Questions and Answers: Land Use Options Evaluation Outcome work session

December 8, 2014

The Land Use Options Evaluation Outcome calls for:

- **EVALUATION**, by the end of 2017, of "policy options, incentives and planning tools" that can help local governments to "reduce the rate of conversion of agricultural lands, forest and wetlands", and

- **DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIES** to support "local governments' and others' efforts in reducing" the "rate of conversion of agricultural lands, forest and wetlands" by 2025 and beyond.

"By the end of 2017, with the direct involvement of local governments or their representatives, evaluate policy options, incentives and planning tools that could assist them in continually improving their capacity to reduce the rate of conversion of agricultural lands, forests and wetlands as well as the rate of changing landscapes from more natural lands that soak up pollutants to those that are paved over, hardscaped or otherwise impervious. Strategies should be developed for supporting local governments' and others' efforts in reducing these rates by 2025 and beyond."

I. EVALUATION

1. **What does an evaluation of "policy options, incentives, and planning tools" look like to you? What types of similar evaluations (or organizations doing this type of work) already exist? How comprehensive or extensive does this need to be?**

OPTION ONE- perform evaluation

Select a number of medium- to fast-growing communities in the Chesapeake watershed to evaluate as case studies.

- Evaluate both state-level and local-level land protection, land use planning, and smart growth policies and programs.
- Evaluate different types of local governments, urban, rural, small, large, engaged public, non-engaged, etc.
- Identify the most effective strategies
- Identify benefits and costs of different policy options.
    - Types of "policy options, incentives and planning tools" could include traditional land protection, innovative land use planning and zoning (e.g., conservation zoning, TDRs), rural economic development, financial incentives, and methods to facilitate infill and redevelopment.

OPTION TWO – synthesize/analyze and use existing evaluations.

Organizations like Smart Growth America, EPA Sustainable Communities, Lincoln Land Use Institute, and the Victoria Transport Policy Institute have completed studies of the benefits and costs of policy options, incentives, and planning tools focused on reducing land conversion. The Lincoln Land Use Institute has evaluated the effectiveness of state-level smart growth programs. The new analysis, as well as the existing evaluations, could be made available on the Bay Program website as an easy-to-use reference guide for local government and advocacy groups.

OPTION THREE- combination of option one and option two-
Perform new evaluation and also synthesize existing evaluations.

ISSUES:

A. Who should perform evaluation? States, third party selected by Partnership/Management Goal Team?
    a. States may have a tendency to highlight their good programs but not their gaps. Should we use a hybrid by asking each state to evaluate themselves and also ask one or two land conservation type NGOs from each state to look into their state policies
B. How do we involve local governments in the evaluation effort?
    a. Ask municipal and county leagues to review the evaluations, send surveys to local governments, hold roundtables,
    b. LGAC involvement
    c. Ask local government to identify targeted learning opportunities that meet their needs (this could be referred to Local Leadership Outcome group, GIT6).

2. What "evaluation of policy options, incentives and planning tools" could contribute the most to local capacity building?

There is a concern that an evaluation might "sit on a shelf" and not be used for "continually improving [local government] capacity" to reduce land conversion. To try to avoid this, care must be taken to decide what information is most needed (to determine scope and design of the evaluation) and how any conclusions or recommendations would be delivered to enable change on the ground.

The outcome also calls for development of strategies to support "local governments' and others' efforts in reducing" the "rate of conversion of agricultural lands, forest and wetlands" by 2025 and beyond.

II. DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIES

1. **What does a strategy to support "local governments' and others' efforts in reducing" land conversion rates by 2025 look like to you?**

   OPTION ONE- track the "local level metrics for characterizing" land conversion rates
   This is being developed under the Land Use Methods and Metrics Development Outcome by 2016. Once the Bay Program Partnership understands where the most rapid land conversion is happening, a Goal Team or Workgroup or consultant could provide recommendations on strategies that could reduce those conversion rates and develop a plan to disseminate these strategies to local officials and citizen groups and to connect them to technical assistance providers.

2. **When should the strategy to support local government be developed and whose efforts should it direct?**

3. **What adaptive management approach should be used if the Bay Program Partnership notes that land conversion rates are not decreasing over time towards the 2025 goal listed in the Outcome?**

4. **Where does this Outcome fit within the range of priorities in the Bay Program?**

   Preventing the loss of forests and wetlands, by minimizing the amount of natural lands consumed by new development, is the best method for retaining the natural hydrology and pollution control that these lands provide to the Bay watershed. Although farms alter hydrology and add pollution to the Bay watershed, conserving farmland is an important local, state and federal priority. Conversely, strengthening our towns and cities through smart growth provides many quality-of-life and economic benefits. About half of the 41 million acre Bay watershed is currently forested and another quarter is farmland. With population growth within the Bay watershed increasing by roughly 2 million more people (about 770,000 households) by 2030, loss of rural and natural lands could decrease by as much as 1.5 million acres (if each new household consumes 2 acres) if all developed outside of growth areas, or as little as about 200,000 acres (if each new household consumes ¼-acre) if all developed within growth areas. Although traditional land protection can help to direct population growth into growth areas, additional "policy options, incentives and planning tools" also are needed to reduce land conversion.

5. **How does this outcome add to work already underway?**
   At all levels of government and among many non-governmental organizations, efforts to promote and implement smart growth measures are underway, but the level and type of

effort varies across the watershed. At this time there is no concerted Bay watershed effort to promote and implement smart growth measures as a means to protect the Chesapeake Bay and the rural lands in its watershed.

6. **How does this outcome differ from the Local Leadership Outcome? How does it overlap with other outcomes?**

   This outcome differs from the Local Leadership Outcome in having a 2025 goal for reducing land conversion rates. The outcome is similar to the Local Leadership Outcome because the evaluation will serve to "increase the knowledge and capacity of local officials on issues related to water resources."

   Overall, the management strategy for this outcome should propose methods for informing and supporting other outcomes in the Bay Agreement (e.g., 2025 WIP, Wetlands, Stream Health, Brook Trout, Healthy Watersheds, Local Leadership, Protected Lands).