

Carroll County Buildable Land Inventory

Introduction & Background

Introduction

What is a buildable land inventory?

The buildable land inventory (BLI) is an analysis of land that is considered to have development potential. It estimates where, how much, and what type of additional development could occur. Estimates of the number of residential lots that could be created or units constructed are based on a jurisdiction's current zoning and/or proposed future zoning, called "land use designation." The BLI also uses land zoned for commercial and industrial development to estimate the potential acres available for this type of development.

The BLI is a planning tool for evaluating the potential impacts of planning policies and recommendations, and measuring the effectiveness of previous actions. The BLI could influence decisions on such issues as land use and zoning, subdivision regulations, watershed management, public facilities, and preservation measures. The BLI does not address the capacity of natural systems, infrastructure or other limitations to handle the projected growth.

How did the Carroll County Bureau of Planning perform these calculations?

In Carroll County, the BLI was completed using calculations processed in ArcGIS, the geographic information system (GIS) used by the County. The model generates an estimate

based on the methodology used to manipulate data. Many different variables may, or may not, affect lot yield.

The only way to get an exact number of buildable lots would be to research every deed for every parcel in the county (66,181 parcels including the municipalities as of July 1, 2011) to determine covenants and restrictions and other provisions that might affect lot yield. A certified engineer or land surveyor would then have to prepare an environmental resource inventory for each parcel to delineate the exact presence and location of environmental resources. Each potential lot in an area not served or planned to be served with public water and sewer service would have to have percolation tests performed and a well drilled to see whether a lot could actually be created. In addition, every subdivision plan would have to be reviewed to determine which lots are remainders or off-conveyances and to determine if additional lot yield exists. Finally, a subdivision plan would have to actually be created to lay out the lots to then determine the ultimate lot yield.

As this is time and cost prohibitive, GIS becomes the best tool available to develop estimates of buildable land. GIS is a powerful tool that can be used to examine spatial problems but is only as powerful and accurate as the data used for analysis. The best data available was used to perform this analysis; however, not all data that could be used for this study is available digitally. Therefore, we

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believe that this is the best information that can be provided with the data we have. Certain assumptions must be made to provide timely calculations that are accurate enough that they can be used to make decisions.

It is important to note that the lot yield calculations were performed on each individual parcel. Calculating yields on an individual parcel basis provides more accurate results than calculating lot yield on the sum of the acreage of all parcels in each zoning district or land use designation

because it accounts for some of the characteristics of individual properties that may affect total potential lot yield. Therefore, if the total acreages of buildable land shown in the tables in this report were divided by the minimum acreage shown for each zoning district or land use designation, different numbers would result than those shown in the tables.

Key Terms

The Buildable Land Inventory Report presents data by several specific geographies. The following definitions of these geographies were used to generate the estimates:

- Municipality – the current corporate boundaries of a municipality as of December 2011
- Designated Growth Area (DGA) – an area, generally organized around a municipality, for which a detailed

comprehensive plan has been prepared. DGAs typically correspond to the municipality’s defined future municipal growth area.

- Priority Funding Area (PFA) – areas designated by the State and local jurisdictions that are targeted for growth and economic development. These areas must meet the minimum PFA criteria defined under State law.

Organization of Report

The Buildable Land Inventory Report is divided into two main parts: a Residential Buildable Land Inventory, and a Commercial/Industrial Buildable Land Inventory. Each part is further divided into:

- a methodology section that describes how the estimates of potential buildable residential lots or potential buildable commercial and industrial acreage were derived;

- a countywide totals section that provides a breakdown of the estimates by municipality, Designated Growth Area (DGA), and Priority Funding Area (PFA); and,
- for the residential BLI only, a detailed analysis of potential buildable residential lots by municipality and their DGAs.

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The detailed municipal/DGA portion of the residential BLI uses current zoning to estimate how many lots presently could be built within the corporate limits. The land use designations (proposed future zoning) and DGA boundaries (proposed municipal growth area) that are defined in each municipality's comprehensive plan were used to estimate how many residential lots potentially could be built according to the plan. Each of the eight municipalities in the county has an adopted comprehensive plan with a defined DGA. Because the Town of Sykesville's growth area falls within the Freedom DGA, those two areas are presented together. Although there is a Finksburg DGA, the Finksburg community is not incorporated.

The commercial and industrial BLI is presented in multiple tables according to various geographies. Buildable acreage is provided within each geographic category for both vacant parcels and partially-developed parcels, in recognition of the fact that in many cases further development of an improved parcel could occur. Each table also shows the number of parcels within set acreage size ranges.

Maps are included in the detailed municipal/DGA portion of the residential BLI. Potential residential lots are depicted by a red dot. These same maps also depict potential buildable commercial and industrial parcels with a green (commercial) or yellow (industrial) triangle.

Changes Since Original 2005 Report



Since the last report was completed in June of 2005 the county has many new and updated data layers which should improve the accuracy of the BLI estimates. The county's parcel layer was updated in 2010; the parcel layer is the base layer for the BLI calculations. As a result of the new parcel layer the zoning, land used designations, growth area boundaries, corporate limits, agricultural easements and most of the absolute constraints were updated to match the new parcel lines and incorporated any updates since 2005. The county also has a new address point's layer; this layer

was used to determine if a parcel is improved or vacant. In the 2005 report the property's improvement value was used for this determination. The BLI estimates also incorporates a new data layer that contains Forest Conservation, Floodplain and Water Resource Protection easements that were used as absolute constraints. The floodplains and steep slopes layers have been updated and were derived from more precise data than the original layers. The 2005 report assumed a 100-foot stream buffer, while this update assumes a 50-foot stream buffer, as this is the county's minimum stream buffer width.

Article 66B Requirements

Article 66B of the Annotated Code of Maryland requires local jurisdictions to prepare an annual report of planning activity. One of the required components of this report is a set of "measures and indicators" designed to analyze development patterns and potential. Included in these

measures and indicators is a development capacity analysis, which must be updated once every three years or when there is a significant change in zoning or land use patterns. The Buildable Land Inventory is Carroll County's development capacity analysis tool.