



Summary and Recommendations

The model has shown that there is a great deal of development potential left in the county--13,000 to 30,000 new units that can be constructed under present zoning regulations, in addition to the 10,000 units that are currently in the development pipeline. Growth will continue to occur not only through the development of the vacant and underdeveloped parcels in the urban area, but also through redevelopment.

Some growth will occur in the rural area as well, but this is not addressed by the model. It is a long-standing county policy to maintain the urban-rural demarcation line, and there is no reason to deviate from that policy. As the number of larger vacant tracts have diminished, some have the perception is that the county is approaching "buildout." While the opportunity for conventional large-tract subdivisions is not what it once was, the potential of the urban area to accommodate growth is still quite high.

Standard, greenfield subdivision is still possible throughout the urban area but on smaller vacant tracts. Many of these could be termed "infill" development where they occur within existing communities. Opportunities to construct residences on vacant, individual lots that are part of an existing subdivision, but were not built on, are also numerous.

The greatest opportunity for new building construction comes from resubdividing underdeveloped lots. A few of these resubdivisions will involve large parcels. But most will involve small infill development, where lots in existing subdivisions are split, sometimes into panhandle lots or other meandering configurations to accommodate new units.

The redevelopment that is occurring in the county is a relatively new phenomenon. Because of the ability of developers to use the PUD process, the number of future residential units is not predictable. However, the model can be used as a tool in planning for redevelopment, as discussed further below.

How Should the County Grow?

The state's Smart Growth policies encourage infill development because it takes advantage of the existing supportive infrastructure--roads, schools, libraries, parks, etc. For developing jurisdictions, it is an alternative to expanding suburban sprawl.

For Baltimore County, as a maturing jurisdiction, encouraging continued non-selective infill development may not be the best way to accommodate new growth in some areas. If the county's growth were to continue to its ultimate limit as regulated by current zoning, it is very likely that the growth will exceed the capacity of the county's supportive infrastructure. Many communities are already being subjected to congested roads, crowded schools and lack of open space. Further, infill development that is out of scale or character with the existing neighborhood can negatively affect its cohesiveness and visual identity.

Alternatively, redevelopment provides the opportunity to replace antiquated structures with modern buildings providing more amenities and a higher level of design. While redevelopment is more costly than greenfield development, it can be planned at a higher density, providing an economic incentive for the developer and greater tax benefit for the county. For the developer, the economic incentive should be paired with a requirement for a higher quality of design accompanied with a range of attractive amenities to ensure a positive impact on the community. Redevelopment areas can be planned for locations where the existing infrastructure can either accommodate it, or can be upgraded as part of the redevelopment. The county government may find it advantageous to provide incentives for redevelopment, or build the necessary infrastructure upgrades.

Planned redevelopment may offer the best solution for accommodating new growth. As the county ages, buildings and other facilities need to be renovated, modernized and upgraded to maintain the county as a place where people want to live and

work. Redevelopment provides an opportunity to “retool,” providing development that meets the emergent goal for improved sustainability, including better environmental quality, more efficient land use patterns through mixed use and more transportation opportunities including walking, bicycling and transit.

The following recommendations are suggested as ways to direct growth to ensure the county remains a desirable, sustainable place for its citizens to live and work.

Maintaining Established Communities-- Community Conservation Areas

As part of the community planning process, identify areas where new growth through greenfield development, infill and redevelopment is desired, as well as where the character of the existing community should be maintained. Pursue appropriate actions to achieve the desired results, which could include:

1. Apply zoning classifications that match the existing or desired density of the neighborhood.
2. Prohibit resubdivision that involves panhandle and meandering lot lines.
3. Adopt appropriate compatibility standards (height, setbacks, parking, building style, etc.) that blend new development into existing neighborhoods.
4. Formalize existing privately-owned open space by converting vacant parcels into public passive open spaces using the NeighborSpace program or other mechanisms.
5. Clarify the legislation regarding the zoning merger doctrine, undersized lots, and building setbacks so that the development of small lots located within existing neighborhoods demonstrates a high level of compatibility.

Promoting Redevelopment Areas-- Community Enhancement Areas

As part of the community plan adoption process, establish an overlay district with zoning and development standards. Consideration should be given to the following:

1. Identify areas where additional density can be accommodated without straining the existing infrastructure, or where upgrades to the infrastructure are feasible as part of the redevelopment activity. Streamlined development review through limited exemptions could be applied.
2. Select redevelopment areas based on their ability to be multi-modal. As the county’s road system is reaching its operational limits, use of alternative forms of transportation to support higher density, mixed use, compact and walkable redevelopment will be essential.
3. Where intensive growth is desired, apply a special zoning district that would require a mixture of residential, commercial and employment uses, as well as a mix of housing types. Include mandatory design standards in order to assure a high quality design and an adequate level of amenities.
4. Provide developer incentives that are appropriate to the redevelopment area. For example, if a sewer upgrade is needed, the county could participate in the construction cost.
5. Apply a sustainability index (criteria) in order to evaluate and rank projects using software such as Criterion.

Next Steps

The development capacity model has been a useful tool in projecting the potential for new residential development in the urban county. The model should be run annually to monitor the county’s growth. The current model results can be compared to future results on a parcel by parcel basis to analyze whether the growth pattern is consistent with the county’s goals as identified in the Master Plan.

The model can be adjusted to provide results for any area, not just watersheds. Other parameters can be adjusted as well, such as the zoning density, or the percentage of environmental constraint coverage. A new model step can be added to apply an additional factor for analysis, or deleted if one is found to be unnecessary.

By focussing the model on specific communities, it can assist in developing community plans to guide

rezoning and creation of community-specific zoning, design or compatibility standards.

The model can also be used in creating county-wide growth scenarios by adjusting the densities at various localities. Used in concert with population projections, the results can assist in analyzing the impact of alternative growth scenarios on public infrastructure, and inform decisions for amending zoning and other legislation.