

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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# **MDE Denies Disastrous Highway Permit Local, State Advocates Celebrate**

**Charles County** – Charles County citizens have much to celebrate today after the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) denied a key permit for the Cross-County Connector. The denial will save the county millions of dollars, and save the Mattawoman Creek watershed from the potentially disastrous impacts of the proposed four-lane highway. The creek has long been considered one of the best nurseries for migratory fish in the entire Chesapeake Bay. However, two years ago American Rivers listed the Mattawoman as the fourth most endangered river in America because of threats posed by the road.

“This is huge. Without the permit the highway can’t be built, hopefully ever,” said Terry Cummings, Maryland manager of advocacy for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. “We are thrilled. This is a historic day for the citizens of Charles County and Maryland. If we are going to save the Bay, we must save her rivers and streams.”

“This is a victory for Smart Growth. This highway was originally conceived to service a huge development project that inspired Governor Parris Glendening to bring Smart Growth to Maryland, and to purchase historic Chapman Forest for the protection the Mattawoman, the Potomac, and the Bay,” said Bonnie Bick, representing the Sierra Club, Maryland Chapter.

MDE cited the county’s failure to provide necessary information requested by the state. In addition, the County failed to show that the project would not harm nearby waterways, or that those impacts could be aggressively avoided or mitigated.

“This is great news for the legions who enjoy Mattawoman,” said Jim Long, president of the Mattawoman Watershed Society. “At a time when one of the Bay’s best is faltering, this highway and its sprawl development would have made recovery impossible. Previous county administrations failed to understand, but we are hopeful the county will now signal its concern by doing the right thing in its new comprehensive plan.”

The decision came after the County Commissioners voted on October 12<sup>th</sup> to not commit any new funds to the project, including funding the studies and analysis needed to determine how the highway would impact nearby waterways.

“We are glad that the county decided not to waste another penny of taxpayer dollars on this road,” said Hal Delaplane, president of the Conservancy for Charles County. “MDE just saved Charles County taxpayers \$1300 per household.”

The permit denial comes at a critical time, as the county is going through the process of updating its comprehensive plan. While two of the original scenarios for the plan did not include the Cross-County Connector, the road reappeared in one of the final scenarios.

“Building this unneeded highway would have detracted from revitalizing Waldorf with transit-oriented development. Smart planning – investing in your existing roads, your existing communities – is the only way to guarantee a sustainable future for the county,” explained Jennifer Bevan-Dangel, deputy director with 1000 Friends of Maryland.

Even the consultants working on the comprehensive plan questioned the need for the highway. In their original evaluation, they questioned the utility of the road in a paragraph that was later stripped from the report.

The comprehensive planning process will continue over the coming year. A public forum on the final scenario may be held as soon as mid-November. Advocates are confident that, given the recent decision, the Cross-County Connector will not be included in the final scenario.

MDE’s permit denial was followed by a letter from Maryland Department of Planning Secretary Richard Hall to Charles County Commission President Candace Quinn Kelly. Hall said in the letter the highway would have harmed the Mattawoman, one of the state’s environmental jewels, and also would have increased sprawl development which is contrary to the state’s policy. Hall suggested the county could grow in more suitable, less harmful ways.

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*The Smarter Growth Alliance for Charles County is a coalition of local, regional, and state advocacy groups representing environmental and taxpayer interests. Members include 1000 Friends of Maryland, AMP Creeks, Audubon MD-DC, Audubon Naturalist Society, Bass Federation Nation, Chapman Forest Foundation, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Citizens for a Better Charles County, Clean Water Action, Coalition for Smarter Growth, Conservancy for Charles County, Maryland Conservation Council, Mason Springs Conservancy, Mattawoman Watershed Society, Nanjemoy - Potomac Environmental Coalition, Inc., Port Tobacco River Conservancy, Potomac River Association, Sierra Club, MD Chapter, Southern MD Audubon Society, South Hampton HOA, St. Mary's Watershed Association*