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To: Charles County Planning Commission

SUBJECT: Re: Comprehensive Plan Amendment: Lands Surrounding Maryland Airport

I am writing you to oppose the proposed Amendment to the 2016 Comprehensive Plan that would remove environmental protections to vulnerable properties surrounding Maryland Airport.

With this amendment, the County hopes to create an “economic engine” by expanding the Maryland Airport to spur economic and commercial development at the expense of irreplaceable and valuable natural resources. However, this proposed “engine” will run on fossil fuels, and it is located in the wrong place. Not only is there a lack of infrastructure, it will be built on land in the Mattawoman Creek watershed that has been identified as having high ecological value prioritized for conservation. Economic development and environmental conservation are not mutually exclusive. In fact, keeping Mattawoman Creek healthy is good for the local and regional economy, as it attracts tourist revenue and supports recreational and commercial fishing.

If the proposed Comprehensive Plan amendment moves forward, the natural resources of the land and streams surrounding the airport will be irrevocably damaged by industrial-scale development and increased pollution. The county will forever lose the ecosystem services this forested land provides, such as stormwater mitigation, carbon sequestration, and groundwater recharge. In fact, every 10% increase in forest cover in a watershed produces double the savings in water treatment downstream, according to research reported by American Forests.

Protecting forest lands, like those in the Mattawoman watershed threatened by the proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment, is a proven, affordable, and common-sense solution to defend the safety of the water we drink, protect clean air, combat climate change, and provide open space our community can turn to for physical and mental well-being. Protecting forests makes good financial sense and will provide a steady stream of economic and health benefits for Charles County families both now and in the future.

The world is in the grips of a climate crisis. Deforesting land to build an “economic driver” will cause damage to our natural resources due to additional fossil fuel consumption. This expansion is fiscally and morally irresponsible because preserving our forests, wetlands, and our citizens' health and well-being should be the cornerstone of any successful economic development.

Sincerely,