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THE VALLEYS— STILL GREEN

Property owners in the historic valleys north of Baltimore are meeting success in their unique, privately-financed effort to turn the tide on urban sprawl.

BY JOHN C. SCHMIDT / Three years have passed since 270 families living in the Green Spring and Worthington Valleys unveiled a unique and impressive plan for future development of this prestigious area. In that time, the self-financed group has grown in numbers to over 1,000 members and shown itself to be an effective regional force. It has won many more battles than it has lost in its drive to preserve the pastoral character of the countryside by choking off typical urban sprawl. It has formed a working alliance with Baltimore County planners and administrators and has enjoyed the cooperation of a large percentage of builders and developers. The plan itself has won national acclaim, and a beginning has been made in erecting the legal framework necessary to support its revolutionary concepts.

The most apparent effect of the group's work is that the lava-like advance of suburbia, which had already penetrated from Baltimore to the fringes of the 75-square-mile valley area, has been contained for the most part. The green valley floors show no signs of being transformed into seas of closely-spaced, look-alike houses, with the only forest in view consisting of multi-array television antennas. A drive through the valleys today reveals them essentially as they were in 1962 when the Green Spring and Worthington Valley Planning Council was founded, and for that matter, essentially as they

THE PLAN AT A GLANCE

Developed for the Green Spring and Worthington Valley Planning Council, Inc., by Wallace-McHarg Associates of Philadelphia, the Plan for the Valleys contains the following basic concepts:

- The valleys have an obligation to provide for a variety of housing types and region-serving open space to accommodate the expanding population.
- For esthetic and conservation purposes, no development should be permitted on the valley floors and development should be limited on the surrounding slopes.
- An anticipated influx of 56,000 new residents in the area by 1980 and an additional 37,000 by 2000 can be accommodated on uplands and plateau regions, with a mix of apartments — including high-rise — and clusters of individual homes.
- One town center of about 20,000 population and 14 villages and hamlets are envisioned; no additional commercial or industrial development in the region is seen as necessary.
- A private real estate syndicate should be formed with responsibility over undeveloped lands; property owners in the valleys who agree to leave their lands undeveloped would share in the profits arising from development in upland areas.
- A special trust should be set up to manage preservation and conservation activities in the valleys.







Unforested Plateau Development



Forested Plateau Development



Forested Valley Walls Development

were in the middle of the 18th century when the area was first settled. In a story about the council's plan, Fortune magazine described the valleys "as among the largest pieces of near-perfect pastorality that still lie within a half-hour's drive of a major U. S. city."

The valleys traditionally have been the home of the state's most prosperous and influential citizens. To a large extent the area is typified in the public mind by the fox hunting set which keeps the land under panel fence and pays farmers for any chickens that the foxes eat. For this reason, valley people had a large hurdle to overcome in trying to convince county officials and the public that they were not trying to maintain the region as their own private preserve. The inevitability of growth was recognized and the region's responsibility to accommodate its share of this growth was accepted. The plan's basic contention is that planned growth can be just as profitable and is vastly more desirable than the haphazard growth pattern that typifies suburban areas almost everywhere in the country.

Facts of geographic and economic life and a constructive rather than a negative approach to specific problems were the council's chief tools in trying to implement the plan. A good example occurred several years ago when the county proposed the creation of a





sanitary landfill on 200 acres of farm land on Western Run Road just north of Worthington Valley. Refuse disposal had been argued for months, and the county's only other dump, near Texas, was filling up rapidly. Residents of the proposed Mushroom Farm site area got together to oppose the idea — primarily because nobody wanted to live near a dump, but there were other substantial reasons. The council's planning director, William C. McDonnell, began working as a liaison man between the area residents and county engineers on the problem. The council's position, essentially, was that a dump was an industrial land use and should be in an industrially-zoned region. The council hired an independent engineer and got 30 days from county executive Agnew to come up with an alternative location.

The best they were able to find was one called the McShane site, which the county had previously looked at but turned down. It was near the Campbell stone quarry, and county engineers feared that seepage from a dump there might pollute ground water flowing into Loch Raven. The council's engineer believed this could be overcome by sealing the site against seepage, but the county engineers' opinion prevailed. The council wrote a report recommending the McShane site and its members showed up 250 strong at a meeting of the Baltimore County Council at which the matter was being considered. In the face of this opposition, the County Council voted almost unanimously against acquisition of the Mushroom Farm property. A way was subsequently found to seal the bottom at the McShane site and it is in use today.

"This was an important victory because it really brought into focus the purpose of our whole program for developing the valleys in an orderly way," explains Mr. McDonnell, who is the council's only paid employee. "From an engineering standpoint, the Mushroom Farm site was an extremely good choice. But if they had brought in this kind of use, I think it would have caused a mass exodus in the area, with widespread selling of land and all kinds of speculative buying — precisely the kind of disorder we're trying to avoid. This would have defeated our purpose and really the purpose of county-wide planning itself. The incident also showed the strength of this organization. As a direct result, we got 30 new members, mostly from the area, who were pleased with the action we had taken and the success we had. Some people carped that this was just a big valley power play, but I think the fact that we tried to do something constructive rather than just say 'we

don't want it — put it in somebody else's back yard' helped us a great deal." Altogether, the council has been involved in more than 30 similar actions.

There are other indications of the council's effectiveness. A Development Review Committee was formed under the chairmanship of an architect to review plans submitted by developers and lend design advice. Mr. McDonnell says cooperation of builders and developers who have come into the area since the council's formation has been on the order of 95%. For one tract of about 500 acres near Padonia Road and the Baltimore-Harrisburg Expressway, the council persuaded the developer to hire Wallace-McHarg to do the detailed planning. In other property transactions, the council has been successful in putting restrictive covenants into deeds that assure development in accord with the plan.

A recent landmark was an agreement among a dozen property owners in the Joppa-Falls-Valley Road section that they would do nothing to develop their properties for at least three years. This area, involving about 600 acres, is described by Mr. McDonnell as highly vulnerable to urban development. He worked with the group of owners, two of whom were not council members, for six months on the details of the agreement. Council members presently own about 35% of all the undeveloped land in the 75-square-mile area, and this kind of voluntary agreement to resist pressures to develop or sell for development, the director says, will be one of the key factors in the ultimate success of the plan.

John A. Spilman III, a vice president at Maryland National Bank who has served the council as president since its formation, thinks the most valuable accomplishment to date is that through compromises worked out among land owners, developers and county officials, all significant development that has occurred has been in accord with the general concept of the plan for preserving open space and preventing undue concentrations of residential and apartment units. "More important," he says, "it's becoming recognized that if a plan of this nature is good within a specific area, it's good within the county as a whole and beyond. Professional people in Baltimore County and the Baltimore Regional Planning Council are enthusiastic about the project. They've stated many times that it's been helpful and that they're glad that some citizens are willing to get out and do a little leg work which, if it results in good ideas and good planning, they can incorporate in their own plans."

There is much evidence to bear out

Mr. Spilman's words. George E. Gavrelis, director of the Baltimore County Office of Planning and Zoning, calls the plan a significant document in its contribution to planning both locally and nationally. The county planning board itself more than two years ago adopted a resolution approving the basic concepts of the plan, calling it an excellent design to guide community development and endorsing the objective of preserving the county's basic amenity resources. The plan has been applauded by the administrator of the U. S. Soil Conservation Service, Citizens Planning and Housing Authority, Greater Baltimore Committee, the Regional Planning Council and the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects. One of the most glowing tributes came from Lewis Mumford, the nationally known planning and architectural critic, who called it the most important contribution to regional planning since the original 1926 Report on the Development of the State of New York. He said further that "in its value for urban planning, it outweighs the total production so far of all the institutes for urban research."

One of the plan's features which has helped attract such attention is the way it takes advantage of geologic and topographic conditions in the area to support its basic aim of keeping development off the valley floors and steep green hillsides. Maps developed by the Soil Conservation Service basically for agricultural land use problems have proven to be a valuable planning tool — a good index of the development potential of the region. They show among other things that underlying the valley floors is an impermeable clay which cannot accommodate a large concentration of septic tanks. This is a problem recognized by the county, and as a result, minimum lot sizes of one acre are required where there are septic tanks and water is supplied by wells. Mr. McDonnell frankly admits that if soil conditions were more accommodating to septic tanks, the council would have a much slimmer chance of attaining its esthetic and conservation goals in the valleys.

In view of the conditions that exist, the valleys' greatest enemy, as far as the council is concerned, is the common sewer. How, when and where the county sewers the area is the key to control of development. "Should the valleys be sewered," the Wallace-McHarg report states flatly, "they will succumb to development and be erased forever." The only area that the county is under any amount of pressure to sewer now is the previously mentioned Joppa-Falls-Valley Road section where some septic tanks are causing trouble.

If a sewer is put in to serve this section, Mr. McDonnell says, the council's position would be to attempt to prevent its extension farther west into the Green Spring Valley.

If the council can succeed in another of its basic objectives — having the Plan for the Valleys incorporated into the county's master plan for development — a good many of its hurdles, such as the sewer question, will be cleared. To this end, Mr. McDonnell and the council's attorney, R. Taylor McLean, are working on a new unit district zoning ordinance that would set up special provisions for the area, just as the Rouse Company obtained in Howard County for Columbia. This will make available some of the new legal machinery that will be needed to implement the plan fully.

This is another example of how the council and the county work together: the county planning staff drafted the basic ordinance framework, leaving the council to refine it and fill in details. Mr. McDonnell hopes to have it ready this summer for submission to the planning board, which hopefully will act favorably on it and pass it on to the County Council for adoption. In the meantime, he says he expects the county to incorporate the essentials of the Plan for the Valleys into an intermediate or composite plan which will come out later this year, and the Regional Planning Council to do likewise with its overall plan.

One of the important forthcoming moves, according to the director, will be a series of confidential interviews with council members and other land owners in the region to more clearly identify the factors that influence a property owner's decision to hold or sell his land for development. "Then it will be a matter of convincing those people who will sell for one purpose or another that they should do it in accordance with this plan, either because it will be more profitable for them in the end or because the land they wanted to sell couldn't be developed very well anyhow. Most people, even those who have been wed to a place for many years, still feel that a piece of land is a piece of land and that on 100 acres you can put 100 houses — you can't."

Information developed in these interviews will also be important in two other areas of future work: detailing the plan in specific locations, and forming the proposed real estate syndicate which will acquire rights or title to various properties and insure that development on them conforms to the plan.

There is some uncertainty about one feature of the plan at present: the town center. In the plan it is strategically located along the proposed extension of the Jones Falls Expressway from its present terminal point to an interchange with the Baltimore-Harrisburg Expressway about midway

between Texas and Cockeysville. It was felt that this extension would create a good potential for the town center development, but at present, the State Roads Commission has not definitely committed itself to building this extension.

There is a lot yet to be done, and it will take a long time, says Mr. Spilman. "There has to be give and take — there isn't going to be any utopia. And it won't all be done in the next 20 or 30 years, but neither will the valleys be destroyed in that time if we succeed."

How does the council's membership feel about the progress to date and the outlook for the future? Mr. McDonnell's answer: "I think that can best be expressed in terms of what the members have contributed. We've collected about \$160,000 for this work over a five-year span, averaging between \$35,000 and \$40,000 a year. We're looking for \$50,000 this year because we have more things to do — it's taken us three years just to develop the proper opinion and attitude for our program, and now we're ready to move in a number of ways. We're going to actively campaign for new members this year because we're anxious to get as many votes behind us as possible. When the time comes for us to present something to the Baltimore County Council, we want enlightened and knowledgeable people to be able to go in and say 'yes, we're for it.'" **gms**

THE GREEN SPRING & WORTHINGTON VALLEY PLANNING COUNCIL, INC.

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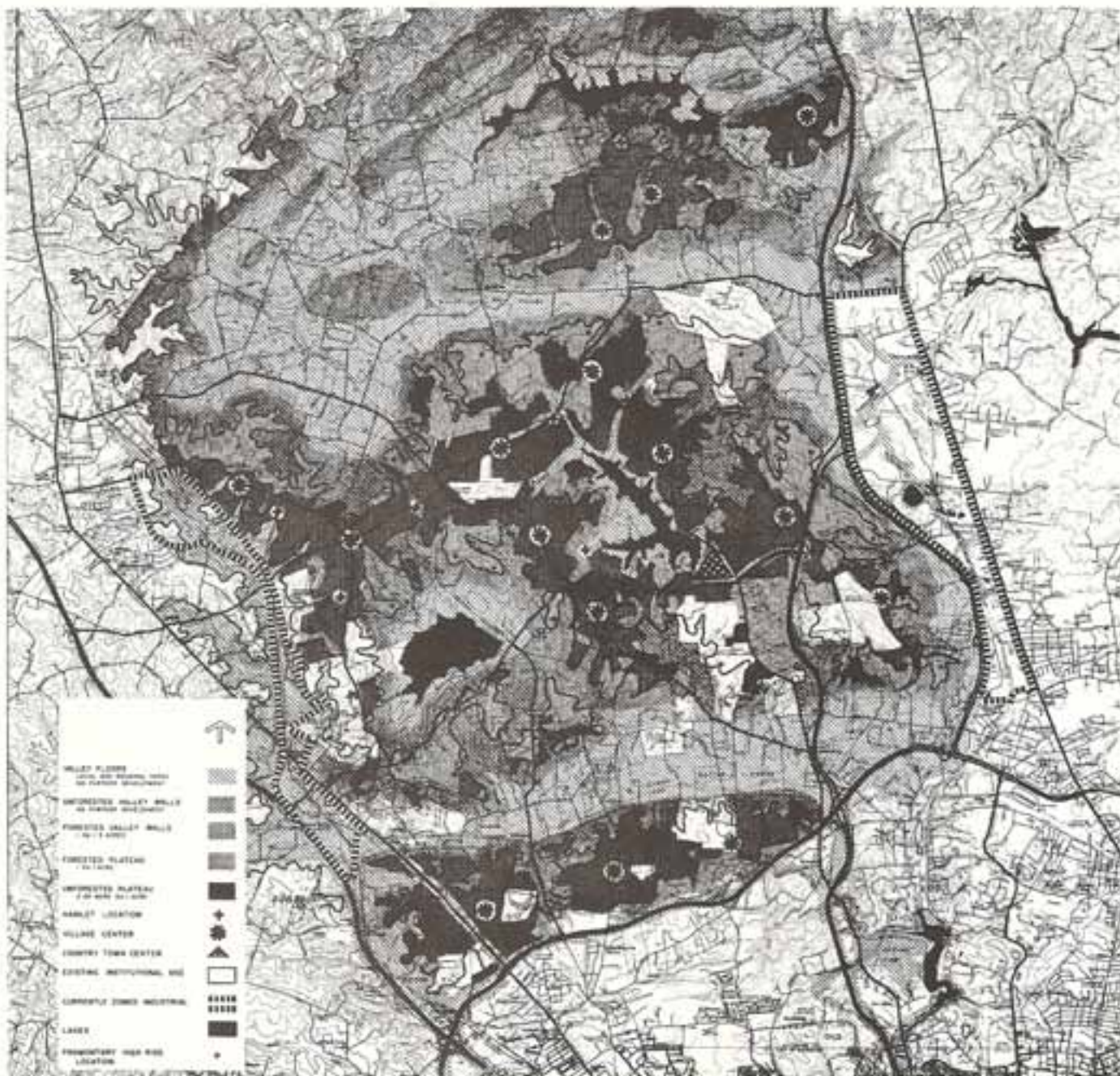
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Optimum Land Use

This is one of the most beautiful areas in the East — rich in natural resources, in stream valleys, stately trees and rolling hills — too beautiful to be destroyed by uncontrolled growth and arbitrary development. Yet it is dangerous to ignore the possibility of such destruction. This prime land is vulnerable. The estimated population growth makes development inevitable. The choice is not whether this area will be changed, but how.

We must ensure enhancement by observing conservation principles. We must answer housing needs without sacrificing the beauty and resources of this region. We must prove that planned growth is both desirable and profitable. We must create a partnership of public and private powers to realize the plan for the Valleys.

By 1980, an estimated 73,000 people will live in the Green Spring and Worthington Valleys. By the year 2,000, the population will grow to between 110,000 and 150,000. In the next few years, County policy on zoning, roads and sewers will play a major role in determining the character of the entire area.

THE COUNCIL NEEDS YOU:

- To help influence government decisions.
- To fight arbitrary land use changes.
- To promote thoughtful leadership.
- To coordinate both development and conservation in the area.