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**New Poll Shows Charles County Development Plan Drastically Out-of-Step with Voters
Advocates Say Charles County Land Use Plan Was “Hijacked” by Developers;
Voters strongly support rural protection and oppose Cross County Connector**

(Baltimore, MD) A new poll conducted by OpinionWorks and released today by 1000 Friends of Maryland reveals that Charles County voters have very strong views on the future of the County that are in direct conflict with the County’s comprehensive land use plan. The land use plan is supposed to guide future growth and development. Advocates said the county’s plan, originally written with input from the public, was “hijacked” by developers and would endanger local waterways, threaten rural lands and increase sprawling development.

According to the polling memo, the 401 voters from across the county want a plan that:

- Protects most agriculture lands from development (75%)
- Protects the values of existing homes (93%)
- Protects local water ways (93%)
- Creates good jobs closer to where they live (84%)

A full 71 percent of voters also think local elected officials are too close to developers and realtors. Advocates say this may be because a very inclusive citizen process to create the new comprehensive plan was later disregarded by the planning commission, in favor of a plan written by the development community. (See timeline)

“Charles County voters’ vision for the future is in stark contrast to the draft Comprehensive Plan that is now before the Charles County Commissioners,” said Dru Schmidt-Perkins, Executive Director of 1000 Friends of Maryland. “This plan is required by the state to direct how and where the county will grow over the next 20 years, and it fails to deliver on any of these visions.”

“From the time the plan went to the planning commission, the process was hijacked by a four-person faction of the commission. All the concerns of the people involved in the visioning process were tossed out, and only those of a small segment of the county were considered,” stated Edward Joell of Indian Head.

The draft plan received over 60 pages of often critical comments from state agencies. The plan puts at risk 88,000 acres of the state’s most environmentally critical lands, calls for up to 52,000 new homes to be scattered across the rural areas of the county, removes the agriculture land designation in favor of rural residential, and puts at risk Mattawoman Creek and other waterways.

Perhaps most remarkably the draft plan calls for the Cross County Connector, despite the fact that the federal and state permitting agencies have denied the permits for this major new road. According to the poll, over 71 percent oppose building this new road, yet the commissioners voted to have \$1 million in the FY14 county budget to study the road.

Recently MDOT Secretary James Smith sent a letter to the County Commissioners warning that the draft plan jeopardizes the county's top transportation request of light rail from Waldorf to the DC area.

...opening new rural areas to proposed growth and additional development will compete with the proposed mixed use development in the Transit Corridor. As high frequency transit service requires higher density and intensities of development to operate efficiently and effectively, diluting focused growth away from the Transit Corridor appears to conflict with the County's stated transportation priorities. Further, this may adversely affect the competitiveness of any future Federal application for transit funding as part of the Federal Transit Administration's (FTAs) scoring is for local land use policies/regulations and the relative supportiveness of these policies and regulations to the success of the proposed transit service.

Sometime in the next month the local elected officials will have to decide to accept this draft plan or vote it down and start again. They do not have the option to amend the plan.

“Who should the County Commissioners be listening to? The vast majority that want to have clean water, strong agriculture and rural lands, and communities where walking, biking, and transit are possible? Or should they listen to developers and land speculators who want to maximize their profits on the backs of the community?” asked Dru Schmidt-Perkins.

1000 Friends of Maryland works for a better quality of life by engaging all Marylanders to achieve vibrant communities and healthy rural communities.