**Using a Studio Course for Provision of Smart Growth Technical Assistance:
The University of Maryland's 1999 Community Planning Studio in Perryville, MD**

James R. Cohen
Urban Studies and Planning Program, University of Maryland

Introduction

When a set of initiatives collectively known as "Smart Growth" was passed by the

Maryland legislature in 1997, the acts became the latest in a series of laws, dating back to

1969, that distinguished the state as a leader in land preservation and watershed

protection. Spurred largely by concern over the health of the Chesapeake Bay, the

legislature had already established laws for generating funds for state purchase of open

space, farmland and forests; protecting tidal and non-tidal wetlands; managing

stormwater runoff; regulating development within 1,000 feet of the bay and its tidal

tributaries; requiring re-forestation and tree planting as condition of new development;

and protecting sensitive areas. The Smart Growth programs (profiled below) contained

incentives and planning requirements aimed at curbing sprawl and revitalizing cities and

inner suburbs.

To varying degrees, most of the above-listed laws added to the planning and regulatory

responsibilities of local governments. As a faculty member in the University of

Maryland's Urban Studies and Planning Program, in early 1999 I decided to have my

summer, community planning studio course focus on the challenges facing one of

Maryland's smaller jurisdictions at it attempted to comply with its planning mandates and

grow in a manner consistent with the state's Smart Growth program. The resulting

summer studio course, entitled "What's Smart Growth for Perryville?", proved to be a rich learning experience for the students and a valuable resource for the town.

This chapter focuses on how the 1999 summer studio course provided smart-growth related technical assistance to the Town of Perryville. It will provide a brief profile of the studio course and of Perryville; discuss how the students approached the study; summarize the major findings and recommendations of the final studio report; critically analyze the degree to which the report has since been utilized by the town; highlight the students' reactions to the studio experience; and discuss the lessons learned from the studio and the studio's potential transferability.

Overview of the Planning Studio Course and of Perryville

The Community Planning Studio is a six-credit "capstone" course for Master of Community Planning (MCP) candidates in the University of Maryland's Urban Studies and Planning Program (URSP). The one-semester course enables students to apply their knowledge and skills, analyze current, pressing planning issues in a selected community, and to produce an oral and a written report containing recommendations for addressing those issues. In essence, the students act as a consulting team for a community client.

In early 1999 several URSP Masters of Community Planning students requested a studio that would enable them to help a rural jurisdiction apply smart growth principles in dealing with new growth. As the summer studio instructor, I contacted the staff members of the Maryland Department of Planning to obtain suggestions of possible case-study

jurisdictions. I also contacted Uri Avin, principle planner with HNTB, Inc. and member of our planning program's technical advisory committee, who recommended Perryville as the study site. Avin's firm had done a study on development opportunities and design options for Perryville's downtown in 1997 (LDR International, Inc. 1998), and thought that a studio report would be an excellent follow-on.

Located at the confluence of the Susquehanna River and the Chesapeake Bay near the Delaware-Maryland border, Perryville (pop. 4,500) is the second largest city in Cecil County. During the 1990s the town's population grew by nearly 50 percent, during which time the state's population grew by less than 11 percent.

First settled in 1622, for over two centuries Perryville consisted of a cluster of residences and locally-owned businesses along a postal road leading to the Lower Ferry crossing of the Susquehanna River. During the late 1880s the town grew due to its importance as a coach stop at the ferry crossing and as a busy railroad depot. Much of the old town's rail freight traffic was diverted to roads, however, following construction of major highways (such as State Routes 40 and 7, and U.S. Interstate 95) beginning in the 1940s.

Perryville's new growth occurred on converted farmland and forests away from the old town center along Broad and Front Streets, and new, outlying subdivisions were annexed to the town. Further annexations occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s. By the end of the 1990s, the major employer in Perryville was the Veterans Administration hospital, situated on a peninsula just past the old town. Dozens of disabled veterans live in

Perryville's old town in boarding houses operated by private operators. Map 1 indicates

that Perryville is approximately 80 miles north of the University of Maryland.

Insert Map 1 here

As with many of Maryland's rural towns, Perryville does not have a planning staff, yet is

responsible for most of the land use planning and regulation that addresses the State's

environmental and Smart Growth legislation. About 25 smaller jurisdictions on the

Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay rely on the Maryland Department of Planning's

"circuit rider" planners for technical assistance in implementing their Critical Area land

use program (see below), but this occasional assistance is constrained by limited state

personnel and financial resources. These limitations can hamper smart growth

implementation in smaller jurisdictions and create conditions for a potential technical

assistance role to be played by graduate planning programs. For the above reasons,

Perryville provided a studio opportunity with mutual benefits for the town and the

students.

When I contacted then-Perryville Town Administrator Sharon Weygand, she was grateful

for the offer of planning services and technical assistance. The town commissioners

subsequently endorsed the proposed studio. As is done with all URSP studio courses, I

put together an advisory committee comprised of major stakeholders at the local and

county level, who would assist the students by identifying key issues in Perryville and

Cecil County and by providing them with background information and planning
documents.

The studio advisory committee consisted of nine persons, including a town
commissioner; the chairperson of the town's planning and zoning committee, the town
administrator, the Cecil County planning director and the county's principal planner, the
chairperson of the county economic development committee, two persons working with
the Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway project (which had economic and
environmental importance to the town), and the Maryland Department of Planning's
"circuit rider" planner for Perryville.

Outside of picking the studio site, organizing the advisory committee and compiling
initial information and documents, my role was facilitator of some of the student group
discussions, acting as an occasional ambassador between town officials and the students,
serving as occasional chauffeur (for van rides to take the 11 students on the one-hour and
20 minute drive from campus to the town), and exhorting the students to complete the
written report by the end of the 12 week summer session.

The town did not provide the studio with funding. Class expenses were supported with
$600 from the Summer Programs division of the University of Maryland's Office of
Continuing and Extended Education. The funds were used to pay for layout and printing
of the final report. In addition, the Summer Programs division set aside $320 of the
participating students' tuition, which was used to pay for the use of a van from the

University's Motor Pool to make site visits to Perryville, MD. For its part, the town provided the students with the use of the Rogers Tavern, an historic landmark on the shore of the Susquehanna River, as a meeting place. The town also gave the students access to all documents needed for the study. In addition, town elected officials and other stakeholders were very responsive to students' requests for interviews.

The students' roles began with a meeting with the advisory committee at the beginning of the semester. At that meeting each member of the advisory committee was given a chance to tell the students what (s)he believed were the most compelling planning challenges facing the town. The following were the main issues raised by the advisory committee.

- Perryville's Comprehensive Plan was updated in 1997, prior to the full unveiling of Maryland's Smart Growth Initiatives. The Plan needed to be reviewed to determine its consistency with the new initiatives.

- Neither the town's zoning ordinance nor subdivision regulations had been updated in decades, so were consistent neither with the 1997 Plan nor with Maryland's 1997 Smart Growth legislation.

- Perryville does not have an identity, in the form of have an easily recognized town center, or at least a landmark.

- There was a vacant, 100-acre industrial site in Perryville, formerly the location of the Firestone Plastics company. The site was unoccupied largely due to poor access for trucks. Resident protests stopped a recent proposal to build an incinerator on the site, and the town was exploring other opportunities for the site's utilization.

- Commercial development in the area is found at the Outlet Mall off Interstate 95, on each side of Route 40, and (in small measure) in Perryville's old downtown. However, the town does not have a supermarket. Although an estimated 1,200 workers and visitors drive through the old downtown each day to get to the VA hospital, no attempt was made to capitalize on the potential market created by the hospital-generated trips. Questions also arise as to how to bring boarding homes for VA patients up to code. Some town commissioners were reluctant to put pressure on the boarding home owners, but dilapidated properties were thought to undermine the old town's growth potential.

- The MARC train station site in the old downtown not being utilized for its commercial potential. (The MARC train connects Perryville to Baltimore and Washington. The station could provide goods and services not only to daily commuters but to downtown residents. Across from the train station and overlooking the Susquehanna is a historic landmark, the Rogers Tavern, which was also underutilized. As the population increases within and near the old

downtown, questions arise concerning what kinds of commercial / tourism opportunities the Town could pursue.

- The Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway project was in final planning stages, and would create a corridor of protected open spaces along the Susquehanna River in Cecil County and neighboring Harford County. With its system of looping walking / biking trails, the greenway will provide recreational opportunities, habitat for rare species, and access to scenic views, historic sites, museums and local festivals and cultural events. The town was deliberating the ways in which it could benefit from the greenway's economic development potential.

How the Students Approached the Studio Report

Following the initial meeting with the advisory committee and during the next 12 weeks the students completed the following tasks:

- determined which of the above issues they could address in the given timeframe;
- organized their research agenda;
- read relevant literature including state legislation, smart growth websites, and local, county and state planning documents;
- collected data, conducted interviews with advisory committee members and other individuals with information and perspectives relevant to the studio topic;

- attended meetings of the Town Commission and the Planning and Zoning

  Commission;

- conducted extensive site surveys; and

- investigated potential sources of funding and technical assistance for

  implementing smart growth in the town.

The students gave an oral presentation to the advisory committee in September of 1999, along with a written report. The written report was intended to be a working document -- something the town can use to manage growth in a way that is consistent with the major State legislation including the Maryland Smart Growth Initiatives.

To guide them in their work, the students found it helpful to define smart growth in two ways. One definition referred to local land use procedures and outcomes that are either mandated or encouraged via incentives, by a set of four laws passed by the Maryland legislature since 1984 to prevent sprawl and/or protect environmentally sensitive areas. Those four laws were collectively labeled as "Smart Growth" (capital "S" and "G"). The second definition consisted of a set of general principles expressed in such Maryland legislation an in other local, state and national "anti-sprawl" initiatives. These general principles were denoted as "smart growth" (lower case "s" and "g"). Each term will be briefly outlined below.

The first Maryland law that the students included under the term "Smart Growth" was the 1984 Critical Area Act, designed to improve water quality, protect habitat and manage

growth within a zone measured 1000 ft. from the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries.

The Act requires jurisdictions to inventory their Critical Area land into three zones,

depending on the intensity of the actual land use in 1984. A 100-foot buffer from the

shoreline is required for all new development, with exemptions for certain types of water-

dependent uses. The local governments must then implement land regulations and

performance standards specific to each of the zones, subject to oversight by a state

commission. Because of Perryville's location, much of the town's land was is subject to

Critical Area Act requirements.

The Forest Conservation Act of 1991 constituted the second "Smart" law under the

students' classification. That act requires developers to replace some of the forests

cleared for building, and requires tree planting on development sites that have few or no

trees. Local governments are responsible for implementing, monitoring and enforcing

the act.

The third "Smart" Maryland law, the 1992 Economic Growth, Resource Protection and

Planning Act, has the stated purpose of facilitating economic growth and development

that is well planned, efficiently serviced and environmentally sound. The legislation

required jurisdictions, by 1997, to incorporate the following seven visions into their

comprehensive plans: 1) development is concentrated in suitable areas; 2) sensitive areas

are protected; 3) in rural areas, growth is directed to existing population centers and

resource areas are protected; 4) stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and the land is a

universal ethic; 5) conservation of resources, including a reduction in resource

consumption, is practiced; and 6) to assure the achievement of 1 through 5 above,

economic growth is encouraged and regulatory mechanisms are streamlined; and

7) funding mechanisms are addressed to achieve these visions.

Under the 1992 act a new "sensitive areas" element was to be included in plan updates.

Each jurisdiction was allowed to define, and determine the level of protection for steep

slopes, streams and their buffers, the 100-year floodplain, and habitats of endangered

species. Once the plan with the new sensitive areas element was adopted, the law

requires that zoning and subdivision regulations become consistent with the plan. Local

planning commissions must review and, if necessary, amend their plans every six years.

Certainly the most nationally-recognized of the four Maryland laws that the studio team

defined as "Smart" were the bundle of five programs passed in 1997 under the leadership

of former Governor Parris Glendening. The stated goals of the Smart Growth initiatives

were threefold: "to save our most valuable remaining resources before they are forever

lost; to support existing communities and neighborhoods by targeting state resources to

support development in areas where the infrastructure is already in place (or is planned to

support it; . . .and to save taxpayers millions of dollars in the unnecessary cost of building

the infrastructure required to support sprawl" (Maryland Department of Planning Website

2003). At the time of the Perryville studio, the Smart Growth initiatives consisted of the

following five, core programs. (insert end note about the addition of smart codes and

community legacy. see Cohen 2002 for a discussion of each of the initial five programs

along with more recently-passed Smart Growth programs.)

1. The Smart Growth Areas Act, which directs state funding into locations that meet
   one of several criteria. Some of the qualifying locations are a municipality, an
   enterprise zone, a certified heritage area, and locally-designated growth areas
   (a.k.a. "Priority Funding Areas") that meet specific State criteria. With certain
   exceptions, only Smart Growth Areas may qualify for state funds for water,
   sewer, transportation, housing, economic development and environmental
   projects.

2. The Rural Legacy Act, which established a grant program enabling local
   governments and private land trusts to purchase easements and development
   rights in rural areas with important natural resources such as prime farmland.

3. The Brownfields Voluntary Cleanup and Revitalization Incentive Programs,
   which attempt to stimulate the reuse of contaminated properties.

4. An updated Job Creation Tax Credit Program, originally established in 1996, that
   encourages businesses to expand or relocate in Maryland by providing tax credits
   for each new, full-time job a qualified business creates – with higher benefits
   available for businesses expansions or relocations in Smart Growth and Priority
   Funding Areas.

5. The Live Near Your Work Program, which creates financial incentives for
   employees to buy homes near their workplaces. Only home purchases in areas

that qualify as "designated neighborhoods" (because they are mixed-use

neighborhoods in need of revitalization) are eligible for the incentives.

The second definition of "smart growth" used by the studio encompassed principles being

espoused at that time by The Congress for the New Urbanism, the Urban Land Institute

and the Smart Growth Network. (The students did their study prior to the time that the

Smart Growth Network website listed its "Ten Principles of Smart Growth".) The

students referred to those "smart growth" (lower-case "s" and "g") principles as the

following eight principles:

- residents live close to their employment;

- building placement and scale are conducive to a pedestrian-oriented environment;

- neighborhoods are compact and walkable with a modified grid street network;

- transportation systems and transit hubs are centrally-located and accessible by
  pedestrians;

- public gathering centers parks and open spaces are located in accessible and
  practical locations;

- civic buildings and spaces are promoted;

- a wide spectrum of housing options is available, enabling a broad range of
  incomes, ages and family types to live within a single neighborhood or district;
  and

- infill development is pursued.

By using the two definitions, the students intended to assist the town to fulfill its requirements under Maryland's Smart Growth mandates, and to grow (and revitalize) in a manner consistent with those mandates and with smart growth principles.

Findings and Recommendations of the Final Studio Report

Near the beginning of their written report, the students clarify its purpose.

> We sought to create a useful, action-oriented document that clearly outlines Choices, steps and resources necessary to plan for and implement future growth, as well as to enable the Town to discuss and make decisions based on a range of alternatives (p. 6).

The 98-page studio report, *Smart Growth for Perryville*, begins by analyzing the extent to which Perryville's then-current planning/regulatory practices conformed with smart growth principles in general and Maryland's major environmental and Smart Growth laws in particular. The chapter contains a total of 32 recommendations for improving those practices; 23 for the town, three for Cecil County and five for the State of Maryland. The report then presents three potential scenarios for future growth in Perryville. The scenarios were based on three different "visions" that the students found in their review of the Town's comprehensive plan and their interviews with local officials and residents. The scenarios are: "A Great Place to Live", where quality, small town life and residential development take precedence; "A Great Place to Work," where business

and industrial development are the focus; and "A Great Place to Visit", where heritage-based tourism is the main goal.

Each of the three scenario chapters opens with a vision statement followed by a description of what the town would look / feel if the vision were realized using smart growth principles. Each chapter then contains an inventory of assets and constraints, suggestions for short-term and long-term actions for realizing the vision (in terms of land use and zoning, design, transportation, amenities and services, etc.), and a listing of implications for major stakeholders. In all, there are 27 suggestions for implementing 'Live", 24 for "Work", and 27 for "Visit".

The students point out that each of these visions could have differing implications for the Town's about-to-be-updated zoning ordinance, and for its capital improvement plan, its use of vacant land, its designation of town centers, and other policies and regulations. For example, in the "Great Place to Live Scenario", the town would have two designated centers, one in the old downtown on Broad Street (where new residential development would be attracted to in-fill sites), and a new center at the intersection of State routes 222 and 40 about a mile and half from downtown. Under the "Great Place of Work" scenario, there is only one center, at the latter site, for the convenience of employees and/or customers of potential new commercial and industrial development located away from the old downtown. Under "Live", the vacant Firestone property is to be examined as a potential site for of access to shallow water for boats and paddleboats on the Bay. Under "Work" that site is assessed for pollutant contamination and marketed for light industrial

uses. In "Visit" the town's historical buildings, MARC station and new greenway trail is exploited for tourist-related commercial development.

In an effort to clearly distinguish the differences among the three vision scenarios, the report contains a table summarizing how each of the three visions presented by the students addresses each of the eight smart growth principles, and compares that to the "trend" of then-current planning practice in Perryville.

In their report the students emphasize that the vision chapters are meant to stimulate discussion and action regarding a vision for Perryville's future – not to be a directive. Accordingly, following the vision chapters the report outlines a series of steps the town could take to decide upon and implement its own vision, beginning with the formation of a Strategic Planning Committee representing a range of community stakeholders who would then develop a vision for the Town. Following the outline of the strategic plan process are a total of 29 recommendations in the categories of meeting personnel needs of town hall, improving communication between the town and other jurisdictions; and town code updates, mapping; annexation, infrastructure and public facilities, design guidelines, economic development and neighborhood revitalization.

The report concludes with a table intended to assist the town with smart growth implementation. The table matches 25 specific planning goals to a short list of town actions or tasks that can be taken to address each goal, along with the names of

organizations that can provide funding and/or technical assistance in relation to those tasks.

For example, one of the planning goals identified is "commercial business development", for which the table lists four actions that could be taken (such as "conduct market research") and identifies five sources of technical assistance and ten sources of funding to aid in the performance of those tasks. Following that table is a 20-page appendix containing an annotated summary of each of the 84 sources of federal, state and non-governmental program sources of funding and/or technical assistance listed in the previous table – including a one-paragraph description and contact information. The appendix also contains an additional listing of Maryland Department of Planning publications and services; a list of six, relevant planning publications (such as Ames 1998 and Daniels et al. 1995); four sources of training for public officials and staff on smart growth; and seven references for grant writing.

Perryville's Utilization of the Report

The studio advisory committee expressed great satisfaction with the students' work. Nevertheless, there was no formal commitment on the town's part to use the report, nor any expectation that the students or I would assist with the report's implementation. The document simply would be left with town officials and the advisory committee members.

In the four years following the studio report there was only one occasion for continuity in the university's connection to the town once the report was completed. Three members

of the town's planning and zoning commission participated in a two-day, Planning

Commissioner Certificate Program training, sponsored jointly by the URSP and MDP in

neighboring Harford County in November of 1999.

To ascertain the degree to which the studio report was helpful to the town, I interviewed

the following individuals: Eric Morsicato, current town administrator; Sharon Weygand,

town administrator at the time we did the studio; Mary Ann Skilling, the MDP "circuit-

rider" planner for the Critical Area assigned to Perryville; Barbara Brown, chairperson of

the planning and zoning commission at the time we did the studio course and now a town

commissioner; Anthony DiGiacomo, principal planner with Cecil County; and David

Dodge, a developer who is president of the Perryville Chamber of Commerce and a major

player in the revitalization of downtown Perryville. Each of the five was asked to discuss

the nature and degree to which (s)he use(d) the studio report and implemented its

suggestions and recommendations. To determine the degree to which the town had

incorporated students' suggestions and recommendations in their official planning

documents, I read the latest draft of the zoning ordinance, dated February 2003. I also

read the minutes of planning and zoning commission, and zoning board of appeals

commission meetings since September of 1999, to get a sense of how their deliberations

reflected the kind of smart growth ideas in the studio report. I also drove through

Perryville to get a first-hand look at any visible changes in the town.

Before discussing the impact of the studio report it is necessary to consider Sharon

Weygand's comment that "change [in Perryville] is gradual". None of the town's five

commissioners receive a salary, nor do the planning and zoning commission members.
Also, typical of small towns on the Bay's eastern shore, the salaried town administrator
has multiple responsibilities. In Perryville, in addition to administration those roles
include code enforcement officer, zoning officer and financial officer. This means that
championing change requires voluntary activism on the part of elected officials and extra
effort by the town administrator.

The gradualness of change in Perryville is reflected in the fact that the town has not
updated its comprehensive plan since 1997. In fact, when the students were conducting
the studio the town was about to begin updating its zoning ordinance to be consistent
with the 1997 plan, and has yet to begin updating its subdivision regulations.

Consequently, the impact of the studio will be discussed in three main ways: (a) how the
town has addressed the report's recommendations for having planning/regulatory
practices conform with what the students described as Maryland's Smart Growth
program; (b) the degree to which the town has responded to students' recommendations
for creating a visioning and strategic plan, meeting personnel needs of town hall, and
making town code updates (just the zoning ordinance draft), and other recommendations
contained in the report's final chapter; and (c) other ways in which the key informants
say they have used the report. In some cases, the noted impacts were a direct result of the
report; in other cases, the report reinforced actions that the town administrator and some
other stakeholders were already contemplating.

Several of the students' recommendations for the strengthening the town's enforcement of Maryland's Smart Growth laws were implemented immediately. The circuit-rider planner and the town administrator prepared checklists to be used by the town in enforcing the Critical Area Act and the Forest Conservation Act. The minutes of the town planning commission and zoning board of appeals reveal stringent enforcement of environmental laws over the past four years. It is not possible to determine the degree to which the studio report influenced this increased vigilance.

Consistent with student recommendations the draft zoning ordinance requires public access to the waterfront in residential developments; enables future development to include commercial centers and high density residential nodes; and enables infill and compact development. The town is also involved in implementing and promoting the Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway, and investigating a range of funding options for smart projects (discussed below).

Some of the students' Smart Growth recommendations that have *not* been acted upon are those that would follow from an updated comprehensive plan, such as annexing open space to create a greenbelt, better defining sensitive areas and working with Cecil County to establish a transfer-of-development rights (TDR) program. The TDR program option is not being explored at the Cecil County level because there currently is insufficient infrastructure capacity to support the more intensive growth that would be directed to "receiving" areas. Other recommendations have simply not been explored as of this writing. The students urged the town to apply for "Designated Neighborhood" status,

which if approved would enable it to participate in the Live-Near-Your-Work program. The students believed this program could stimulate home purchases in Perryville by VA Hospital employees.

Perryville did not follow the students' suggestion to create a strategic planning committee that would review the contents of their report (and other documents), develop a vision for the town and then create a plan for its realization. Instead, in early 2001 the town created a Revitalization Committee that is focused on the old downtown. Established by Town Administrator Morsicato, the group also includes the mayor, developer David Dodge, downtown property owners, and other interested stakeholders. At their April 2002 meeting, the group established the following mission statement: "We will make Perryville one of the best places to work, live and visit in Maryland. Come see us grow."

In other words, for the time being the town will address all three of the student's visions, but concentrate on a targeted area. Three new residential developments have been built in the old downtown and a few more are planned. Combining elements of the students' "Live" and "Visit" scenarios, the revitalization committee and town officials are planning to create a community educational and recreational center near the Rogers Tavern and build a pier for water taxis. According to Morsicato, the eventual goal is create a mixed-use downtown and a waterfront with promenades and restaurants so that people will chose to come to the downtown for recreation and entertainment. The greenway will be an integral part of this "live" and "visit" scenario.

The "work" scenario is also being addressed by an event that was unrelated to the students' report. In 2000 the State, Cecil County and the town were able to attract IKEA to build a huge, 1.7 million sq. ft. warehouse and distribution center on the Firestone Plastics site, made possible by construction of an access road to Route 40.

The draft zoning ordinance complements the mission of the Revitalization Committee, and incorporates many of the student's recommendations, including the creation of a new mixed use zone for downtown. The draft ordinance has a new "Town Center Mixed Use Zone", that incorporates students' suggestions that there be design guidelines and standards for parking, street lighting and street furniture. Other parts of the draft ordinance include bed and breakfast facilities as a conditional use in some zones, landscaping and open space requirements for residential developments outside of the downtown, and support for planned unit developments.

The students had suggested that the town create an annexation declaration, clearly indicating what kind of land uses would be considered for addition to the town. This recommendation has been rendered moot for the time being because the town is nearing capacity of its water and sewer treatment plants and is targeting its remaining capacity for infill development, especially in the old downtown. The report recommended that the town develop a long-range plan for water and sewer needs based on population growth projections, but the town has yet to begin planning for longer-term service.

Other recommended actions have *not* been taken by the town, including: hiring a town planner and a code enforcement officer; considering adoption of an adequate public facilities ordinance; improving town entry signage at key locations; creating an economic development plan and utilizing various kinds of tools (such as tax increment financing) to finance site improvement in specific revitalization areas; and strengthening code enforcement. The reasons why most of these recommendations have not been adopted are because of insufficient funds or town officials being preoccupied with other issues.

Key informants identify four reasons for the studio report's utility. First, the report did contain some new ideas. As one planning commissioner stated, "The ideas that the students added to our vision was invaluable, because they thought of things we hadn't considered." But secondly, and probably more important than containing new suggestions, the report consolidated a number of smart-growth related ideas that had either been contained in earlier reports or had been proposed previously by others in the town. As a result, it was a resource for persons in the town who already had an interest in the town growing in a "smart" manner. Rather than being a revolutionary document, said Cecil County Planner Anthony DiGiacomo, the report "gave momentum to smart growth ideas by putting them into clear form and a good time."

Third, the concepts in the report have given additional legitimacy to initiatives by the town's present and former administrators. Morsicato, who has been town administrator since 2001, states:

When I got here it was one of the first documents I read. I can't measure it, but

I fall back on the report as a resource more than any other document. We use it

a lot as a reference. It legitimizes some of our proposals, gives us back up

support.

Morsicato states that he has used concepts in the report "for every grant proposal

we send out," including one that obtained funds to purchase property on the

waterfront for the planned community activities center.

Fourth, perhaps the most immediately utilized component of the studio report was

table on sources for technical assistance and funding, and the accompanying

appendix with descriptions and contact information. Former town administrator

Sharon Weygand says that this part of the report was a godsend. Said Weygand:

"For me, being new [at her administrator job], I didn't know all the agencies to

contact. I kept the report in my notebook as a resource." The Maryland

Department of Planning (2000, I-15), in its instructional guide for local

governments entitled *Revisiting the Comprehensive Plan: The Six Year Review*, has

a resource directory that concludes with a note that some of the information in the

director was derived from the 1999 studio report.

Student Reactions to the Studio Experience

Concurrent with my interviews with key informants about the impact of the

Perryville studio, I e-mailed several of the participating students to inquire about

what they regarded as the greatest challenges in conducting the study and the degree

to which the studio experience shaped their professional careers. There were two

closely-related challenges identified by the students: obtaining crucial information

for the study and producing the report within a relatively short time frame; and

learning to work effectively as a team.

With regard to the first challenge, one student wrote: "The greatest challenge in

doing the studio was having only three months to do it, and with no prior

knowledge of Perryville. In that short amount of time were charged with the task of

understanding exactly what was happening in the town in order to develop

scenarios for the town's future." Another student wrote of his difficulty in getting

timely cooperation from some state and county officials who could provide

information about various capital improvement projects slated for Perryville and

surrounding areas.

The second challenge, learning to work effectively as a team, was underscored by

every student contacted. The following are comments from two of the students.

"I recall that the biggest challenge was getting consensus among the

members of our group on how the studio project should work, how far we

should go in our recommendations, and was realistic to expect as an

outcome. We all brought different expertise, personalities and assumptions

to the process. . . While this was technically "just an academic project . . .
we were all pretty passionate about it and really cared about the outcome."

"As with any team working on a tight schedule, it was important to try to be
as efficient as possible, while maintaining a high level of quality, by
capitalizing on the team's assets and overcoming individual shortcomings.
Unfortunately, but not unpredictable, this did not always occur for a number
of reasons not the least of which were different expectations, standards and
approaches."

Many of the participating students indicate that the studio experience has had an
impact on their careers. Some of the students' comments on this impact are the
following.

- "It was a great benefit being able to relate this real-world experience to
  my professional planning career in Florida. I can better understand the
  challenges of managing growth, and that has helped me as a planner for
  a small city near Orlando, Florida. Like Perryville, my city is finding it
  difficult to redevelop the downtown and utilize historic resources, the
  land development code needs to be updated and development decisions
  are often affected by small town politics."

- "I really enjoyed the intensity and creativity of the studio. I also liked
  working on the local level with a great team and with the

multidisciplinary, problem-solving nature of smart growth. . . [I am] lucky enough to continue work in the field of smart growth, albeit on a broader national scale [with a national organization]. What I like about my job is basically what I like about smart growth: it makes sense, it makes communities more livable, and it's a complex, challenging issue."

- "Since working on the Perryville studio team I have been on a number of multi-disciplinary teams in my professional career in various capacities - member, facilitator, resource. Each time I am reminded of my experience with the Perryville studio and am better able to anticipate these types of challenges."

- "In Perryville there were a number of key individuals who provided invaluable information unavailable from any other source. In my [current] work as a consultant to local governments, it is interesting to discover in each new community that that there are usually a handful of people with a vast knowledge of the community's history, politics and economics, just as in Perryville. As an outsider to the community – as a member of a student studio or as a consultant – it is essential to find those key individuals. At the same time the studio highlighted the value of verifying and validating information. This has been an invaluable lesson and has been reinforced in my professional career time and again."

Lessons Learned; Potential Transferability

The experience of the 1999 summer studio suggests that a semester-long, community planning studio is not only a valuable learning experience for students but a viable means of university provision of smart-growth related assistance to a jurisdiction. However, in the Perryville case the reason is that there were, are still are, town officials and activists in the town who are very interested in applying smart growth principles in local planning. These stakeholders greatly appreciated having a group of bright, conscientious students take a fresh look at the town's past and present planning actions and their future options. However, as a result of town elections and changes in planning and zoning commission appointments, it is conceivable that, over time, the report will be forgotten should smart growth lose favor among the local electorate.

Even if those committed to smart growth remain in positions of influence in the town, it would be valuable for both the Town and the University to have a follow-up planning studio by the year 2006. The purpose of the studio would be to examine growth patterns in the town since 1999, determine reasons for that pattern, and make recommendations to the town, county and state. The students would have the intellectual exercise of figuring out what smart-growth planning and policy changes have, and have not occurred since 1999, and why. Town, county and state stakeholders would again benefit from getting feedback from a group of intelligent,

outside observers. This follow-up should be a standard practice for any smart growth studio.

The recommendation begs the question, though, of what kind of assistance the university offers in the interim years. After all, students graduate and faculty members move on to other projects, so there is a loss of continuity once the report is given to the jurisdiction. I had no contact with Perryville for almost two years prior to the present study. The answer to the question will have to be the product of ad hoc negotiations between the university and the jurisdiction. When appropriate, the assistance could be offered by another unit in the university. For example, in early 2003 Eric Morsicato inquired about additional assistance from the University of Maryland for help with design issues related to the Perryville's community facilities planned for the old town waterfront. As a result of his request, the University of Maryland's Architecture program chose Perryville as the focus for its Spring 2004 masters' studio.

Some of the recommendations in the 1999 studio report called on the State of Maryland to increase the amount of technical assistance provided to local governments to assist them in smart growth planning and implementation. Should budget constraints continue to limit the amount of Maryland Department of Planning provision of such assistance, the university planning programs could be called upon to help fill the need. The Perryville studio experience strongly suggests

that such assistance can be greatly beneficial both to students and community

stakeholders.

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