and lively. Where farms, fisheries, and forests are protected and flourishing. Where the Shore's scenic and historic geography is preserved and safeguarded. *The people in this room can help make it happen.* Together, we can build a bridge between the Eastern Shore's traditional past and its 21st Century future.

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However, as we have seen from this morning's exercise, we face some tough questions. *First*, where will the state's 1.5-million new residents—and the millions more who will follow them in subsequent years—live and work? *Second*, can our existing cities and towns assimilate the increase in population and jobs? Can we prevent sprawl from spilling even further into the landscape that we hold so dear? *Third*, how will this affect the already troubled Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, and how will it affect the future of our natural resource based industries? And *fourth*, how will this growth affect the quality of life of all Marylanders?

Maybe we can no longer do things the way we used to. Maybe it is time for new approaches. Perhaps the era of single-jurisdiction planning—at the county or municipal level—has seen its day. For example, should we create a regional entity to support groups like the Mid-Shore Regional Council?

No matter what we do, we need to find a way to strike a balance between what used to be and what could be. I'm not sure what the answers are yet, but I take heart in seeing so many faces here today who share my conviction that there *are* answers.

However, I do know this: what we need, for starters, is to reach a consensus as a region on what is sustainable for the Eastern Shore and how to best to achieve more acceptable development patterns.

From my perspective, a factor driving the urgency of this meeting is the recent, astounding increase in property values and development pressure. Just three years ago, the future for agriculture on the Eastern Shore looked pretty positive. We were approaching the goal of preserving 30 percent of our rural lands and could fall back on some of the best zoning in the state.

And then, land prices nearly doubled. Within an incredibly brief period of time, development pressure escalated to previously unimagined levels. Now, some people who were committed to agriculture are rethinking their options, as the payoff for selling land increases almost monthly. Therefore a critical part of our discussions MUST include strategies to enhance the profitability of farming and forestry on the Shore.

The Maryland Center for Agro-Ecology, a group for which I serve as Executive Director, has worked hard to bring assistance to landowners affected by this trend in land value. The Center has funded more than 30 research projects designed to provide decision-makers with science-based guidance on subjects like downzoning and the importance of the forest and poultry industries to Maryland's economy. The Center played a strong role in encouraging Maryland leaders to create a dedicated source of revenue for enhanced state support of the cover crop cost share program and to fully fund our land preservation programs. In 2003, we hosted a conference that provided Maryland county leaders with an opportunity to share innovative land protection and preservation techniques with their peers.

This is just one example of what a single organization can do to help the Shore adjust to the realities of development. Imagine what we can accomplish if, following this exercise, all of our collective entrepreneurial and innovative thinking is integrated into a *single plan for growth for the Eastern Shore?*

Let me give you another brief example from Vienna, the town I serve as mayor. Vienna is a small town located on the Nanticoke River in Dorchester County. Facing the potential for significant growth and change in the 21st century, in July 2002 the Town engaged The Conservation Fund to help create a Community Vision Plan. The Plan, which was officially adopted in January 2003, describes a vision for how Vienna can grow over the next 20 years and still retain its small-town character, serve as a gateway for recreation and tourism, and emerge as a model for conservation planning in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

As I reflect on this experience, I offer the following lessons we learned from that small-scale process, because I believe they might be helpful to us during today's regional exercise:

- *First*, even though it is time-consuming, the process must engage the citizens in a meaningful dialogue
- *Second*, the process must be viewed as being open-ended and transparent, with no hidden agenda
- *Third*, make people aware of what the community will look like with "business as usual." In fact, a graphic that depicted what the town would look like at "build out" under the current zoning was probably the most compelling reason why Vienna's citizens decided we needed a change
- And *finally*, it is critical to develop a plan that fits into the broader context. For Vienna, we engaged local land owners just outside the Town as well as County and State officials, to gain their support for a regional vision

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Similarly, over the past 15 years, the process of “regional visioning”—of which Reality Check is one type—has emerged as an important tool for building regional consensus, especially with respect to growth-related issues like those we face here on the Shore. Utah, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, and Central Florida have conducted successful initiatives that yielded clearly-defined, measurable goals.

But we don’t have to look beyond the state for great examples of planning. We have great examples right here on the Shore.

As a starting point, we could look back to 1992, when Maryland adopted a statewide policy requiring counties to develop comprehensive plans that guide land-use planning activities. Since then, various stakeholder groups have combined their efforts to approach the challenge in new ways.

One example is *Eastern Shore 2010*, which is a regional land use agreement for the upper Shore’s six counties. This program was launched in 2002 by the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy and provides an outstanding example of how *local citizens* can contribute to a vision for growth. The agreement helps set the highest expectations for the care of our landscape. These six counties have agreed to the following goals for 2010:

- Strive to protect from development, through the use of voluntary preservation programs, 50 percent of Eastern Shore land outside of locally designated growth areas
- Recognize our resource-based industries as a key part of our Eastern Shore heritage and future by integrating agriculture, fisheries, and forestry into each county’s economic development plan
- Work with existing communities to guide at least 50 percent of new annual development into locally-designated growth areas

- Develop a regional public transportation plan

Another example is the *Cambridge Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team Program*, or “R/UDAT” as it is more commonly called. Since 1967, the R/UDAT program has used a grassroots approach to help create more livable communities. The Cambridge R/UDAT was held just last week, and was sponsored by Cambridge Main Street and the City of Cambridge. The initiative provided us with suggestions that, as local residents, we might not have reached ourselves because we “couldn’t see the forest for the trees.” Most importantly, the end goal of the process is to develop a growth strategy for Cambridge that its citizens can claim for their own.

A third example is Talbot County’s current endeavor, called *Toward a Vision Plan for Sustaining Agriculture in Talbot County*. It was initiated by Talbot County Councilman Peter Carroll and Dr. Wayne Bell from Washington College. This effort is being sponsored by Maryland Sea Grant, Talbot County Government, the Town Creek Foundation, and Washington College’s Center for the Environment and Society, with cooperation from the Talbot County Extension Office. Through this effort, Talbot County is taking steps to educate citizens about the value of agriculture and its contribution to the community, and identifying ways to ensure that agriculture remains a viable part of the County economy.

A fourth example of how local citizens can be heard in this process comes from Wicomico County, where population will triple by 2030 from its level in 1950. I am sure that some of the people here today were involved in this example. As many of you know, earlier this month, town officials in Willards decided not to consider further major annexations for the near

future—effective immediately. They made the decision to halt new development after watching what was happening in cities and towns across the Lower Shore.

Willards is not alone. Other towns on the Shore have placed moratoria on growth. In Somerset County, Crisfield has chosen to delay approval of further development as it completes its planning process. Further west, the Terrapin Run development project is now before an Allegany County Circuit Court and its future is in question.

I am sure these changes feel like huge victories to the people who fought for them; and in a sense, they truly are—for *those localities*. But if local efforts—without the framework of a larger strategy—comprise our response to the challenges of growth, I worry that in the long term, we will experience collective fallout with troubling implications for the Shore as a whole.

But growth is coming and it's got to go somewhere. Localized growth controls risk pushing the development farther beyond town limits where there is no infrastructure to support it. And just because a town wins a battle to limit growth inside its own borders, doesn't mean it has sidestepped the challenges that come with growth, such as the increase in population and traffic. I worry that these kinds of solutions don't actually create a buffer against growth, but only put off asking tough questions for a few more years.

It's sad, but we can't ignore the fact that certain things about our cherished past are gone forever. The Eastern Shore of twenty years ago is, quite simply, history. To try to preserve something that isn't there anymore is an expenditure of time and effort that we just can't afford.

Let's look at the issue another way. Consider the example of Caroline County, where they just recently passed a new rural zoning ordinance that I think is a great model for future efforts. Also, Cecil County, where there is a very progressive down-zoning proposal coupled

with a TDR program is being debated. Both are examples of effective, integrated planning initiatives.

But what we cannot do is protect the overall quality of life here on the Eastern Shore with a parcel-by-parcel approach. For the good of all the Shore's residents, now and future, we have to take a long-range approach. That's what this event is all about.

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The Reality Check events—here on the Eastern Shore and at the other locations across the state—are just the beginning of a long-term conversation about growth and its implications. It will have ups and downs. But it is important for all of us to pull together and, for this one day, realize that we probably have more things in common than we thought. As I listened this morning, I overheard some comments that gave me hope, and a sense of pride over what can be accomplished if we work together.

We have a chance to preserve the things about the Eastern Shore that are special and make us unique. Towns like Chestertown and Easton. Like the wonderful habitats that supports waterfowl, crabs, and rockfish that has provided a living for generations of watermen. Like the rural farms that have played such an important role in the economy, culture, and history of Maryland and the Mid-Atlantic region. Like the forests that provide a home for the area's native wildlife and a setting for our sportsmen.

After today, our task, our challenge, will be to take the principles and implementation ideas that we agree on and continue to work together to find a way to make them happen—to bolster the elected officials who have the courage to support them, and urge future candidates for public office to support them. No pun intended, but this could be a watershed event, a watershed year in how we think about land use on the Shore.

Again, I want to thank the Urban Land Institute's Baltimore District, the University of Maryland's National Center for Smart Growth, 1000 Friends of Maryland and the others listed in the program for making this event possible. And I want to thank all of you, the developers, environmentalists, watermen, elected officials, agricultural and forestry interests, and business and civic leaders who care so much about the future of the Eastern Shore. Let's work together for the remainder of the day, and in the months and years ahead, to make the future of the Shore a positive one.

As we return to the Reality Check exercise this afternoon, let's do so with a sense of what we can achieve if we work together. Vince Lombardi once said, "When a group of dedicated individuals makes a commitment to act as one ... the sky's the limit." Let's take these words to heart. Thank you.