



## Eastport Civic Association

May 07, 2020

To: Mayor Buckley, Ms. Smith, Director Jarrell, Dr. Nash, City Council Members and Planning Commission Members

From: Debra Dillon, President, Eastport Civic Association

On behalf of the Eastport Civic Association I am writing to provide suggestions about the City's planning for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic relative to work on current and new development, The Eastport Forest Drive Sector Study and the Annapolis Comprehensive Plan. I am also writing to urge you to strengthen opportunities for meaningful citizen participation and to ensure transparency in government.

The initial steps that the City, the Eastport Civic Association and other community groups have taken to improve citizen-government communication, cooperation and decision making must be preserved in the recovery effort. In this time of virtual meetings, we urge the City to examine and refine its communication efforts and commitment to transparent government by improving systems for public input, comment and testimony and by making public comment available in a timely manner. The City should also provide instruction on how to participate in the new process and update the website.

Relative to planning efforts, the City should take the following steps and continue them until we have established a "new normal:"

1. **Suspend work on the 2020 Annapolis Comprehensive Plan.**

Community meetings and detailed planning for the 2020 Comprehensive Plan should be paused until conditions permit full, safe, and meaningful community participation. Ideas for achieving more effective community participation were being discussed with the Planning and Zoning Office prior to the shutdown and this dialogue needs to continue. The City of Annapolis should follow the lead of Anne Arundel County, which has deferred work on its General Development Plan.

2. **Revisit existing projections and assumptions about growth, development, mobility and environmental impact when the impact of the pandemic can reasonably be measured.**

The pandemic is affecting the economic, social and health needs of our community with no clear end. The time to fully measure and understand the long term impact of this storm is not while we are in the eye of the hurricane. Existing projections and assumptions will have to be re-assessed and tested for future validity. For example, we can reasonably expect increased

vacancy/foreclosure rates on existing properties, reduced ridership on public transportation as well as an overall drop in employment in the coming months, and perhaps the next couple of years.

It is probable that our communities will not fully emerge into the “new normal” until after a vaccine is developed. This is estimated to be 12-18 months. Now is the time to begin developing the mechanisms we will need to recalibrate the data and projections to formulate a well-crafted long term plan for a changed future.

Other actions can also be taken. We recommend providing additional time for the Forest Drive/Eastport Task Force to complete its work and for the findings and recommendations to be made public. Additionally, the 2009 Comprehensive Plan and various sector studies could usefully be revisited to determine whether the findings are still valid and to what extent the recommendations should be implemented. How to pay for the recommendations should be an element of this review. The City could also usefully advance its review of various Adequate Public Facilities requirements, policies and procedures, as called for by the recent Board of Appeals findings on the Lofts at Eastport Landing project and take steps to assure that any actions are made visible to the public.

3. **Focus on plans to provide immediate support and recovery for the economic, social and health needs of our communities and to digest what happened.**

This is not a time for big new projects, major zoning changes, or actions based on speculative assumptions. It is a time to fully understand and digest how the pandemic has exposed and clarified long standing problems with service delivery, efficiency, government transparency and discrepancies experienced by our citizens, particularly our most vulnerable and underserved neighbors. If we work now to improve in these areas, we will be in a stronger and more unified position when larger and longer term planning decisions need to be made. If we fail to take this time during recovery to improve the foundations of our community, we may not get a better chance.

We should help each other emerge from our current situation stronger and better able to work together on behalf of a stronger community. We should learn how businesses, non-profit organizations and government departments adapted and what they learned that can be useful going forward – telecommuting, more efficient service delivery, mobility, etc. Consider whether we draw from these experiences and create incentives to reduce traffic and otherwise have less environmental impact.

4. **Develop specific mechanisms to encourage and strengthen meaningful citizen participation in planning decisions.**

The Eastport Civic Association recommends that Annapolis explore the use of a binding Community Benefit Agreement. Government and communities should create stronger mechanisms for citizen input.

