

Chapter 1: Introduction

Legal context for the Comprehensive Plan.....	1-1
Purpose & Consistency of the Comprehensive Plan	1-2
Components of the County's Planning Program	1-4
Goals and Objectives	1-6
Planning History	1-6

Introduction

Chapter 1

Introduction

This document establishes a Comprehensive Plan (the Plan) to direct and manage the future development of Charles County. The new Plan replaces the 2006 Charles County Comprehensive Plan. The new (2016) plan was adopted by Resolution on July 12, 2016. It updates background information, notes recent trends, analyzes factors affecting future development, assesses the desires and interests of Charles County residents regarding the future of their County, and identifies areas where changes are recommended to the framework established in the 2006 Plan. It should be noted that this plan took over five years to complete, with various drafts and changes in order to best reflect the values of the community. Therefore, there may be some variations between chapters with the data used for issues which needed to be revised and updated over time. However, the plan is internally consistent throughout. This is a ten year plan for implementation but contains projections to the year 2040 and is intended to guide decisions for that period of time, until it is considered for additional major changes.

Legal context for the Comprehensive Plan

The Charles County Comprehensive Planning Program meets the requirements for local government planning in Maryland pursuant to State enabling legislation and requirements contained in the Land Use Article formerly known as Article 66-B of the Annotated Code of Maryland¹. Among the requirements is that at least once every ten years a Planning Commission shall review and, if necessary, revise or amend the Comprehensive Plan.

Included in the Land Use Article are 12 visions adopted by the Maryland General Assembly in 2009 for local Planning Commissions to implement through comprehensive plans. The visions are:

- (1) Quality of life and sustainability: a high quality of life is achieved through universal stewardship of the land, water, and air resulting in sustainable communities and protection of the environment;
- (2) Public participation: citizens are active partners in the planning and implementation of community initiatives and are sensitive to their responsibilities in achieving community goals;
- (3) Growth areas: growth is concentrated in existing population and business centers, growth areas adjacent to these centers, or strategically selected new centers;

¹ House Bill 1290 adopted by the General Assembly in 2012 repealed Article 66B effective October 1, 2012, consolidating it with other laws relating to zoning, planning, subdivision, and other land use mechanisms, in a new article in the Annotated Code of Maryland, to be designated the Land Use Article.

(4) Community design: compact, mixed-use, walkable design consistent with existing community character and located near available or planned transit options is encouraged to ensure efficient use of land and transportation resources and preservation and enhancement of natural systems, open spaces, recreational areas, and historical, cultural, and archeological resources;

(5) Infrastructure: growth areas have the water resources and infrastructure to accommodate population and business expansion in an orderly, efficient, and environmentally sustainable manner;

(6) Transportation: a well-maintained, multimodal transportation system facilitates the safe, convenient, affordable, and efficient movement of people, goods, and services within and between population and business centers;

(7) Housing: a range of housing densities, types, and sizes provides residential options for citizens of all ages and incomes;

(8) Economic development: economic development and natural resource-based businesses that promote employment opportunities for all income levels within the capacity of the State's natural resources, public services, and public facilities are encouraged;

(9) Environmental protection: land and water resources, including the Chesapeake and coastal bays, are carefully managed to restore and maintain healthy air and water, natural systems, and living resources;

(10) Resource conservation: waterways, forests, agricultural areas, open space, natural systems, and scenic areas are conserved;

(11) Stewardship: government, business entities, and residents are responsible for the creation of sustainable communities by collaborating to balance efficient growth with resource protection;

(12) Implementation: strategies, policies, programs, and funding for growth and development, resource conservation, infrastructure, and transportation are integrated across the local, regional, State, and interstate levels to achieve these visions.

This Comprehensive Plan has also been prepared with due consideration to PlanMaryland, a plan developed by the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) and accepted by Governor O'Malley in December 2011. PlanMaryland is the State's first comprehensive plan for sustainable growth and development and is intended to improve the way in which state agencies and local governments work together to accomplish common goals and objectives for growth, development and preservation.

Purpose & Consistency of the Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan serves as the policy guide and framework for future growth, development, and preservation in Charles County. The Plan's "horizon" is the year 2040, meaning that the Plan looks at growth and development out over the next 24 years. The Plan addresses land use, water resources (including drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater),

energy, transportation, public facilities (including police, fire and emergency services, schools, and libraries), economic development, housing, natural resources, environmentally sensitive areas, and community development.

The general thrust or "theme" of the plan is that the County should continue to grow with a Smart Growth philosophy: balancing this growth with strong environmental protection measures by conserving resources within the framework and guidance of this plan. This plan makes significant changes from the previous plans by reducing the Development District by 30,000 acres, concentrating growth, protecting our natural resources, promoting historic village revitalization efforts and supporting light rail transit for long term development.

The Plan's goals, objectives, policies and recommended actions provide guidance for decisions concerning how development will be managed or regulated, where and how it should occur, and what capital improvements and public services should be provided to support it. In this context, the Plan serves to inform County residents, the development community, and state and federal agencies of the County's intent regarding its future. It identifies controls, management measures, financial or human resource investments, and incentives necessary to achieve County objectives.

The Plan also provides the basis for a number of County actions and management decisions and can be used to evaluate the merits of proposals that will surface over time. House Bill 297, approved in 2009, requires consistency of development, zoning, densities and intensities with the direction of the Comprehensive Plan – including land use districts and Goals, Objectives and Policies set forth herein.

It is impossible to anticipate all possible future occurrences, problems, or opportunities which will arise and, undoubtedly, County residents, the Planning Commission, and the County Commissioners will be faced with proposals which could affect many aspects of life in the County. This Plan, and in particular its policies and objectives, is intended to provide guidance in decision-making and establish a basis for evaluating such proposals.

Amendments to the Plan

Comprehensive Plans are amended periodically. The process for amending the Plan is the same process as approving a new Plan and is set forth in State law (see above under Legal Context) including public notice and hearing requirements. Requests for Comprehensive Plan amendments can be made to the Department of Planning and Growth Management along with a completed application and associated fee. The burden of proof to support policy changes to the text or to the maps is on the applicant. The Comprehensive Plan is intended to be a 10 year plan for purposes of implementation. Therefore, applications for amendments to the plan will only be considered one time per year from the date of adoption as a batch or group of amendments at the same time. Such amendments should be substantially consistent with the overall direction and intent of the plan.

The Plan's Relationship with the Towns of La Plata and Indian Head

La Plata and Indian Head are incorporated towns. Under state law, the towns have their own planning authority and adopt their own comprehensive plans and land use regulations. In

that sense the County Plan does not apply to the towns. However, inter-jurisdictional coordination is a feature of planning in Maryland. The County coordinated the development of the Comprehensive Plan with the towns. The Land Use Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland requires coordination between the towns and the County over the municipal growth elements of the Towns' comprehensive plans. Port Tobacco is also an incorporated town but does not exercise zoning authority.

Components of the County's Planning Program

The Comprehensive Plan both influences and is influenced by companion documents that serve to implement the Plan.

Zoning Ordinance

The zoning ordinance will continue to be the chief means through which this Plan is to be implemented. The ordinance prescribes ways in which lands located within the County may or may not be used. It prescribes a series of zoning districts and, for each district, enumerates uses permitted and establishes performance standards for development. The Zoning Ordinance will be updated to implement this Comprehensive Plan. The County Administrator will be responsible for reporting zoning ordinance updates and ensuring that goals are established to ensure that the county's Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Ordinance are aligned. State law mandates that the Comprehensive Plan and the zoning be consistent therefore, the County Administrator will devise and publicly share an implementation schedule to ensure public notification and feedback.

Subdivision Regulations

Subdivision Regulations have been established in the County since 1960. They guide and control the configuration and layout of land subdivision in the County.

Related to the zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations are several key ordinances and manuals including the Roads Ordinance, Adequate Public Facilities Manual, Site Design & Architectural Review Guidelines, and the Stormwater Management Ordinance. The Subdivision Regulations will be updated to implement this Comprehensive Plan.

Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Program

Charles County's Critical Area Program was adopted in June 1989, and is updated periodically. It limits development densities and protects natural resources located within 1,000 feet of tidal waters or tidal wetlands. This program will be updated to implement this Comprehensive Plan.

Comprehensive Water and Sewer Plan

The Comprehensive Water and Sewer Plan guides the development of water supply and sewerage systems and facilities by implementing County development policies so as to prevent or minimize adverse health and environmental problems related to use of water supplies. It is designed to assure that ample supplies of water are treated, and delivered to

points of use, and that wastewater is collected and delivered to points best suited for waste treatment, disposal, or re-use. The Water and Sewer Plan will be updated to implement this Comprehensive Plan.

Capital Improvement Program

The Capital Improvement Program (CIP) is important to the Comprehensive Plan because it relates the goals and objectives of the Plan to the implementation strategies. It states what capital projects will be undertaken, when they will be paid, and the funding sources. The Comprehensive Plan is, in turn, important to the capital budgeting process because it outlines the location and intensity of future growth. Projects will be proposed as future CIP projects to implement this Comprehensive Plan.

Other Adopted Plans

The Charles County Planning Program also considers a variety of other specialized plans which are coordinated with and help implement the comprehensive planning program. These include but are not limited to:

- Benedict Waterfront Village Revitalization Plan
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan
- Blossom Point Research Facility Joint Land Use Study
- Bryans Road Sub-Area Plan
- Community Development Housing Plan
- Educational Facilities Master Plan
- Emergency Medical Services Plan
- Emergency Operations Plan
- Hazard Mitigation Plan
- Historic Preservation Plan
- Hughesville Village Revitalization Plan
- Indian Head Joint Land Use Study
- Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan
- Port Tobacco Village Revitalization Plan
- Solid Waste Management Plan
- Southern Maryland Heritage Area Heritage Tourism Management Plan
- Waldorf Sub-Area Plan
- Waldorf Urban Design Study & Waldorf Urban Redevelopment Corridor (WURC) plans
- Wicomico Scenic River Study and Management Plan

Goals, Objectives and Policies

As used in this plan **goals** are long range, generalized statements that represent the long-range desires of the County. **Objectives** are more immediate and specific in nature and are intended to be intermediate steps toward achieving goals. Where possible, objectives are measurable and tied to specific time frames. Policies further implement objectives.

Planning History

1990 Comprehensive Plan

The 1990 Comprehensive Plan was the first major Comprehensive Plan for Charles County and established the broad direction for planning in the County over the subsequent 20 plus years. It was developed with a large Citizens' Advisory Committee that established nine broad goals. (Table 1-1).

The 1990 Comprehensive Plan's land use concept provided for future growth to be absorbed in concentrated form in the northern end of the County, as well as in the incorporated towns and designated locations called Town and Village Centers. The intent of the land use plan was to channel most of its population into proposed growth centers and to preserve lands in the Resource Conservation, Rural Protection and Agricultural Conservation Districts. The land use concept also directed commercial and industrial activities into planned commercial/industrial clusters to depart from earlier highway strip development practices.

Table 1-1 Broad Comprehensive Plan Goals

	Comprehensive Plan Origin
Limit sprawl development.	1990
Limit multiple points of access to arterial roads.	1990
Improve the County road system to support transportation needs.	1990
Protect the agricultural industry and the land base necessary to support the industry.	1990
Increase opportunities and public access to the waterfront.	1990
Improve access to and community appearance in the Waldorf area.	1990
Develop greater opportunity for development of higher wage jobs.	1990/2006
Create better development standards for commercial development.	1990
Develop greater control and management by County Government over the rate, location, quality and cost of future development.	1990
Integrate economic and fiscal implications of growth and development into County planning.	1997
Achieve the objectives of the 1992 Maryland Economic Growth, Resource Protection and Planning Act. This goal is revised in the 2016 Comprehensive	1997/2016

	Comprehensive Plan Origin
Plan to read: "Implement State's 12 visions for Planning adopted by the General Assembly in 2009".	
Develop greater attention to community character aspects of development, including urban design, quality of development and community image.	1997
Ensure regional and inter-jurisdictional coordination on regional issues.	2006

1997 Comprehensive Plan

The 1997 Plan update reaffirmed the overall plan concept developed in 1990 adding broad goals (see Table 1-1). The Citizens' Advisory Committee also added three major recommendations that were incorporated into the Plan:

- Integration of economic and fiscal implications of growth and development into County planning;
- Achieving the objectives of the 1992 Maryland Economic Growth, Resource Protection and Planning Act; and
- Greater attention to community character aspects of development, including urban design, quality of development and community image.

2006 Comprehensive Plan

The 2006 Comprehensive Plan update was developed through careful review of the 1997 Plan. The Plan's Citizens' Work Group (CWG) adjusted some broad goals (see Table 1-1) and made recommendations on eight specific issues:

1. **Economic Development/Jobs.** Measures and objectives to bring higher wage/quality employment to the County.
2. **Green Infrastructure.** Should the Plan recommend development of a green infrastructure plan?
3. **Villages.** What should the function of Village Centers be? Should the village designations in the Plan be changed?
4. **Agriculture.** How should the Plan's goals and objectives be changed to reflect changes in agriculture?
5. **Bensville.** Was a sub-area plan needed in Bensville, as recommended in the 1997 Comprehensive Plan, and should the land use designations there be changed?
6. **Deferred Development District.** What criteria should be used to open up new areas for development on public water and sewer? How often should the deferred development areas be reconsidered for change?
7. **Mattawoman Creek Watershed Management Plan (2003).** How should this plan's recommendations be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan and should low impact development and "green buildings" be incorporated into the Plan as objectives?
8. **Future transportation facilities.** What facilities would be needed beyond 2020, and how could a more multi-modal system be encouraged?

The 2006 Comprehensive Plan was amended in 2011 to incorporate a Water Resources Element (Chapter 4).

How this 2016 Comprehensive Plan was Prepared

The 2016 Comprehensive Plan included a new process: an extensive outreach program to solicit public input into the plan. The intent of the program was to allow discussion and debate over all the county's land use policies, including some first established in the 1990 Comprehensive Plan. The outreach program included the following:

1. Public Kick-Off meeting, March 29, 2011.
2. Land Use Marketplace Forum, April 28, 2011.
3. Four Regional Visioning Sessions, Spring 2011.
4. Internet –based public opinion survey with a total of 733 respondents, Spring/Summer 2011.
5. Stakeholder Interviews, approximately 60 in-depth personal interviews, May to July 2011.
6. Four Regional Design Charrettes (workshops) on three Preliminary Comprehensive Plan Scenarios, Summer 2011.
7. Open House, on two Comprehensive Plan Scenarios, October 19, 2011.
8. Public Meeting on single Merged Scenario, December 15, 2011.
9. Joint County Commissioners/Planning Commission briefings, February 2012.
10. Planning Commission work sessions, Winter/Spring 2012.
11. Planning Commission – Public comment review and edits, 2013
12. Planning Commission Transmittal of Draft Plan, August 2013.
13. County Commissioners adopted the Tier Map, April, 2014 and requested that the Planning Commission incorporate it into the plan and make changes for consistency.
14. January, 2015. The Planning Commission included the Tier Map into the plan and made additional changes to land use districts.
15. July, 2015. The Planning Commission reviewed State Agency comments on the most recent plan.
16. October, 2015. The Planning Commission held a public hearing on the updated Comprehensive Plan.
17. January, 2016. The Planning Commission completed a series of briefing updates and evaluation of technical studies in order to make a recommendation on a revised plan.
18. March 21, 2016: The Planning Commission finalized recommendations, changes and directed the Planning and Growth Management Staff to draft a revised plan.

19. April 4, 2016: The Planning Commission certified by Resolution an updated 2016 Comprehensive Plan to be transmitted to the County Commissioners.
 20. May 17, 2016: The County Commissioners held a public hearing on the Planning Commissions recommended plan.
 21. June, 2016: The County Commissioners held a series of work sessions and briefings and recommended changes to the plan.
 22. June 21, 2016: The County Commissioners held a public hearing on their proposed changes to the plan and conducted various work sessions throughout June.
 23. July 12, 2016: The County Commissioners adopted the revised and updated 2016 Charles County Comprehensive Plan.
-

Copies of presentations, original materials, minutes and summaries of meetings and other input were posted on the Comprehensive Plan website. Paper copies are available from the Department of Planning and Growth Management.

Note on Plan Content, Format and Appendix

The 2016 Plan update follows the same basic organizational format as the 2006 Plan. A large volume of data and information was used to prepare the Plan. To make the plan more accessible and up to date, the update includes some changes:

- Some chapters have been changed; for example, Agriculture & Forestry data and policies were removed from the economic development chapter and incorporated into the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Chapter.
- The text has been streamlined. Related plans and documents that are readily available, especially on the internet, are referred to by reference rather than described in the Comprehensive Plan.
- To keep the Plan to a manageable length and size, the main text contains the key points, data, maps, figures, conclusions, policies and recommendations. Supporting documents, reports, data and memoranda are in the appendix to this plan which is available from the Charles County Department of Planning and Growth Management.