

# ALLIANCE FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES (ASC)

Annapolis, Maryland

The Annapolis Alliance for Sustainable Communities was formed to “provide a livable future for the diverse residents, businesses, workforce, and visitors in the Greater Annapolis area, based on its extraordinary environment and historical importance.”

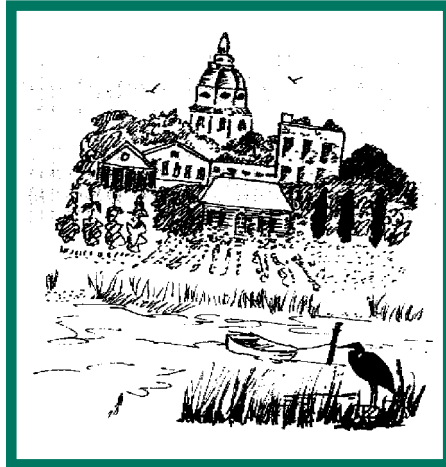
Inspired by the innovative work taking place around the country and her work to develop a local public television series on sustainability, Anne Pearson founded the Alliance and, with the encouragement of colleagues like Richard Crenshaw, co-author of *Sustainable Cities*, began to build a foundation of support for this project in 1993. She established connections among organizations representing all facets of the community to start projects guided by sustainability principles. Residents of Annapolis, the capital of Maryland, concurred that the time was right. They were seeking leadership toward bold new approaches.

Since its inception two years ago, this effort has attracted the participation and support of residents, public officials, small business enterprises, educators, housing activists, and many more. The Annapolis Alliance draws on the expertise of a wide range of local citizens to carry out its work and is supported by grants from foundations, public agencies and local civic groups. A significant number of advisors and citizen activists from academia, public agencies, private firms, and nonprofit organizations have volunteered time and expertise. Over the past two years the Alliance has focused on two major activities: citizen summits and a number of specific community projects.

## Bringing the community together

Recognizing the important contribution that citizens can make to chart their own future, the Alliance planned a series of well-attended public meetings beginning in October 1994. The first, *Toward a Community Vision*, evoked a vision of what the community could become, what obstacles needed to be overcome, and what

activities could be pursued; the second, *Sacred Places*, drew on the collective knowledge of local citizens who expressed their connections to what they valued and wanted to preserve and created a map as a means for steering the City/County Comprehensive Review; the third, *Can the Creeks Run Clear?*, was dedicated to public education and solutions for improving the quality of local waterways and to develop a set of watershed-based principles for development which led to the development of citizen-based watershed surveys



during the Comprehensive Review. The fourth summit, *Solutions from the Ground Up*, scheduled for the fall of 1995, will focus on bringing citizens, businesses and government together to develop practical approaches to ecologically-sound planning and to explore ways to finance community-based solutions that are economically viable.

The Annapolis Summits blend vision, inspiration and pragmatism and have attracted a wide range of speakers and of people with diverse interests from six counties and the cities of Baltimore and Washington. They provide an effective forum for citizens to contribute ideas and solutions, building support for innovative approaches, and orchestrating citizen involvement with local planning and development. Inquiries have come from five states and two municipalities are planning summits patterned after those in Annapolis.

Although it is premature to identify substantial change as a result of this process, the overwhelming response from citizens and public officials alike has been very productive. These summits have provided a forum to strengthen intangible connec-

tions, such as common “sense of place,” and reinforce citizens’ knowledge of and commitment to bringing about change, for example, to make local transportation planning more resource efficient and pedestrian friendly. The Summits have brought out the importance of addressing the needs of one of the low-income neighborhoods in Annapolis, Clay Street, by facilitating the efforts of residents who want to mobilize their community.

## Clay Street community projects

### ■ Green Gardens project

“It’s not where you live, but how you live,” commented Bertina Nick, a local community activist and employee of an affordable housing company which donated land on Clay Street, in the heart of Annapolis, for the organic gardening pilot project. Sponsored by the Alliance and the UJIMA Clay Street Planning Action Committee, it is staffed by two full-time gardeners and volunteers of different ages, some of them neighborhood children.

The impetus for this project grew out of one of the goals of the Alliance: facilitating empowerment of local citizens through hands-on, experiential programs. The Green Gardens Project combines training and skills building, planning and organizing, and the experience of collaboration. Ultimately, the project aims to address several dimensions of sustainability: ecology, economics, and social equity. Already their work has helped to regenerate the soil, stimulate ecological diversity, prevent runoff, and inspire neighbors to adopt similar approaches. It is anticipated that some of the produce and flowers will be sold to local restaurants or at farmers markets in the county. Ongoing creation of skills and jobs is being encouraged through gardening and the development of a related landscaping and other businesses stimulated in partnership with a new organization, the Business Ecology Network (BEN).

The Business Ecology Network, a nonprofit organization supporting the use of business ecology, an innovative approach to planning and development, has been working with Clay Street citizens and businesses within Annapolis and surrounding county to support exchanges such as that of food, energy, materials, water, money and information. One such example of ecologically-based development is the use of spent grain from the Fordham Microbrewery (Ramshead Tavern) for livestock feed for goats and cows at the nearby organic West River Farm. In turn, the cow

and goat cheese produced at the farm is being sold back to the tavern.

In another collaborative project Clay Street residents are working with Reasoning, Inc., a local nonprofit, to survey community skills using the process outlined in the guide, *Building Communities from the Inside Out*, authored by John Kretzmann and John McKnight, which is designed to help community members rebuild their communities. They are also exploring the possibility of using an alternative economic system called Time Dollars to bank and exchange volunteer service hours.

#### ■ **College Creek cleanup**

Adjacent to the public housing in the community are the headwaters of College Creek, one of the least-impacted waterways in the area. Working with the Maryland Youth Corps, the Anne Arundel Community College, the Public Works Department, and the Department of Natural Resources, residents are working with the Alliance to develop a wide-ranging citizen education and action program to restore urban ecology, create innovative methods to prevent pollution, and monitor progress in containing effluent. Other projects include a habitat survey and water testing project.

#### **Resource conservation**

The Alliance has also initiated a number of other on-going projects which include:

- A long-term community wide plan for a tree canopy that will not only contribute to energy reduction but also serve to re-introduce native species.
- The designation of Annapolis as an energy efficiency showcase city.
- The successful coordination of a collaborative effort to assure passage of a number of amendments to the county's solid waste plan that focus on waste reduction.

#### **Comprehensive land use planning and zoning**

A number of counties in Maryland are reviewing their long-term land use plans, among them, Anne Arundel, where Annapolis is located. Recently, a series of public hearings was held by the planning department to solicit citizen "visions" of the future, yet no clear mechanism exists to integrate these into the planning process. The Alliance is proposing using the Sacred Places map created by citizens at its sec-

### **How To Get in Touch with Alliance for Sustainable Communities**

**Contact:** Anne Pearson, Director  
Alliance for Sustainable Communities  
111 Hickory Lane  
Annapolis, MD 21403  
**Tel.:** (410) 741-0125  
**Fax:** (410) 990-0082  
**Email:** N/A  
**Web:** N/A

**Scope:** City/county

**Inception Date:** 1993

**Participants:** Residents, city, county and state officials, grassroots organizations, businesses, civic associations

**Project type:** Comprehensive community development, public education, local business development

**Methods used:** Public education, workshops, demonstration programs, ecologically-based planning, micro-enterprise development, and media coverage

**Lessons learned:** Value of building creative partnerships with government. Importance of learning about innovative approaches that are working. Effectiveness of making the broader perspective specific.

ond summit as well as watershed surveys to help guide what should be preserved, how land is zoned, and to develop a framework for planners to assess proposed development around the state.

This effort is focused on systemic change, drawing on local knowledge and ties to valued physical sites in the area to guide land use preservation and planning.

#### **Challenges**

Institutionally, the most immediate need is for more funding. Although the Alliance has been successful in securing funds from diverse sources, both public and private, and at leveraging other resources, its budget is lean, and it depends heavily on donated time to plan and oversee its projects.

Another challenge is more fundamental: changing traditional planning processes at the neighborhood, town and county levels into a more integrated, inclusive, long-term framework. Developing new work-

ing relationships, facilitating practical solutions, and creating whole systems thinking demands creativity and commitment. Alliance members are modelling new approaches to help residents and professionals alike learn from each other and collaborate in areas of mutual interest for the benefit of the larger community.

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## **UPDATE**

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Since 1995, the Alliance has broadened its program and geographical reach. In 1997 it conducted three Pilot Participatory Planning Workshops in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia with funds from the Chesapeake Bay Program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association. These workshops train government officials and citizens to identify local places which have cultural, economic, and ecological meaning essential to the community's quality of life. Citizens identify with the historical framework of early settlements (compact townships rather than sprawling subdivisions) and then use the design framework to guide planning that has appropriate scale, character, and density.

In addition, a local economic evaluation guides citizens to identify local skills and flows of the money into and out of the community with a goal to increase local control over job creation. This economic renewal process emphasizes land-use decisions which contribute to the local economy.

This model can create a framework for citizens and planners to work together to develop consensus and to build support for implementation. Because it is based on what citizens value, it provides an incentive for ongoing involvement with planning processes. In turn, this approach supports planners by turning a potentially contentious process into one that is mutually supportive. Anne Pearson believes that connecting government and citizens has been not only the greatest challenge but also the most satisfying aspect of the process.

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