

Bordering on Madness

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An American Land Use Tale

Second Edition

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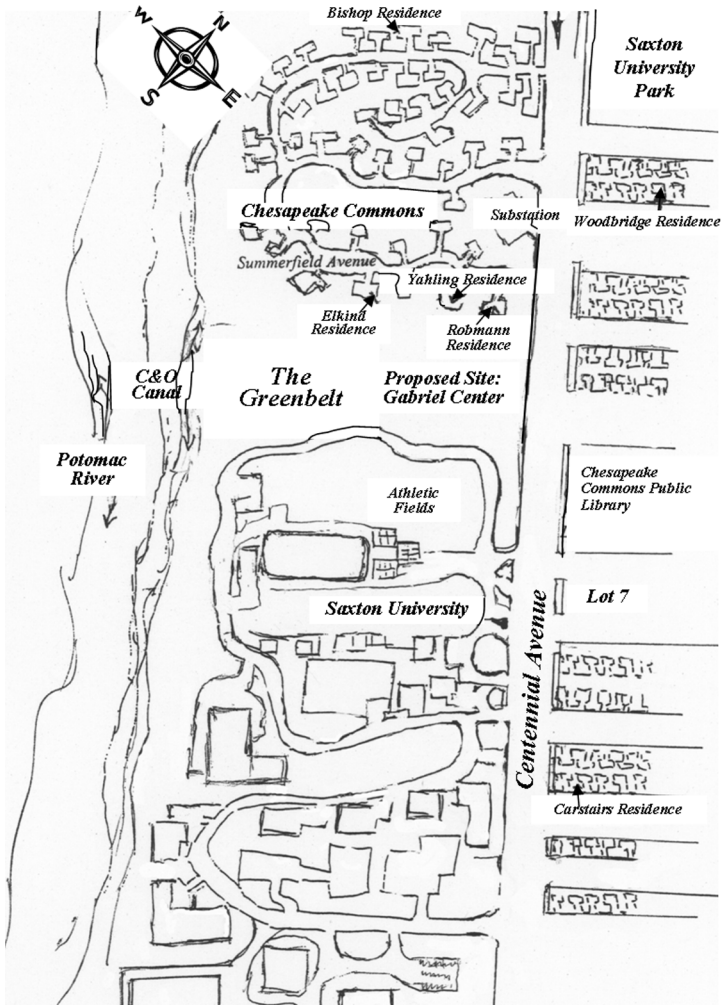
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Preface

We are a species that takes property seriously. We have always been. In every community, regardless of size, disputes explode when developers face off against citizens' groups. In these not particularly civil struggles involving the use of land, the legitimacy or design of a proposed project is secondary. The first inquiry is simple: 'Why here?' For some, it is not just the first question, it is the only question.

The emotions that drive those involved in land use disputes are primitive, rooted in the core of that ancient being for whom protection of property meant survival. Humans, and probably most other species, seek companionship with those who appear similar, and passionately resist change. The mere announcement of plans to alter any aspect of our landscape evokes powerful anxiety. When these changes touch our lives, our backyards, the forces are magnified and experienced as a direct threat to the fortress domestic.

Land use fights become confrontational with amazing speed. Before there is time for meaningful compromise, homeowners and their counterparts on development teams become combatants. Positions harden, making settlement impossible. The opposition becomes the enemy, depersonalized and reprehensible.

The rage and fear land use disputes generate are almost never released by the conclusion of the legal proceedings they activate. The parties rarely experience catharsis. Nevertheless, in these sinewy exercises in democracy, there are unexpected and regular displays of intelligence and conscience.

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