

# The Abell Report

*What we think about, and what we'd like you to think about*

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## ABELL SALUTES: Women's Housing Coalition for creating a "beautiful quilt" of the lives of homeless, low- or no-income women.

"I think of Women's Housing Coalition (WHC) as a quilt, with each of our women making up a patch within it," says Joann Levy, executive director of Women's Housing Coalition. "Each patch, each life, is different, one from the other. But together, they make up a beautiful quilt."

The WHC that Ms. Levy is describing is dedicated to providing safe, affordable housing and support services to homeless and low-income women and families in Baltimore City who are suffering from physical disabilities, mental health issues, and/or chemical addiction, but at the same time, are committed to work toward personal growth and independence.

Since 1979 more than 1,000 needy women have benefited from WHC residential and services support, which includes case management, advocacy, and life skills training. Here are the stories of three of them, three patches in Ms. Levy's quilt...

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Lisa is a 36-year-old African American whose life story took her on a 20-year, trouble-laden journey from Chester Street in East Baltimore to 111 East 25th Street—where at long last she was able to stabilize her turbulent life

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## Growing! Growing! Gone! *The Chesapeake Bay and the Myth of Endless Growth*

By Tom Horton

The once-acclaimed program to restore the Chesapeake Bay, now in its 25th year, has failed. For three decades the Bay's fundamental and serious declines have scarcely budged despite billions of dollars spent on an array of cleanup efforts by the federal government and six states that share the 64,000-square-mile Chesapeake watershed.

A 2010 deadline for cleaner water won't be met, nor is there a new target date, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Chesapeake Bay Program. Blue crabs are at historic lows. Oysters are virtually gone except as a farmed crop supported by hatcheries on land. Nitrogen, the Bay's dominant pollutant, is double healthy levels, with no overall reduction since the 1980's, and increases in several rivers.

All this 25 years down the road to restoration.

Improvement is possible if we strengthen political will, better enforce environmental laws, increase funding and reform weak zoning that allow rampant development of the Bay's sensitive shorelines and rural lands.

Even so, a blind spot remains, large enough to keep us from ever recapturing the glory days of the Chesapeake environment (water quality and habitat for fish and wildlife similar to the 1950's—the goal of the restoration effort).

The blind spot is our addiction to limitless economic growth, based on encouraging an ever-expanding population of human consumers to support it.

This is our mantra:

Growth is good, vital to our well-being, or at least inevitable and must be "accommodated." So unchallenged is this premise that day to day, we analyze it little more than we do the gravitational force that holds us to the planet. But listen to what we are, in effect, saying:

With better management and technology, the human population and economy can grow forever while assuring a sustainable and high level of environmental quality, including room for the rest of nature.

We can return today's Bay, inhabited by some 17 million people, back to the 1950's when eight million lived in the watershed. In other words, we can reduce our current environmental impact by half—and reduce it even more to totally offset all new impacts on air, water and land from the 1.7 million new people coming to the Bay every decade.

That is what we continue to assume, with the connivance of elected and environmental leaders, after 25 years of failing to do it. Growth is good. Growth is necessary. Growth will come. Growth can be accommodated. These are the greatest, most uncritically accepted and fatally flawed assumptions made by those charged with protecting the natural resources of the Chesapeake Bay.

By an end to growth we do not mean an end to capitalism, stock markets, free trade, innovation, the profit motive or greed and corruption. Economic *development* would continue to underpin our prosperity—a shift to building more comfortable, affordable and energy-effi-

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cient homes versus more homes; to producing tastier, more nutritious burgers with less impact on the environment rather than more and bigger ones; to rebuilding our cities and towns and mass transit versus expanding the suburbs. The focus would shift to better serving those already here versus making endless accommodations for all who might be induced to come.

We already know better than we act. For decades, government and environmental leaders in the Bay region have tacitly acknowledged that growth without limit is at odds with a sustainable\*\* environment.

At the first modern conference on Bay health in 1977, the final speaker, marine scientist J.L. McHugh, concluded:

*“One theme has run like a thread through this conference... an issue that is almost always evaded and certainly never addressed seriously... the human population explosion. If we cannot cope with it, maybe everything else will be in vain.”*

The 1987 update of EPA’s Chesapeake Bay Restoration Agreement drew *“a clear correlation between population growth and associated development and environmental degradation in the Chesapeake Bay system.”*

And in 2007: *“Population growth has increased,”* a scientist told the *Baltimore Sun* to explain why pollution was actually increasing again in several tidal rivers.

But always, when the time for action comes, questioning economic expansion and population growth is off the table—sacred cows, or just too hard to deal with. It is assumed we can cure the symptoms while furiously expanding their root causes.

Only a few decades ago our politicians and environmental organizations forthrightly questioned growth. “One of the most serious challenges to human destiny in the last third of the 20th century will be the growth of the population,” President Richard M. Nixon told the nation in July 1969.

Nixon and Congress appointed a bipartisan Commission on Population and the American Future, chaired by John D. Rockefeller, 3d. It concluded:

*“We have looked for, and have not found, any convincing economic argument for continued population growth. The health of our country does not depend on it, nor does the vitality of business, nor the welfare of the average person.”* The country *“should concern ourselves with improving the quality of life for all Americans rather than merely adding more Americans.”*

The report gained little traction as the U.S. grew slowly during the 1970’s; but in 1982 a “Global 2000” report under President Jimmy Carter again recommended stabilizing population. In a 1988 “Blueprint for the Environment,” the nation’s environmental groups warned President-elect George H. W. Bush that “population pressures threaten the environment all across our nation.” In 1996 President Clinton’s Council on Sustainable Development declared the need “to move toward stabilization of the U.S. population.”

Had the nation moved toward population stability after the Rockefeller Commission in 1972, U.S. population would have peaked at around 230 million by 2030. Instead, we have 304 million Americans already, heading for close to half a billion by mid-century. In the Bay watershed, we might have had 15 million people here in 2030. We’ve already surpassed that, headed for 25 million or more by 2050.

So why do we persist in ignoring a widely acknowledged root cause of pollution like population growth, in light of our failure to date to clean up the Chesapeake Bay (and many other national environmental messes)? Why, despite a burgeoning commitment to a “sustainable” society, do we keep promoting growth without limit?

The excuses fall into three overlapping categories:

- How many of us isn’t a problem; it’s

how we live.

- Economic prosperity depends on growth.
- Stopping growth is politically or morally unacceptable.

This article is a challenge to these assumptions, an attempt to put growth on the radar screen as a vital issue. Continuing to ignore it, locally and nationally, renders most environmental progress temporary, mocks aspirations to live sustainably with the rest of nature, and erodes our quality of life.

## **I. Big Footprints— The problem is not people, as much as how they live.**

Environmental policies now focus wholly on reducing our footprint, our per capita environmental impacts, and ignoring how many capitas there are. This is like assuming your weight is all a function of exercise, never mind how many calories you shovel in.

Not that we don’t need to shrink our environmental footprint. Americans are about a twentieth of the world’s population, but consume a quarter of the world’s natural resources and generate similarly disproportionate amounts of pollution. If the world’s 6.6 billion people all lived like Americans, it would take five or six planet Earths to support them.

In Maryland, demands for big, suburban yards have driven open-space development up 100 percent as population rose only about 30 percent. And people on sprawling lots generate four-to-eight times the pollution from septic tanks as people in densely settled areas with sewage treatment. So reining in sprawl and revitalizing cities could in theory save open space and improve water quality, even as Maryland adds 1.1 million more people by 2025.

And some impacts on the Bay aren’t directly related to population growth—farm runoff and invasive species like the oyster parasite, MSX, are examples. And technological advances like cleaner

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\*\* A sustainable society is one that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs—one that can persist over generations, using natural resources at rates that let nature renew itself.

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cars can keep a growing population ahead of the pollution curve for a time.

All this lends hope to those who would restore our environment while ignoring, or even advocating, continued growth. But any number of factors, including the fundamental nature of the Chesapeake estuary, make success unlikely.

The same features that make the Bay so productive make it quite vulnerable to human pressures. The Chesapeake's essential shallowness—average depth of 22 feet—lets sunlight penetrate to large areas of the bottom, growing lush sea grasses and efficiently recycling nutrients. Both help the estuary produce lots of crabs, shellfish and finfish.

But this shallowness also means the Bay has little water to absorb pollution washing from 48 million acres of land in six states.

Similarly, the Bay has thousands of miles of tidal shoreline; from eagles to oysters, these merges of upland, wetlands and shallows are highly productive. But people love waterfront too. More than 55 percent of us are clustered within 50 miles of the nation's coastlines. And half of all future population growth is projected to go there.

Maryland and Virginia have passed laws specifically to protect their tidal edges, but development has overwhelmed them; and recent research shows environmental degradation even at levels of shoreline development previously assumed to cause no harm.

Across the Bay's vast watershed, forests are key to absorbing and filtering pollution from the air and from polluted stormwater runoff. But we have lost close to a million acres of forest since Bay restoration began—and lost the most exactly where they are most critical—close to the Bay in the fastest-growing parts of Maryland and Virginia.

So long as we keep growing, we cannot escape chiseling away at the natural parts of the landscape that buffer the Bay against pollution. Even the most optimistic scenarios from Bay experts show substantial continued forest loss.

A great deal of hope for having our cake and eating it too has been focused on "Smart Growth," where governments use carrots and sticks to keep development out of the countryside, settling people more densely in existing cities and towns. But Smart Growth categorically ignores population growth, and for this and, other reasons, has had minimal impact.

So averse are Americans to dealing with growth that we ignore it even when it is an overwhelming part of the problem. "The Carbon Boom," a news release by U.S. PIRG (Public Interest Research Group), recently blamed Americans' lifestyles for increasing the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide.

But per capita carbon emissions did not 'boom' at all. Rather, it rose nationally and in Maryland precisely as much as population (about 20 percent between 1990 and 2004).

The greenhouse effect is already degrading the Chesapeake. Warmer water barely supports eelgrass, which is vital crab habitat; and rising sea levels will destroy tens of thousands of acres of Bay wetlands by century's end.

Of course we must reduce per capita carbon; but real, sustainable solutions will also require stabilizing our numbers.

But isn't continued growth vital to our prosperity and rising standards of living? Even a pristine Bay might be held in low regard by an economically depressed populace.

In fact, a stable population and high standard of living are no more incompatible than a stable weight and a healthy body. Advocates of today's grow-or-die economy act as if the only alternative to gluttony is starvation.

## II. It's The Economy, Stupid— More people may cause problems, but growth's benefits outweigh them.

From babies and puppies to redwood seedlings and the lawn, growth is good—up to a point. It is only the human economy, and its essential companion, the human population, that we expect to grow forever without any consequence we can't handle.

The U.S. has grown since its inception, and today most Americans enjoy material standards unimaginable even to the rich only a few generations ago. In Maryland's economy, growth rules. New home construction annually contributes around 13 percent of the Gross State Product. Selling real estate employs more than 114,000 people full- and part-time. Even Program Open Space, Maryland's premiere land conservation fund, is tied to development taxes, and swells with money in growth booms.

Uncritical acceptance that growth is good permeates our lives. Rapid growth in Maryland, the fifth most densely populated state in the nation, is proof "we're still an attractive place to live," crows a state economic development official. "...Population grows by nearly 1,000 residents a week, *but it is the pattern, rather than the pace of growth, that is causing problems,*" says a publication on Smart Growth in Maryland.

"The conflict between valuing growth and protecting nature is glaring," says Brian Czech, a federal biologist who runs the Center for a Steady State Economy. Czech came to question economic growth through his work with the Endangered Species Act. Between 1972 and 2000, federally listed endangered and threatened species increased more than sixfold, closely tracking a near fivefold rise in U.S. economic growth.

If nature has suffered, humans have prospered materially. But are we happier? Polls by the National Opinion

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Research Council every year since World War II show the percentage of Americans “happy” with their lives peaked in the 1950’s and has stayed flat or declined slowly ever since. In 1946, the U.S. was the happiest industrialized nation, but by the 1970’s it was eighth among eleven advanced nations, falling to 10th among 23 in recent decades.

Though we love nature and our Chesapeake, we don’t literally value them. Consider the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) the U.S. government’s broadest gauge of how the economy’s doing. GDP has become a universally accepted indicator of progress—up is good, down is bad.

But just as corporations like Enron and WorldCom defrauded investors by carrying huge costs off the books, so does GDP in effect devalue all our stakes in Earth’s natural resources. GDP measures total national spending for goods and services, but it makes no distinction between “good” and “bad” spending. Spending to hire divorce lawyers, to clean up oil spills, treat victims of pollution—it all adds to GDP just the same as purchases of new cars, barbecue grills and day care.

The real problem, however, is what GDP does not measure. It assigns no value to the work of marshes and forests and oysters, all with well-documented abilities to filter and absorb massive quantities of air and water pollutants. Just the ecological values of forests in the Chesapeake watershed has been conservatively rated at \$24 billion a year.

Modern economic theory holds that we can substitute more cash and better technology for natural resources—bigger and better sewage treatment plants for the prodigious pollution-filtering abilities of wetlands and oysters. Building such plants boosts GDP, while protecting oysters and wetlands doesn’t. But try hunting ducks at dawn over a sewage plant, or slurping effluent on the half shell.

Honest accounting for growth is just as hard to come by locally. Growing the

tax base by constantly adding new houses is a Holy Grail of almost every county and township in the Chesapeake watershed. The same goes for growing jobs.

“Growth does enlarge the tax base, but it also raises peoples’ taxes,” says Eben Fodor, a Maryland native and Oregon-based national land use consultant. In his book, *Better Not Bigger*, Fodor shows how increases in tax revenue are more than offset by the new and expanded services required to support growth: schools, storm drainage, sewer and water, fire, police, roads, school buses, libraries, parks, trash pickup.

As for job growth, Fodor says “the real question is not whether growth creates jobs, but whether it reduces local unemployment. Studies that have compared the fastest and slowest growing U.S. cities find no evidence that it does, he says. Rather, job creation attracts new workers to move in, and also attracts people who end up not finding jobs. And jobs come with a host of associated environmental and financial impacts.”

The jobs argument remains so powerful, however, that governments react instinctively to capture more. The latest alleged golden egg laid in Maryland by the growth goose is the U.S. military’s Base Realignment and Closure Commission’s (BRAC) 2005 decision to shift defense workers to Maryland, a move that means as many as 60,000 new jobs.

State officials, congressional representatives and U.S. senators worked long and hard to sway the decision Maryland’s way. Never mind that the state is already the richest in the nation, the fifth most densely populated, with the second worst traffic congestion and its major natural resource, Chesapeake Bay, in deep decline—BRAC’s benefits, it is assumed with scant analysis, will outweigh the costs.

BRAC will require spending billions on education, transportation and other development—more than \$800 million in 2008 alone. State officials pledge BRAC will “sustain and enhance the quality of life throughout the state.” But half of the eight central Maryland coun-

ties that will get the most new people have some of the state’s least protective rural zoning; and only two of the eight are considered to have a handle on controlling sprawl development.

Additionally, several of the counties have limited water supplies or limited sewage capacity. Most have no impact fees nearly covering the costs to taxpayers of new growth. One, Cecil County, has already asked state environmental officials to relax caps on sewage discharges, for fear of driving development onto septic tanks and large lots throughout its forests and farmlands.

And BRAC, for all the publicity attending it, is only about 15 percent of Maryland’s projected growth during the next decade and a half.

Growth’s impacts and hidden costs extend well beyond pounds of pollutants and higher taxes:

—Rapid growth is pushing sand and gravel companies to open up big, new open pit mines in places like the Eastern Shore’s remote Nanticoke River, where the state and nature organizations have invested tens of millions in preserving a pristine water corridor.

—Traffic growth will turn the twin Bay Bridges’ current summer weekend jams into year-round in 20 years; but there is neither money nor political appetite anywhere for a third span.

—Alexandria, VA is losing out on a high-rise office complex seen as key to revitalizing its downtown, because the land is needed to meet growing sewage treatment needs.

—By 2030 Maryland’s Eastern Shore will lose to development an acreage equal to all the tillable farmland in three counties. This means less grain for the poultry industry and less land on which to spread chicken manure. “The pandemic we’re worried most about isn’t avian flu, it’s the pandemic of development,” says an official of the Delmarva Poultry Industry, Inc.

—Mattawoman Creek in Southern Maryland, one of the Bay’s healthiest, fishiest and loveliest tributaries, is in imminent danger of serious decline as

local governments target its watershed to accommodate new growth.

—To serve new growth, power companies are planning hundreds of miles of new and expanded high voltage corridors, cutting through historically and environmentally sensitive lands in Maryland and Virginia.

—Rising demands for grains to feed and fuel (with ethanol) population growth are converting an estimated 200,000-300,000 acres around the Bay from low polluting uses like pasture, to growing fertilizer-intensive crops that release millions of pounds of additional nitrogen and phosphorus to waterways.

—Freedom is not normally considered in lists of environmental impacts, but Bay scientist Christopher D’Elia in 1995 showed how failure to address population in restoring the Bay guaranteed “more government and more control.”

Again, while we can reduce many of the above impacts by moderating consumption and inventing better technologies, leaving population growth out of the equation makes it unlikely we’ll get adequate or lasting results.

For example, we’ve spent billions on sewage treatment technology to reduce polluting nitrogen and phosphorus. And for decades, sewage pollution fell even as population rose; but in recent years, growth has reversed progress on many rivers. Another round of spending will soon resume progress; and just as certainly, growth will again offset that. In the long run it is not sustainable.

And who really benefits from our massive public expenditures to stay ahead of pollution as we grow? If growth is good, then spending billions on sewage treatment, new roads and bridges, powerlines and attracting new jobs may be a necessary investment. But if growth is not as good as assumed, those same expenditures become taxpayer subsidies.

Subsidies to whom? Recognizing who does gain from growth explains politicians’ allegiance to our current,

environmentally destructive economy. The prime beneficiary is what Fodor in his book calls the “growth machine.” At local levels of government, where most land-use decisions are made, this is “the most powerful political force in America,” he says.

Fodor defines it: “an engine powered by the fortunes resulting from land speculation and real estate development... property owners, developers, mortgage bankers, realtors, construction companies and contractors, cement and sand and gravel companies and building suppliers. All have a common interest in promoting local growth. They tend to be wealthy, organized and politically influential.”

They are abetted in promoting growth and opposing laws or rules to limit it, by trade and business associations, Chambers of Commerce and the like. The industry contributes heavily to elect pro-growth politicians and defeat slow-growth candidates. Its members and their employees serve on county planning commissions, zoning and appeals boards and county councils.

None of this argues for doing away with, or vilifying the growth industry, which builds our homes and paves our roads, and whose members are part of our communities. Rather, we must see it for the special interest it is, and counter its outsized ability to push for growth everywhere and forever.

Limits to growth do not imply limits to development. Rebuilding our struggling downtowns and abandoned industrial landscapes can stoke an economy as surely as expanding the suburbs and building malls in the countryside. Building mass transit can employ people as well as building highways.

And moving from today’s growth-dependent economy to a steady state system would be a slow shift rather than a dramatic change. Because of the time it takes younger people to move through their reproductive years, it would take decades for a stable population policy to translate to a stable population.

There would be winners and losers in the economy as it shifted toward steady

state; but the challenges businesses face every day in response to changing tastes, shifting markets, soaring energy prices and technological change would loom far larger than anything from gradual movement toward a stable population.

There is no reason to think the average citizen would not be better off. Research by Rutgers University economist Paul D. Gottlieb shows that dozens of the nation’s lower growth metro regions have rising per capita incomes, while many metro areas with high growth have declining per capita incomes.

But how would we actually start to stabilize growth? Isn’t any population solution national or global in scope? And who would do the jobs Americans won’t do any longer? How would a smaller group of workers support the burgeoning number of baby boom retirees?

### **III. IT’S TOO HARD. Maybe growth isn’t good, but what can you do about it?**

Too often, when people hear “population” mentioned with anything about controlling it, their thoughts leap to abortion, sterilization, China’s limit on babies, or ostracizing large families. Minorities may also see an attempt to limit their numbers.

Fortunately, stabilizing population here is not dependent on such measures. Including more people in the mainstream economy, raising educational levels and lowering poverty rates, combined with access to voluntary family planning are tried and true means for reducing birth rates the world over. Indeed, current U.S. births are already around 2.1 children per woman, the rate needed for a stable population.

That does not mean population stability is in sight. The U.S. Bureau of Census projects the nation’s current 304 million population will swell by nearly 50 percent by around mid-century and hit well over half a billion by 2100—we could actually hit a billion if current trends continue. The Chesapeake watershed, which now holds about 17 million people, traditionally equals or exceeds

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the U.S. growth rate.

The reason we're still expanding is only partly the population "momentum" from large numbers of people already born, but yet to move through their reproductive years.

By far the largest factor is foreign immigration that was termed "out of control" by a bi-partisan national commission nearly 30 years ago—a time when legal immigration was only half today's million-a-year admissions. Illegal immigration was also at lower levels.

From the nation's inception through the 1960's we admitted an average of about 230,000 immigrants annually. That began to change when Congress, with good intentions, reformed immigration laws in 1965 to stop excluding those not of Northern European origin.

Immigration began to soar, reaching a million annually by the 1990's. Meanwhile illegal immigration is estimated now at half a million a year (after subtracting those deported).

Just counting legal newcomers, about half of U.S. population growth is coming from immigration. Factoring in the higher birth rates to growing numbers of arrivals boosts immigration closer to two thirds of all growth—and up to 82 percent if you include illegal entrants.

Environmental leaders, their organizations heavily white and comfortable economically despite attempts to diversify, shy from wading into immigration issues: "When environmentalists say the human impact is just too large, people will suspect we are saying [it] is just too dark," says Carl Pope, head of the Sierra Club.

"Should we tell poor countries like Mexico to keep their people there, because we don't want their pollution... to curtail citizens from other countries to move here [just as our ancestors did] is just wrong," says William Baker, president of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

Others like the University of Maryland's top Bay science administrator, Donald Boesch, fear "if people think we have to stop population to restore the

Bay, they are going to say it is too hard."

But in fact we have already made a start.

Calvert County in Southern Maryland has rezoned twice in recent years to reduce from 54,000 to 37,000 the number of homes that can be built. The motivation was to avoid decades of traffic congestion, school crowding, higher taxes and loss of quality of life.

Farmers and other property owners there are satisfied their land values haven't suffered. New businesses are thriving, and the county protects three acres for every acre that develops.

Calvert County's actions have mostly just redistributed growth to neighboring Charles and St. Mary's Counties. But it is a start. What if the county's example spreads? What if other county and state officials stop assuming the inevitability of growth? What if more counties analyze growth's costs and benefits realistically—and then the state? What if the nation's president and Congress, who sail, hunt, fish and flush in Chesapeake waters, take note? The most national and global of movements all start somewhere.

Those who are loath to deal with growth because of its large immigration component usually offer the following arguments:

*—There are too many jobs Americans just won't do. And who but immigrants will repopulate our inner cities?*

Would Americans refuse jobs now held by immigrants if pay and working conditions were better? Would pay and working conditions be so bad if not for a large stream of immigrants with few options? A Harvard study estimates our high immigration rate costs American workers \$190 billion a year in depressed wages.

As for revitalizing the cities, immigrants play a vital role, but so would the middle and upper classes if we made sprawl pay its way. End the public subsidies to new suburban development in the form of highways, sewers, schools and power lines running throughout the countryside. Enact realistic impact fees

on new housing. Rethink state laws, like the one in Maryland that requires counties to plan for growth. "Subsidize" the cities with more money to attack crime, drugs, poor-performing schools—all reasons people left urban areas in the first place.

*—As millions of baby boomers begin to retire, a shrinking base of workers can't support them.*

This is a temporary issue that would exist during a few decades of transition from a high growth economy to a stable one, when workers and retirees would once again be in balance.

European nations are already pioneering progress here as their birth rates decline. A growing private industry there specializes in efficiently moving people off welfare rolls and into the workforce.

The U.S. could make many other adjustments like postponing full retirement, promoting half-time work, shared jobs and incentives to postpone collecting pensions and benefits.

*—If we limit building, housing prices will shoot up.*

Many factors affect housing affordability, such as income levels and community attitudes. Rapid growth, by boosting demand, can actually make housing less affordable. Affordable housing is best addressed by specific programs, like requiring new development to include moderate- and low-income homes; by taxing commercial and industrial development; by letting developers build denser if they include affordable homes.

*—In a land of plenty, dominated by whites, restricting immigration is unfair, even racist.*

Anyone advocating reduced immigration must be wary of groups who would keep people out of the U.S. because of their ethnic origin. But the U.S. has set limits on immigrants for a long time. The only question is where—not whether—we draw the line.

Environmentally, too many of us are already here, given the impact we are

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having on our environment. Nothing is less racist than sewage, where rich and poor, legal and illegal, white and black mingle without distinction—and our waters are already full up.

We could, if we desired immigration enough, make more “room” in effect by reducing our current pollution and birth rates enough to accommodate more immigrants while still stabilizing overall population.

—*The solution to population is global.*

No institution exists that can effectively make or enforce population solutions for more than a hundred sovereign nations with widely varying cultures and needs.

It is true that a national population policy is ultimately the best solution for Maryland and the Bay watershed. But we have the legal tools to begin slowing growth at the county and state level. What better place to begin a national movement than on the doorstep of the Nation’s capital, and on behalf of an ecosystem, the Chesapeake Bay, that is considered a national treasure?

## TOWARD A SOLUTION

Those who think questioning a bigger economy and population is opening a Pandora’s Box should remember that from the box’s bottom, hope emerged. A steady state economy and stable popula-

tion are, together, the only hope for a restored, sustainable Chesapeake.

We do not have a long term in which to begin. The choice of twice as many people, even if each caused half the per capita impact, is not environmentally equal to a lower number of us. Even cleaner growth forecloses options—usurps farmland, forests, natural shorelines, freedom to roam. Twice as many cars, no matter how clean, mean more traffic jams, parking lots and roads.

A strong movement, broader than traditional environmentalism, is building around sustainability, which ultimately demands a stable population and an economy that does not degrade nature. Abetting this is growing acceptance of climate change, and the need to limit current lifestyles to reduce greenhouse gases.

It is only slightly simplistic to see a time when growth is understood as antithetical to sustainability, as a pollutant like once “harmless” carbon dioxide is becoming. At that point, many “goods” would become “bads”—spending on bigger roads, bigger power plants, for example. Tax policies would encourage saving and re-using over borrowing and consuming.

Meanwhile, the end of growth remains a debate waiting to happen. We have yet to begin subjecting “growth is good” to real analysis, or accounting for the growth economy’s ruination of natural capital.

Moving to a stable population and a steady state economy won’t guarantee Utopia; but it will give us breathing room, and leave us options that we will not otherwise have. As the Rockefeller Commission concluded four decades ago, there is scarcely a problem facing us that can’t be solved easier in the absence of a rapidly growing population.

## About the Author

Tom Horton is renowned for his more than 30 years as a writer about environmental issues for *The Baltimore Sun* and for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. A native of the Eastern Shore and a graduate of Johns Hopkins University, he is the author of eight books on the Chesapeake Bay, including *Bay Country*, winner of the Jon Burroughs Award for nature writing, and *An Island Out of Time*, about Smith Island. His writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, *National Geographic*, *Rolling Stone*, *Audubon* and *Smithsonian*.

*The full text of “Growing! Growing! Gone! The Chesapeake Bay and the Myth of Endless Growth” is available on The Abell Foundation’s website at [www.abell.org](http://www.abell.org) or: write to The Abell Foundation  
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References on request.*

## ABELL SALUTES

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and start all over again, at Women’s Housing Coalition.

After graduating from Randallstown High, she found herself working in the Job Corps program in West Virginia. Things seemed to go downhill from there. She was victimized by what she still refers to as a “domestic life that turned into a disaster,” complicated by bouts of depression. Following her partner (and running from him at the same

time) she had to move to half a dozen small towns in Maryland on the Eastern Shore, then to North Carolina, when, down on her luck and out of options, she moved back to Baltimore. She found herself homeless and with a daughter seven-and-a-half years old—jobless, homeless, penniless. She was able to get temporary refuge in Christ Lutheran church, which gave her shelter and board for herself and her child, and then made contact for her with Women’s Housing Coalition—and it was there that she was able to turn her life around.

Women’s Housing Coalition provided room and board for Lisa and her daughter — along with generous amounts of counseling.

Today, Lisa leads a stable life, living in WHC’s scattered housing and is only a few months away from getting an associate’s degree in Criminal Justice—which, with luck, will get her placed in a job that will allow her and her daughter to be self-sufficient.

Lisa says, “It has been a long journey. But Women’s Housing Coalition helped me every step of the way. But I

know that with every step, I am further along. I know I am making it.”

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Monica, a 36-year-old African American, wants you to know: “There is no piece of paper long enough to hold the number of times I have been in and out of prison for using and distributing drugs. But that was the only life I knew, and so that was all I did. Until I found Women’s Housing Coalition.

“But that was a long time coming into my life.”

A 12-year-old Monica, who had drifted into the neighborhood drug culture in West Baltimore, dropped out of Dr. Martin Luther King Middle School in the sixth grade. She says, “On the street, I bought drugs. I got high on drugs. I sold drugs. I did that for 18 years. I was in and out of every prison around here. I have been on probation and off probation. Every time I got out of prison, I was sent back—for using drugs and selling drugs. That was the only thing I knew how to do. And here I am now, clean, living comfortably, working at a good job, and alive. That’s what Women’s Housing did for me.

“Along the way I had been a four-time loser, a six-time loser, I can’t even count. Through the court system I wound up in the Drug Court program, living at Safe House on Randall Street, and after some time they sent me to Women’s Housing Coalition. With lots and lots of counseling and psychiatric help, I’ve been clean for six years now. I am close to getting my GED. I am manager at McDonalds. Manager!

“Women’s Housing has taught me to live life on life’s terms. I carry a lot of baggage. If it weren’t for the Coalition, I would be in prison.

Lisa thinks a moment.

“Or dead.”

Another patch in Ms. Levy’s quilt.

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Fontella, a 37-year-old African American in the uniform of a Hopkins Security guard, shows you a plastic

card that reads “Security Guard, Certification.” That card is more than a simple credential to do security work; it is, to Fontella, like a diploma from Harvard earned by traveling a very long and bumpy road. “Looking back,” she says, “though I was never in prison, I was always on crack, from the time I was seven years old. And no matter how many times I quit, that is how many time I went back on it.” The certification tells you where her life is now—stable, comfortable, safe, full of promise. But if you knew how she lived for some 35 years until she got to this point, you would not have bet on her. Crack held her in a vise from which, she was absolutely convinced, there was no escape.

But, escape she did.

Though she spent her early life dirt poor on the Eastern Shore and on crack, she somehow managed to graduate high school and work—mostly in Burger Kings and gas stations. But from there, her life was a series of “bad things happening,” all under the power and influence of crack, abusive boyfriends, out-of-wedlock pregnancies, an erratic pattern in the workplace, homelessness, living in shelters—“several on Park Heights, the Salvation Army, the YWCA, the Red Cross, the Jude House. The state took my children!” That is when, on a day about five years ago, a day she will never forget, when, world-weary and “ready to die but scared of dying” from a life on crack, she called her brother living in Baltimore. She said to him, she recalls, “Come get me. I’m tired. And I am so tired of being so tired.”

And that is when she finally entered the Women’s Housing Coalition.

Under the guidance of a WHC case manager, Fontella began a program that would transform her life. She was placed in tutorials that determined her strengths and how to expand them and make use of them in job placement; she was taught how to write a job resume, how to bring her computer skills up to marketable level, and how to manage

her finances. The Fontella that graduated WHC had come a long way from the Fontella who had entered some years earlier.

And that is why Fontella, now smartly uniformed and full of self confidence, can present her “Security Card, Certification”—identifying herself, and reconfirming, too, she says, “the power of Women’s Housing Coalition to transform a life.”

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The WHC was founded in 1979 by a group of women who after conducting extensive research learned that homeless women were invisible in the community. Ms. Levy says, “They were instrumental in drafting and lobbying successfully for the first Model Emergency Shelter Bill in Maryland in 1990. The Calverton was one of the first Low Income Housing Tax Credit buildings in Maryland, placed in service in 1990, and now, 18 years later, it serves about 90 women and 30 children per year.

WHC estimates that it costs between \$4,000 and \$6,000 per year, depending on the services, to serve each client. This includes the tenant portion of the rent.

As for “results,” Ms. Levy says, “the WHC views success as a continuum not an end. Residents are considered ‘successful’ as they continue to accomplish the goals they set up on entry to the program. With that said, we put our success rate at 90 percent.”

WHC has a staff of ten, plus a grant writer and events planner on contract; executive director, program director, four case managers, property manager, accountant, an office manager for The Calverton where our main office is located and a building manager for The Susanna Wesley House, WHC’s Family Program.

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The Abell Foundation salutes Women’s Housing Coalition, executive director Joann Levy and program director Eleanor Fried, for creating a beautiful quilt of the lives of low-income and no-income homeless women.



This Abell Report explores prevention, intervention, and policy strategies to reduce the individual and societal costs associated with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) for children in Baltimore City. The Economic Benefits of Maryland's Historic Revitalization Tax Credit Program. Maryland must seize the opportunity to strengthen the Historic Tax Credit program and further the reuse and redevelopment of historic structures in Baltimore and across the state.