

Martin O'Malley
Governor
Anthony G. Brown
Lt. Governor



Margaret G. McHale
Chair
Ren Serey
Executive Director

STATE OF MARYLAND
CRITICAL AREA COMMISSION
CHESAPEAKE AND ATLANTIC COASTAL BAYS
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June 24, 2009

Dear Partner in the Critical Area Program:

Last year when we heard the news that the Department of Planning (MDP) circuit rider program would have to withdraw its support of Eastern Shore municipalities' Critical Area programs, we were all extremely disappointed and wondered how the towns would be able to maintain their local programs in the face of sweeping fiscal shortages.

As of January 1, several arrangements have evolved to fill the gap in planning services, and we recognize the temporary nature of many of these measures as well as their accompanying frustrations. My commendation and appreciation to all of you who have "given your all" to keep your programs going under such trying circumstances.

Having made a commitment to address this service gap, we began by searching for a funding source. Particularly in light of the tough economic conditions with which every government agency is grappling these days, it is my pleasure to report that the Critical Area Commission has received a two-year grant from The Keith Campbell Foundation for the Environment for the purpose of hiring a part-time circuit rider. Supporting our application were: MML Executive Director Scott Hancock, Mayor Russell Brinsfield of Vienna, MDP Secretary Richard Hall, Department of Natural Resources Secretary John Griffin, and the Critical Area Coalition which consists of several different organizations within the environmental community. Surely, with such notable friends "in our corner," we were bound to succeed!

We anticipate that this circuit rider service will begin in August. Since this is one part-time position that will clearly not match the level of technical assistance provided under the past MDP program, it is our goal to reorganize the circuit rider duties so as to broaden the scope while still meeting the most pressing of needs. We envision several different approaches tailored to fit each municipality's specific circumstances. Depending on the situation, these approaches would include a combination of:

- Review of applications for building permits, site plans, subdivisions and other development projects and/or teaching town staff how to do so;
- Review and preparation of applications for local program amendments and/or teaching town staff how to do so;
- Design of sample forms and worksheets;

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- Establishment of procedures for coordination with Critical Area Commission staff;
- Interaction with local boards and commissions, including the presentation of projects and testimony; and
- Education and guidance regarding the Program's operating principles and procedures, regulatory updates, and so forth.

We look forward to conversing with you regarding your particular needs and how this modified program can best accommodate those needs. This is an important step forward – one which will hopefully lighten your load and make a significant difference in each town served.

In the meantime, if you have concerns or would simply like to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact Ren Serey, Executive Director of the Commission, at rserey@dnr.state.md.us or 410-260-3460. And if you plan to attend the MML Conference next week in Ocean City, both Ren and I will be part of the Secretaries' Roundtable on Tuesday, June 30, from 2:30 to 4:00 – so please stop by our table.

Sincerely,



Margaret G. McHale
Chair