



MEMORANDUM

TO: Planning Commission of St. Mary's County

FROM: SMC Project Team

DATE: August 2, 2026

RE: Memo #4 - Planning Commission Questions/Comments post-July 13 meeting

On July 13, 2026, the Project Team encouraged members of the Planning Commission to send questions LUGM so that responses could be provided in advance of the August 3rd meeting. Below are the responses offered to the questions/comments that were received.

In response to the comments provided by MDP, the following questions/comments were received:

1. From page 1, it is noted that the Implementation Matrix includes proposed actions but excludes policies without actions items. A concern was raised because not all policies appear to have corresponding actions.

Ordinarily, policy documents would include action items. However, page 15 of the draft plan explains an important distinction with the policies and actions: "Policies are statement of commitment and direction at achieving corresponding Goals. These describe positions to inform decision-making either by the County or a partner agency. Actions are specific tasks that will be taken to achieve the Vision."

As a reminder, there were three Visions that emerged following Community Engagement Window #1. The Vision themes are explained on page 6 of the public hearing draft.

2. From page 2, it is noted that the County should consider adding relevant policies for streamlining the development and permit review processes for all developments in designated growth areas.

This priority has been expressed in Action 1.2.1 and Action 1.2.3 regarding senior housing. The Project Team does support including a new Growth Management Action 1.1.1 to "Evaluate the development and permit review processes and identify opportunities to streamline approvals for development within designated Growth Areas." This is an ongoing priority for the Department of Land Use & Growth Management and could extend to other development review agencies in the county.

3. From page 3, the observation was made that some data on housing affordability are included, but that affordability using income categories described in the MDP comment letter was not included. Also, a question was raised as to the necessity of including the use of MDP's housing data dashboard. Lastly, while these items would be addressed in the housing study referenced in the Housing element, should this data be included now?

The Attainable Housing Workgroup should be looking at all available data. Additional language could be added to the end of Action 1.1.1. This new language could read as follows:

“State law requires that local jurisdictions include certain information within their plans relating to “low-income housing” and “workforce housing,” which are defined by other provisions of State law. The Maryland Department of Planning has developed a ‘Housing Data Dashboard’ that provides data based upon a five-year average of results from the American Community Survey (ACS), an ongoing annual survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. These resources should be examined by the Attainable Housing Work Group in the preparation of a Housing Study.”

4. The Plan, Planning Commission, and the Project Team acknowledge the requirement to assess fair housing. However, it appears as though the plan does not assess fair housing beyond inclusion of a Social Vulnerability index Map. Should additional action be taken?

State law requires local jurisdictions to affirmatively further fair housing and one way to accomplish this is through an assessment of fair housing to ensure that the local jurisdiction is affirmatively furthering fair housing. Because Maryland does not identify specific requirements for assessments of fair housing in housing elements, local jurisdictions have discretion over the contents of their assessments.

The draft plan does reference the Trends & Projections report that was presented as an initial work product for this project, which captured certain data at a single point in time. One of the items included in the draft plan is the Social Vulnerability Index Map which identifies locations within our County that are vulnerable with respect to low-income status, housing cost-burdened, the lack of a high school diploma, not having health insurance, or being unemployed.

It will be incumbent upon the Attainable Housing Work Group to ensure that fair housing is included, which means carefully evaluating and identifying potential barriers to thriving communities for everyone regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, family status, or disability.

5. On page 4, MDP is recommending the adoption of best practices from MDPs Housing Element Checklist. Do we need to include these items?

MDP's review was based upon that checklist. But, as MPD has re-iterated, they don't make any determination as to whether the plan does or does not comply with State law. These items will continue to be considered as various components of the plan are implemented.

6. Following up on an item from page 6, does the County have an updated pedestrian and bicycle plan?

Yes, it was presented as an element of the County's Transportation Plan that was approved on December 9, 2025.

7. On page 8, MDP makes the observation that while the draft plan includes policies and actions related to extending water and sewer services, it doesn't include analysis of current water and sewer capacity versus projected demand. Is this something that should be included? In addition, MDP notes that the draft plan does not discuss projections for suitable receiving waters, climate change adaptation, nor equity impacts of planned growth and development. Is this something that should be included?

In order to conserve, protect, and use water resources of the State in the best interests of the people of Maryland, MDE controls the appropriation or use of surface and underground waters through a groundwater appropriate permit. As for sewer capacity, the County and MetCom will continue an ongoing dialogue. LUGM staff has also reached out to the Consultant Team with respect to this item. We anticipate that the professionals at Burns & McDonnell will be able to provide additional information about this and MetCom should be able to do this, as well.

8. Page 9 of MDP's comment letter notes that the plan is required to include a mineral resources element, including the identification of land that remains undeveloped to provide continuous supply of minerals. Where is the information provided?

This is easily identified through our GIS system and is consistent with the County's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs).

9. On page 10, MDP reference Growth Tiers. Is there a requirement to adopt a Growth Tier Map or does the plan already include this by virtue of designated growth areas?

The goal of the Maryland Sustainable Growth and Agricultural Preservation Act of 2012 (commonly referred to as the "Septic Bill") adopted December 31, 2012, was to "limit the disproportionate impacts of large subdivisions on septic systems on our farm and forest land, streams, rivers and Chesapeake and Coastal Bays."

The Septic Bill required jurisdictions to adopt tier maps. However, this "requirement" was voluntary but came with a stiff penalty if the jurisdiction did not adopt the tier maps. That penalty: the County is prohibited from approving major subdivisions with on-site sewage disposal systems, community sewer systems, or shared systems. In 2013, the Commissioners debated the issue and ultimately decided not to adopt a tier map. And thus, property owners that wish to develop major subdivisions must ensure that the properties are connected to public sewer. This has prevented the rural areas of the County from being overdeveloped.

10. On pages 10 and 11, there are comments regarding the resiliency component of the draft plan. Does the County need to specify what critical infrastructure means? How is the information different from or related to the County's Hazard Mitigation Plan?

As indicted, this element is not yet required to be included in local jurisdictions' comprehensive plans until October 1, 2026. However, the Technical Review Committee felt strongly about developing a "Natural Hazards, Vulnerability, and Resiliency Element" as part of the St. Mary's 2050 Plan" so that an amendment would not be needed immediately after adoption of the plan.

Critical infrastructure is essential for supporting everyday life here in St. Mary's County and ensuring public health and safety. The term "infrastructure" is defined broadly in the glossary and includes utilities, transportation systems, communication channels, public facilities and social infrastructure that supports healthy living in St. Mary's County (like access to health care, community centers, etc.).

The County's Hazard Mitigation Plan identifies the actions that must be taken to have this critical infrastructure be resilient as we look into the future and does consider risk-reduction measures including the siting of new development away from high-risk areas.

In response to the comments provided by DHCD, the Planning Commission had the following questions:

1. On page 2, item #5 states that the draft plan does not show any analysis of total number of people experiencing homelessness and does not identify goals or actions regarding services for these individuals.

Each year, communities across the nation participate in the Point-in-Time (PIT) Count, a one-night effort to identify individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

On January 28, 2026, outreach teams, shelter providers, volunteers, and community partners came together across Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's Counties to conduct the annual Point-in-Time Count.

The 2026 PIT Count identified 298 individuals experiencing homelessness in Southern Maryland. Of those counted, 204 individuals (68%) were staying in emergency shelter; 45 individuals (15%) were residing in transitional housing; 49 individuals (16%) were living unsheltered and of those, only 1 person was counted in St. Mary's County.

The Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) published by the Health St. Mary's Partnership (a group that leverages public and private partnerships) identifies various priorities and strategies for combatting homelessness and this should be an important component of the Attainable Housing Work Group. There are several references to the CHIP in the draft plan.

2. On page 3, item #10 observes that the draft plan does not include an assessment of fair housing as required. [See explanation above.](#)

In response to the comments provided by DNR, the Planning Commission had the following questions:

1. With regard to the statements on page 2, does the draft plan need to be revised to include information about managing forests and tree canopy as "essential natural infrastructure"

No. DNR has already acknowledged that the draft plan includes focus on regenerative stream restoration and supporting the maintenance and implementation of native riparian buffers. In addition, DNR commended the plan's focus on managing forests and tree canopy as "essential natural infrastructure" (see page 91 of the public hearing draft).

One comment was received about the wording of Housing Action 1.1.1, which currently reads as follows: "Consider Development of an Attainable Housing Working Group." However, the wording needs to be stronger than "consider."

The Project Team offers the following suggestion for consideration: "Support the Establishment of an Attainable Housing Work Group."