

Weigh in, help protect quality of life in Calvert County

Every year, Calvert County's more than 1,500-acre nature parks — Flag Ponds Nature Park, Kings Landing, Battle Creek Cypress Swamp, Biscoe Gray Heritage Farm and the new Ward Farm Recreation and Nature Park — host more than 42,000 people, in addition to the tens of thousands of children who attend our nature programs. The parks' woodland trails, wetlands boardwalks and bay beaches provide refuge from busy lives and time to learn about our natural world, and create memorable experiences.

The nature parks are merely a showcase of the variety of natural landscapes around us in Calvert County. The value of these green spaces is immeasurable. Besides maintaining our county's natural beauty and inherent high quality of life, they provide natural habitat and migration corridors for birds and animals while connecting people to nature via hiking trails and walkways. Our town centers should reflect these values in their development while providing sustainable economic markets for our communities

and local businesses.

Unfortunately, as the county is developed, many Calvert green spaces are in danger of becoming "unconnected" from neighboring natural places, causing our natural resources to be fragmented and creating stresses on ecosystems. Calvert Nature Society promotes projects that preserve our wildlife habitats, wetlands, forests and fields, but also encourages development that creates human-scale connections that will make our communities more walkable and enjoyable.

To ensure Calvert continues to grow in a sustainable fashion, it is important for residents to be active participants in the planning process. At this juncture, there are several ways residents can voice their thoughts. We ask Calvert Countians to actively engage in the public process surrounding the following:

- **Prince Frederick Town Center development:** The public weighed in during the 2012 charrette, preferring the old Calvert Middle School and armory sites be not just a retail and residential center, but rather, a community

showcase: "The former middle school site could become a new town center for Prince Frederick. Restoring and re-using the Armory provides an iconic building to frame a town formal green. This would be an active civic space with lawn and paved areas, farmer's market pavilions, a playground space and more. The paving on the streets would be similar to the decorative paving of the plaza areas. This will slow through-traffic and provide opportunity to close side streets if a larger space is necessary for large gatherings and events." (See page 30 of the charrette report at www.co.cal.md.us/DocumentCenter/View/5102.) This property is now being considered for development. The proposed concept drawings and traffic studies are accessible on the county website at www.co.cal.md.us/index.aspx?NID=613.

- **Comprehensive plan:** The 2004 comprehensive plan has a strong vision of vibrant town centers surrounded by thriving rural communities — a county that is dedicated to preserving the natural, cultural and histori-

cal treasures that make Calvert "Calvert." The comprehensive plan (https://planning.maryland.gov/PDF/OurWork/CompPlans/Calvert/10_CMP_Calvert.pdf) is the official policy document for the county, and is a guide when evaluating proposed projects or changes to the zoning ordinance. The goal is "to maintain and/or improve the overall quality of life for all citizens of Calvert County by: a) promoting sustainable development, b) encouraging a stable and enduring economic base, c) providing for safety, health, and education, and d) preserving the natural, cultural, and historic assets of Calvert County." As Calvert grows, we must work together to keep those visions at the forefront so that we may have thoughtful development projects in our town centers that will house and employ people of all incomes while maintaining our current high quality of life for all residents.

- **Funding for land preservation:** Earlier in January, Gov. Larry Hogan (R) sent out a press release restoring land preservation

funding for Program Open Space, Rural Legacy and other programs (<http://news.maryland.gov/dnr/2016/01/20/governor-hogan-pledges-millions-for-bay-restoration-and-land-conservation/>). Our commissioners should follow that lead and fully leverage those state funds to conserve land in Calvert. We request the commissioners provide the \$1.5 million in land preservation money now.

There's a particular quality of life in Calvert, one that looks forward but remains in touch with its rural roots, connected not just by roads, but by deeper community pathways to its natural spaces, through walking paths, hiking trails and access to its bounty of rivers, bays and creeks. We hope all county residents will advocate for preservation of these values, and we request our elected officials continue to promote and fund the preservation of the resources and characteristics that make Calvert so special.

Anne Sundermann, Prince Frederick
The writer is the executive director of Calvert Nature Society.