

# *Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates*

*Opinion Research &  
Public Policy Analysis*

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: David Metz  
Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates

RE: Summary of Recent Statewide Voter Survey on Conservation Issues

DATE: March 7, 2006

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Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates (FMM&A) recently completed a statewide survey of Maryland voters to assess their attitudes on a variety of conservation issues, including outdoor air quality, open space preservation, and other issues affecting Maryland's land, air, and water.<sup>1</sup> The survey results show that **Maryland voters place an extremely high priority on protecting the state's land, air and water.** Sizable majorities say that these issues are important in their voting decisions, and believe that the state needs stronger environmental laws or better enforcement of existing laws. In addition, by more than a two-to-one margin Maryland voters do not see the economy and the environment as being in conflict, and believe that the state can have a strong economy and a clean environment at the same time.

This memo describes these and other key findings of the survey in more detail. It begins with a discussion of voters' general perceptions on conservation issues, reviews voter support for a constitutional amendment dealing with state land sales, explores voter attitudes regarding the Healthy Air Act, and assesses awareness and support for Program Open Space.

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<sup>1</sup> **Research Methodology:** From February 9-14, 2006, FMM&A completed telephone interviews with 803 registered voters across the state of Maryland who have voted in at least one of the last four major statewide elections. The full sample has a margin of sampling error of +/3.5%; margins of error for subgroups within the sample will be higher.

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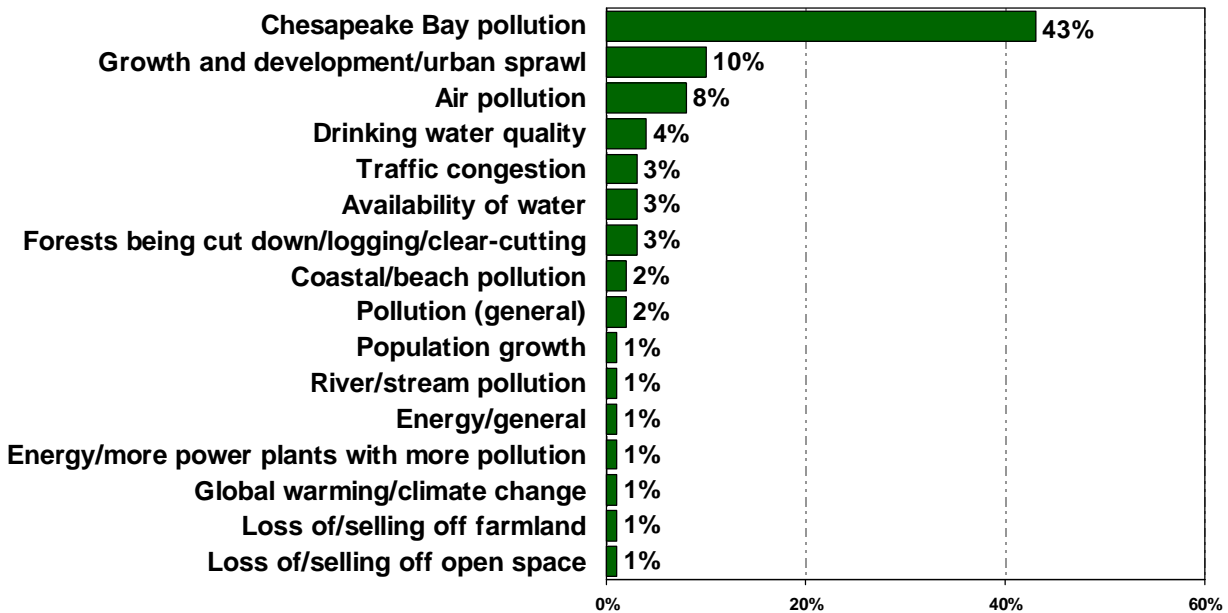
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**GENERAL CONCERNS ON CONSERVATION ISSUES**

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Survey respondents were asked to name, in their own words, “the most important environmental or conservation problem facing Maryland.” As illustrated below in **Figure 1, voters’ greatest concern is pollution of the Chesapeake Bay.** More than two in five voters name pollution of the Bay as the most serious environmental issue facing the state, while not other individual issue is volunteered by more than one voter in ten. The rate of growth and development (ten percent) and air pollution (eight percent) are significant top-of-mind issues for many voters, but are not as prevalent a concern as Bay pollution is.

**FIGURE 1:**  
**Perception of the Most Important Environmental or Conservation Problem Facing Maryland**  
*(Open-Ended; Top Responses Only)*



As a follow-up question, survey respondents were presented with a list of issues facing Maryland, and were asked to rate each as either an “extremely serious,” “very serious,” “somewhat serious,” or “not a serious” problem in Maryland. The list included a variety of issues related to conservation, as well as numerous other concerns. As shown in **Figure 2** on the following page, “pollution of the Chesapeake Bay” and “pollution of rivers, lakes and streams” rank among voters’ greatest overall concerns. Seven out of ten voters rate these issues as “extremely” or “very serious” problem, essentially the same level of concern as is expressed for crime, health care, and traffic.

**FIGURE 2:**  
**Evaluation of the Seriousness of Issues Facing Maryland**  
*(Split Sampled)*

Issue	Extremely/ Very Serious
Crime, drugs and gangs	76%
A lack of affordable health insurance coverage	71%
Pollution of rivers, lakes and streams	70%
Traffic congestion	70%
Pollution of the Chesapeake Bay	70%
The quality of public education	64%
A lack of affordable housing	62%
Loss of habitat for fish and wildlife	59%
Poorly-planned growth and development	56%
The amount you pay in taxes	55%
Loss of farmland	54%
Loss of natural areas	52%

Voters also express significant levels of concern about a number of other conservation issues, including “loss of habitat for fish and wildlife” (59%), “poorly-planned growth and development” (56%), “loss of farmland” (54%) and “loss of natural areas” (52%).

In order to better understand the values that underlie voters’ attitudes on conservation issues, survey respondents were offered a list of statements relating to conservation, and were asked whether they generally agreed or disagreed with each one. The results are highlighted in **Figure 3** on the following page, and reveal several broad trends in Maryland voter opinion:

- ✓ **Voters are concerned about the consequences of growth and development in the state.** More than three out of four (79 percent) agree that many of Maryland’s problems, including traffic, pollution, and housing costs, are linked to the state’s rate of growth and development.
- ✓ **Voters think progress has been made in protecting land, air and water in Maryland, but believe that more needs to be done.** Fully 58 percent agree that “Maryland has made great progress in recent years in protecting land, air and water.” But at the same time, 80 percent *disagree* that “Maryland has enough natural areas and open space, and we do not need to do any more to protect them.”
- ✓ **Voters lack confidence in the State’s work on conservation issues.** A 72-percent majority agree that State officials are too close to real estate developers, and 64 percent agree that the State is not meeting its responsibility to protect land, air and water.

- ✓ **Voters are interested in becoming more informed and active on issues related to land, air and water.** More than three-quarters (76 percent) say they wish they had more information about potential threats to land, air and water in Maryland, while more than three in five (62 percent) say they would like to get “more involved” in efforts to protect Maryland’s land, air and water.

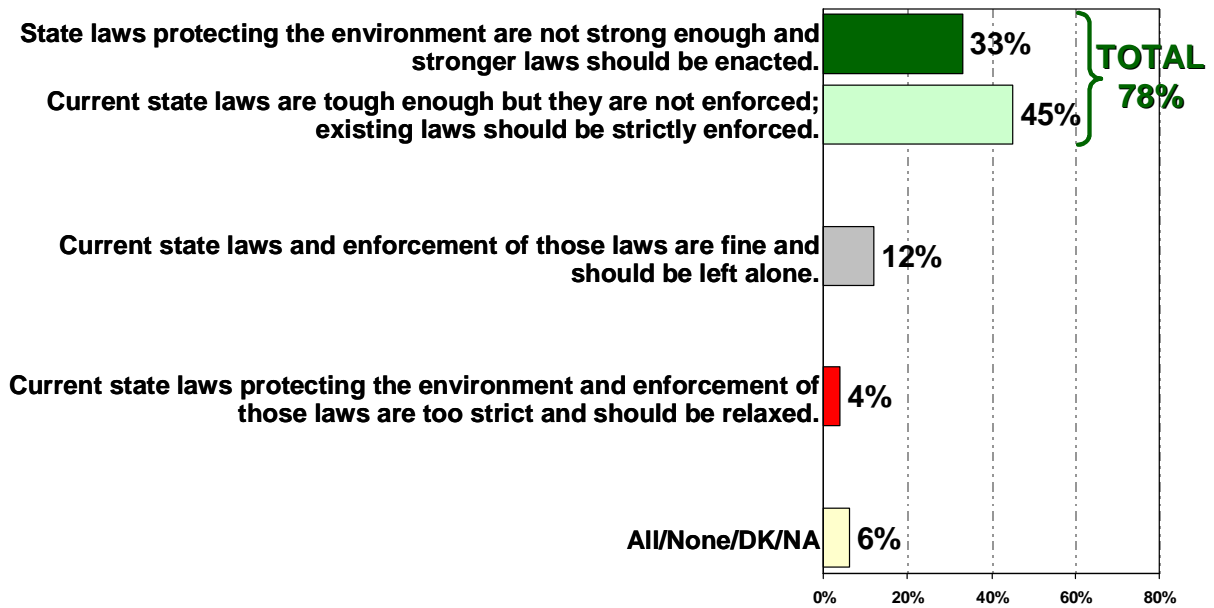
**FIGURE 3:  
Agreement With Statements About Conservation Issues**

Statement	TOTAL AGREE	Str. Agree	SW Agree	Sw Disag.	Str. Disag.	DK/ NA
Many of Maryland’s problems, such as traffic, air and water pollution, and high housing costs, are a direct result of the state’s rate of growth and development	<b>79%</b>	47%	32%	13%	5%	3%
I wish I had more information about potential threats to land, air and water in Maryland*	<b>76%</b>	45%	31%	17%	4%	3%
State government officials in Maryland are too close to real estate developers*	<b>72%</b>	44%	28%	13%	5%	11%
State officials are not meeting their responsibility to protect Maryland’s land, air and water*	<b>64%</b>	30%	34%	22%	7%	7%
I would like to get more involved in activities to protect Maryland’s land, air and water*	<b>62%</b>	23%	39%	23%	12%	3%
Maryland has made great progress in recent years in protecting land, air and water*	<b>58%</b>	19%	39%	22%	15%	6%
Maryland has more than enough natural areas and open space, and we do <u>not</u> need to do any more to protect them*	<b>18%</b>	7%	11%	26%	54%	1%

\* Split Sampled

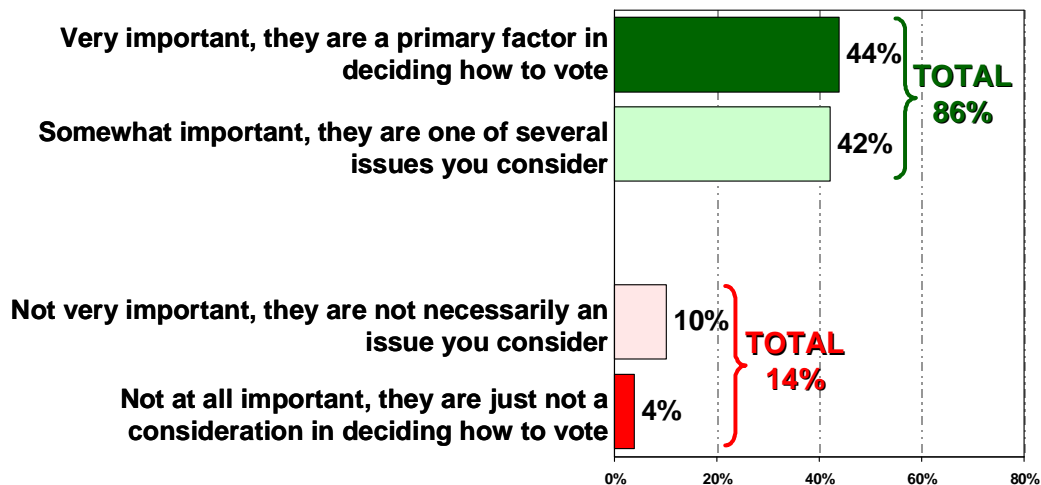
Most Maryland voters want either stronger environmental laws, or better enforcement of those laws already on the books. As illustrated in **Figure 4** on the following page, when offered a choice of four statements about environmental laws in the state, one-third call for stronger laws while an additional 45 percent call for strict enforcement of existing laws. This result demonstrates a strong voter consensus in favor of a stronger environmental protections.

**FIGURE 4:  
 Position on State Laws Related to the Environment**



Maryland voters are not only supportive of environmental protections, but they are ready to stand up for that belief at the ballot box. Survey respondents were asked to indicate how important issues related to land, air and water are in their voting decisions on state or local candidates. And – as shown below in **Figure 5** – a clear 86-percent majority rate them as at least “somewhat important.” The priority placed on conservation issues in voting decisions cuts across subgroups of the electorate: at least seven out of ten voters in every major demographic and geographic subgroup say such issues are at least “somewhat important” in their voting decisions.

**FIGURE 5:  
 Importance of Clean Water, Clean Air and Open Space in Making Voting Decisions**



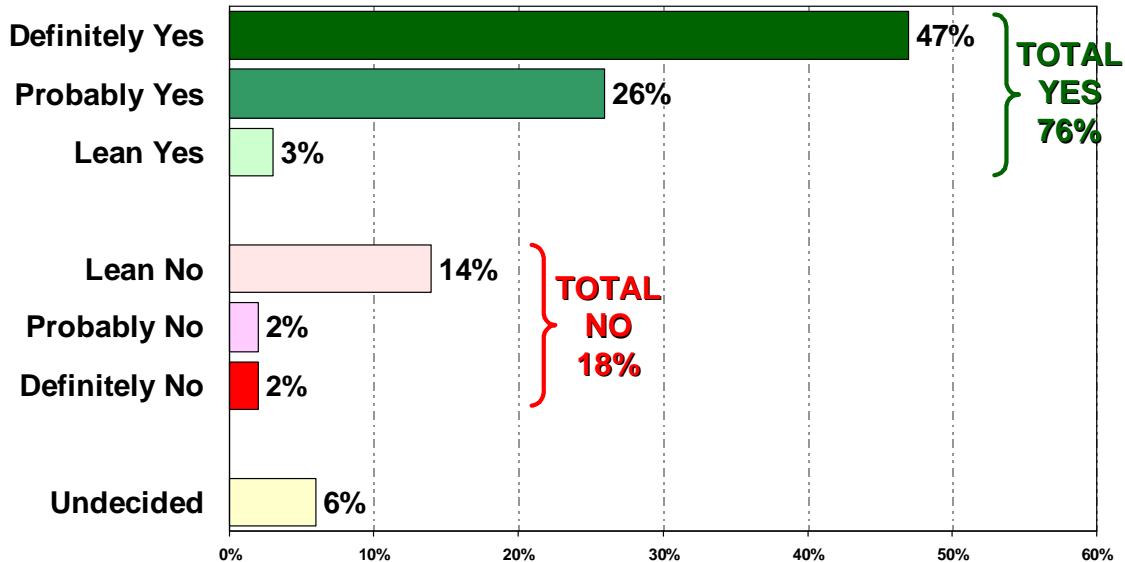
**SUPPORT FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT ON STATE LAND SALES**

Survey respondents were also asked about their position on an upcoming state constitutional amendment that will be presented to Maryland voters in November. Respondents were read the following language of the amendment, as it will appear on the ballot later this year:

*“The Board of Public Works may not approve the sale, transfer, exchange, grant or other permanent disposition of any state-owned outdoor recreation, open space, conservation, preservation, forest, or parkland without the express approval of the General Assembly or of a committee that the General Assembly designates by statute, resolution or rule.”*

As shown in **Figure 6**, voters have an overwhelmingly positive reaction to the proposal. **More than three-quarters say that they would vote “yes,” with nearly half the electorate (47%) indicating that they will “definitely” vote for the amendment.** There is no major demographic or geographic subgroup of Maryland voters where support for the amendment falls below 70 percent.

**FIGURE 6:**  
**Vote on Constitutional Amendment After Ballot Language**



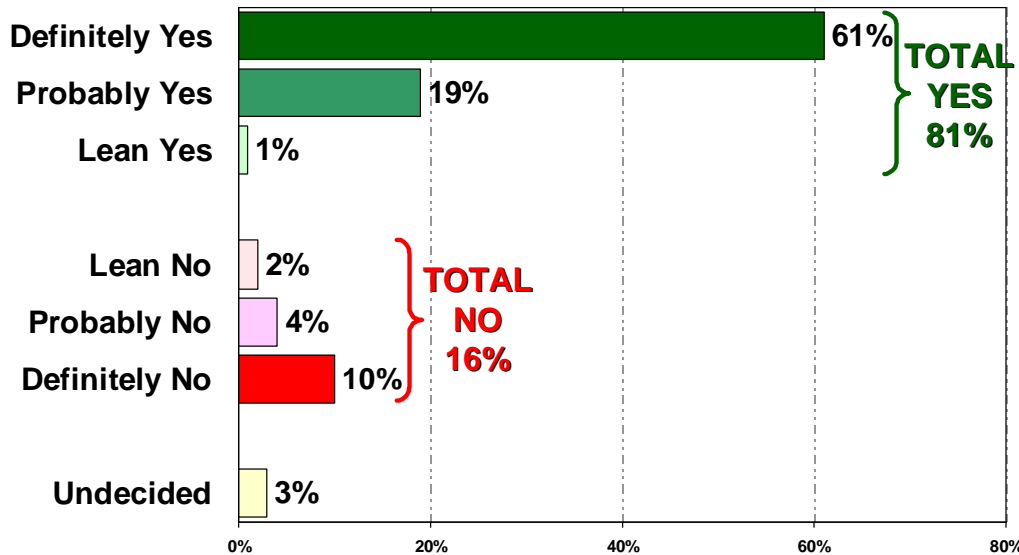
Strikingly, support for the amendment increases still further when voters are offered the following simple explanation of the amendment’s major provisions:

*“Essentially, what this constitutional amendment comes down to is this. It would prevent the State Board of Public Works from selling any state park,*

conservation or recreational land to private owners without approval from the General Assembly.”

Given this description (as shown in **Figure 7**), support for the amendment increases to 81 percent. More importantly, the “definite yes” vote increases by an even greater proportion, going up a full 14 points (from 47% to 61%).

**FIGURE 7:  
Vote on Constitutional Amendment After Explanation**



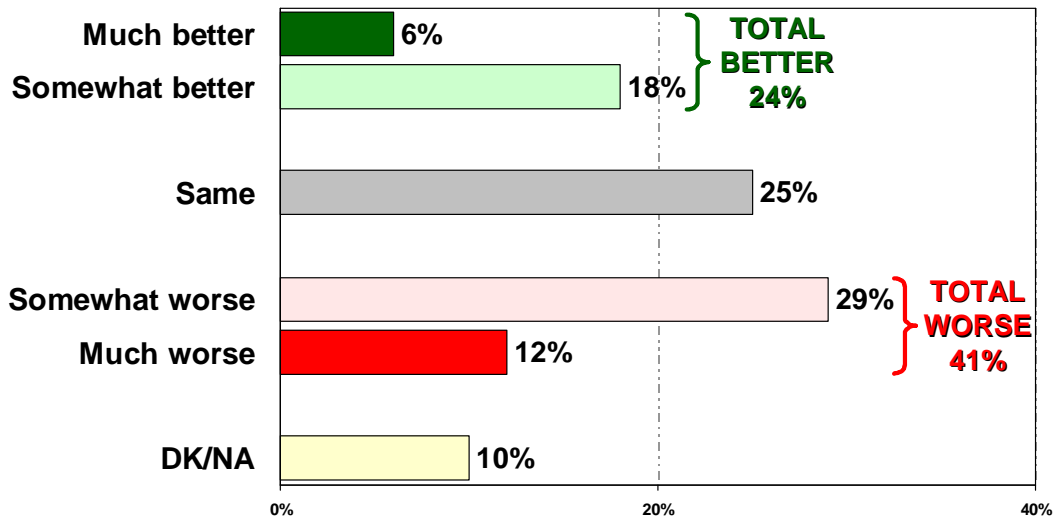
**ATTITUDES TOWARD THE HEALTHY AIR ACT**

The survey results reveal overwhelming public support for the Healthy Air Act, with nine out of ten voters saying that they support the legislation. Support for the proposal cuts across every major demographic and geographic subgroup of the electorate. In addition, the survey results suggest that support for the proposal stems from voters’ strong belief that it is possible to protect Maryland’s environment while at the same time preserving a strong economy.

The following are some of the key specific findings related to the Healthy Air Act:

- ✓ **Voters believe that air quality in Maryland is getting worse.** As illustrated in **Figure 8** on the following page, a total of 41 percent of Maryland voters say that outdoor air quality has gotten worse in Maryland recently, while only 24 percent believe that it has improved. The remainder of the electorate believe that air quality has remained the same (25 percent) or decline to offer an opinion (10 percent).

**FIGURE 8:**  
**Evaluation of Recent Changes in Maryland’s Outdoor Air Quality**

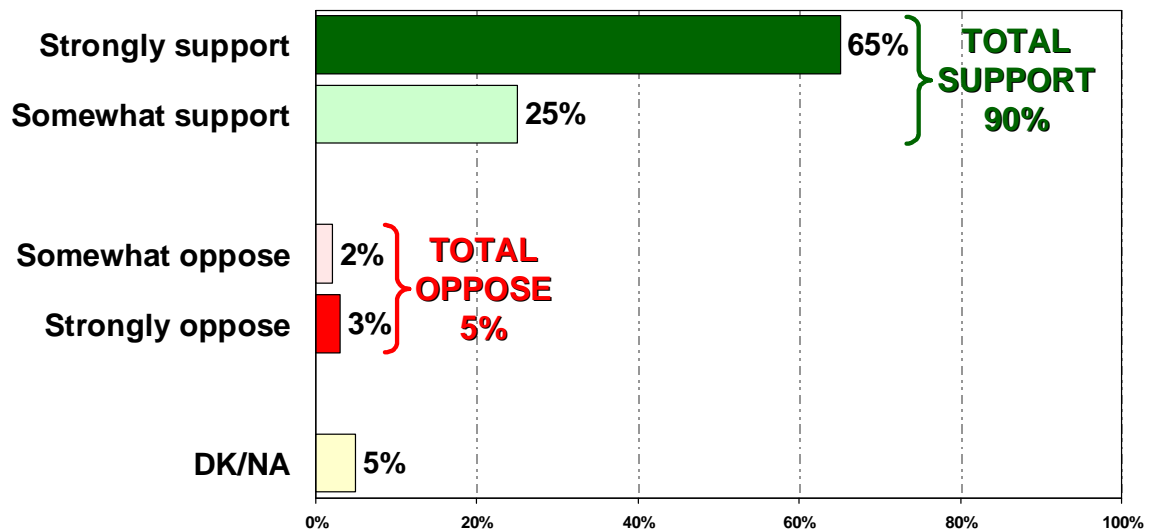


- ✓ **Voters see pollution from coal power plants as posing a significant threat to air quality.** A total of 42 percent label pollution from such power plants as a “major threat” to Maryland’s air quality, while an additional 36 percent call it a “minor threat” – meaning that a total of more than three quarters of voters see coal power plants as threatening air quality in Maryland.
- ✓ **Most likely as a result of these concerns, voters overwhelmingly support the Healthy Air Act.** Survey respondents were read the following brief description of the Healthy Air Act, and were asked their position on the legislation:

*“Let me tell you a little bit more about one proposal to address air pollution in Maryland, known as the Healthy Air Act, which is being considered this year by the Maryland General Assembly. The Act would require Maryland’s dirtiest power plants to install available modern technology to reduce their emissions of four serious air pollutants: mercury, carbon, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide.”*

As illustrated in **Figure 9**, fully nine out of ten voters (90 percent) said that they would support the Healthy Air Act, with nearly two-thirds (65 percent) saying they support it “strongly.” Just five percent of Maryland voters say that they oppose the legislation.

**FIGURE 9:  
Support for the Healthy Air Act**



Support cuts across demographic groups within the electorate. The Healthy Air Act is backed by:

- 92% of women and 88 % of men;
- 91% of voters under 50 and 89% of voters age 50 and over;
- 92% of voters without a college education, and 89% of college-educated voters;
- 92% of African-Americans and 91% of whites; and
- 95% of voters in Prince George’s County, 94% of voters in the City of Baltimore, 93% of voters in Baltimore County, 88% of voters in Anne Arundel County, 86% of voters in Montgomery County, and 89% of voters in other parts of the state.

The survey also indicated that support for the Healthy Air Act remains strong even after voters have heard statements from supporters and opponents of the legislation. After hearing a pair of arguments for and against the Healthy Air Act – including statements that the Act could increase electric rates and cost jobs – voters continued to favor it by more than a three-to-one margin, 68 percent to 21 percent.

- ✓ **More than two-thirds of voters believe that it is not necessary to choose between a clean environment and a strong economy.** Survey respondents were presented with a pair of statements on the relationship between the environment and the economy, and were asked to choose which one came closer to their opinion. As shown below in **Figure 10**, more than two-thirds of those polled indicated that they believe it is possible to have a strong economy and a clean environment at the same time. Voters’ strong support for the Healthy Air Act undoubtedly stems from their

belief that the needs of the economy and the environment can be addressed simultaneously.

**FIGURE 10:  
Perceptions of the Relationship Between a  
Clean Environment and a Strong Economy**

Position	% Choosing
<b>We can have a clean environment and a strong economy at the same time without having to choose one over the other.</b>	<b>68%</b>
Sometimes a clean environment and a strong economy are in conflict and we must choose one over the other.	31%
Don't Know	1%

**ATTITUDES TOWARD PROGRAM OPEN SPACE**

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As noted earlier, Maryland voters are growing increasingly concerned about growth and development and its impact on their quality of life. As a response to these concerns, voters offer overwhelming support for Program Open Space, with nine out of ten Maryland voters saying that they back the program. In addition, voters support taking action to repay money that has been diverted from Program Open Space: fully 57% say that the Governor and State Legislature should be required to repay all of the money that has been diverted from Program Open Space over the last year.

The following are some of the key specific findings related to Program Open Space:

- ✓ **Maryland voters are increasingly concerned about the rate of growth and development in their community.** As shown in **Figure 11** on the following page, a 58-percent majority of Maryland voters say that the rate of growth and development in their community is “too fast,” while less than one in ten (seven percent) regard it as “too slow.” Voters’ feelings on this issue tend to be quite strongly held – as the table makes clear, nearly two in five voters (38 percent) say that growth and development in their community is moving “*much* too fast.”

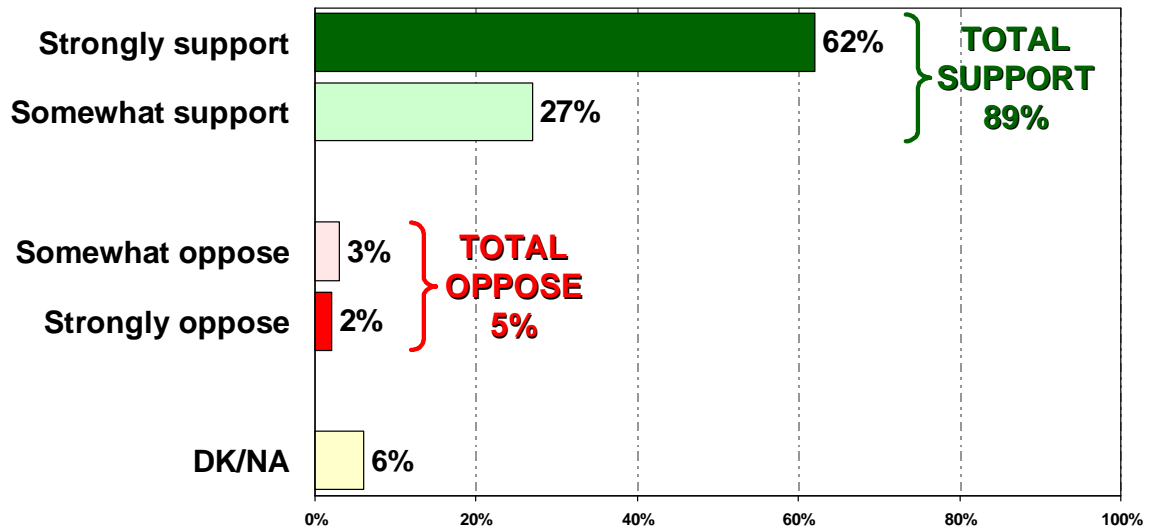
**FIGURE 11:  
Attitudes Toward the Local Rate of Growth and Development**

Position	2005	2006	Change
Much too fast	32%	38%	+6%
Somewhat too fast	16%	20%	+4%
<b>TOTAL TOO FAST</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>+10%</b>
Much too slow	5%	4%	-1%
Somewhat too slow	4%	3%	-1%
<b>TOTAL TOO SLOW</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>-2%</b>
<b>ABOUT RIGHT/DK</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>-8%</b>

It is also noteworthy that voters’ concern about growth has increased significantly since a similar survey conducted in January 2005. At that time, 48 percent of voters said that growth and development in their community was moving “too fast.” Concern about the issue has increased by ten points over the past year.

- ✓ **Voters overwhelmingly support Program Open Space as a way of addressing these concerns about the loss of natural areas.** Survey respondents were given a basic description of the primary features of Program Open Space: that it has been in effect since 1969; that it sets aside money to build parks, protect land around sources of water, and preserve forests, farmland and fish and wildlife habitat; that it is funded by a one-half of one percent tax on the sale of property; and that it has protected thousands of acres of land and created thousands of state and local parks and recreation areas. As shown in **Figure 12** on the following page, after hearing this description nine out of ten Maryland voters (89 percent) indicated that they support Program Open Space, while only one voter in twenty (five percent) oppose it. This level of support is statistically identical to that observed in our 2005 survey, when 88 percent said that they support the program.

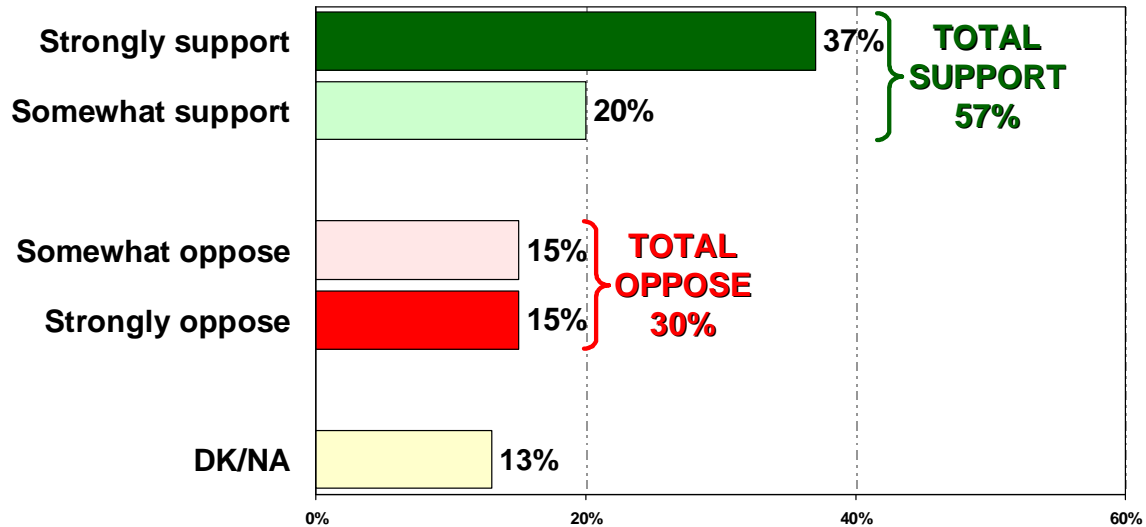
FIGURE 12:  
Support for Program Open Space



This broad support for Program Open Space cuts across every major demographic and geographic subgroup of the electorate. More specifically, Program Open Space is backed by:

- 90 percent of women and 90 percent of men;
  - 92 percent of college-educated voters and 88 percent of those without a college education;
  - 91 percent of voters under age 50 and 90 percent of voters age 50 and over;
  - 90 percent of white voters and 90 percent of African-Americans; and
  - At least 80 percent of voters in each region of the state.
- ✓ **By a two-to-one margin, voters support requiring the Governor and State Legislature to repay money diverted from Program Open Space over the past year.** Survey respondents were informed that over the past year, \$70 million had been diverted from Program Open Space to fund unrelated state programs – part of a total of \$269 million that had been diverted over the past four years. Respondents were asked whether they would support or oppose requiring the Governor and State Legislature to repay the money diverted over the past year – and as shown in **Figure 13**, a sizable 57-percent majority said that they supported the idea. Only about half as many voters (just 30 percent) opposed such a repayment. Those who strongly support repayment (37 percent) outnumber those who strongly oppose it (15 percent) by more than two to one.

FIGURE 13:  
Support for Requiring the Governor and State Legislature to  
Repay Money Diverted From Program Open Space



**CONCLUSION**

Taken together, the survey results show that **Maryland voters continue to be highly concerned about the condition of land, air, and water, and strongly supportive of efforts to protect it.** Most Maryland voters see the rate of growth and development as moving too quickly, which has led them to be highly concerned about issues like water pollution the Chesapeake Bay and in rivers, lakes and streams, as well as the loss of wildlife habitat, natural areas and farmland. As a result of this concern, voters place a high priority on environmental issues at the ballot box, and are strongly supportive of tougher environmental laws or better enforcement of existing laws. The near-unanimous backing that Maryland voters offer Program Open Space and the Healthy Air Act are two noteworthy expressions of this support.