

# Chapter 1

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# Chapter 1

## Framework and Plan Concept

This document establishes a Comprehensive Plan to direct and manage the future development of Charles County. The new Plan updates the 1997 Charles County Comprehensive Plan. Overall, the County is satisfied with its direction since 1997 Comprehensive Plan. The new Charles County Comprehensive Plan 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 1997 Plan.

### 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 Article 66-B of the Annotated Code of Maryland. In 1992, the State of Maryland adopted the Economic Growth, Resource Protection and Planning Act (the Act) which amended Article 66B, and established seven land use visions for Maryland's future. The General Assembly added an eighth vision in 2000 (# 7 below). Under the Act, the land use visions must be implemented when a local comprehensive plan is prepared. The eight visions are:

1. Development is concentrated in suitable areas;
2. Sensitive areas are protected;
3. In rural areas, growth is directed to existing population centers and resource areas are protected;
4. Stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and the land is a universal ethic;
5. Conservation of resources, including a reduction in resource consumption, is practiced;
6. To assure the achievement of the above, economic growth is encouraged and regulatory mechanisms are streamlined;
7. Adequate public facilities and infrastructure under control of the county or municipal corporation are available or planned in areas where growth is to occur; and
8. Funding mechanisms are addressed to achieve these visions.

The Act does not prescribe in detail how a jurisdiction is to implement each vision. As part of the Plan update process, each chapter was reviewed in light of the visions. New language has been added as appropriate in several plan chapters.

### The purpose of the plan

This Plan provides the basic policy framework to manage and direct future development in Charles County. It is designed to deal with problems that are immediate in nature as well as to provide the planning for longer-range actions and policies. As such, the Plan is designed to address the County's needs through the year 2025 and thereby provide the county with a means to ensure orderly, managed growth and development throughout the planning period. The general thrust or "theme" of the plan is that the County should endeavor to preserve and enhance the present "character" of the County and improve the quality of life for its citizens while maintaining a pace of growth and development which is managed. This general theme, when interpreted in terms of land use, says that the County should adopt a "managed growth" philosophy toward the use of the land over which it

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has zoning authority and that development should be of a controlled nature, channeled into the most appropriate areas and discouraged in other areas. The County has determined that such a philosophy is necessary to cost-effectively sustain adequate levels of public services and facilities in the form of schools, transportation networks, sewer, water, police, fire, and other services that will be required to support present and future residents.

This theme together with objectives more specifically framed in subsequent elements of this Plan serve as formally adopted policies regarding Charles County's future. They provide guidance for public decisions concerning how development will be managed or regulated, where and how it should occur, and where 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.

Finally, the Plan 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. 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, should provide guidance in decision-making and establish a basis for evaluating such proposals.

## Components of the growth management program

The Comprehensive Plan both influences and is influenced by companion documents that serve to implement the Plan. A brief description of each follows.

### 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 standards are designed to achieve objectives established in the Plan, including protection of sensitive environmental features, protection of productive farmland, and enhancement of the built environment. The ordinance also establishes design standards and site planning standards for certain uses, requires control of access to certain roads, and prescribes minimum landscaping requirements.

### 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. Standards contained in these regulations implement certain Comprehensive Plan policies and objectives.

### Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Program

Charles County's Critical Area Program was adopted in June 1989, and most recently updated in 2001. It establishes a protection program for natural resources located within 1,000 feet of tidal waters or tidal wetlands. It also limits development densities within portions of the Critical Area that are dominated by farm or forested resources and designates Resource Conservation Areas in accordance with State guidelines.

## **Waldorf and Bryans Road-Indian Head Sub-Area Plans**

These Sub-Area plans provide detailed guidance for land use and development in these two sub-areas of the County's Development District established in Chapter 3. The plans were adopted as amendments to the Comprehensive Plan in 2004 and 2001, and have the same weight and authority as the Comprehensive Plan.

## **Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan**

The County adopted a Land Preservation and Recreation Plan in 1999 evaluating the adequacy of existing parks and open space to meet the present and future needs of County residents. As a result of a joint State / Local Land Preservation and Recreation Planning Study Committee since 2001, a Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plan meeting significantly revised state guidelines is due in 2006, and will be adopted as an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan.

## **Comprehensive Water and Sewer Plan**

The Comprehensive Water and Sewer Plan guides the development of adequate 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:

- An ample supply of water may be collected, treated, and delivered to points of use.
- Wastewater can be collected and delivered to points best suited for waste treatment, disposal, or re-use.

## **Capital Improvement Program**

The Capital Improvement Program 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.

## **Specialized plans**

The Charles County Planning Program also considers a variety of specialized plans which need to be coordinated with the comprehensive planning process. Some of these plans include:

- Educational Facilities Master Plan
- Solid Waste Management Plan
- Community Development Housing Plan
- Historic Preservation Plan
- Wicomico Scenic River Study and Management Plan
- Emergency Medical Services Plan
- Hazard Mitigation Plan
- Charles County Emergency Operations Plan
- Southern Maryland Heritage Area Heritage Tourism Management Plan

### Goals and Objectives

Fundamental to Charles County's Comprehensive Plan is the need for a broad community vision of a future Charles County. The vision in this plan is stated in the form of goals and objectives that are easily understood and generally accepted by the citizens of the County.

**Goals** are long range, generalized statements that represent the ultimate desires of the County. The situations and conditions called for in the goals would normally be achieved only through a sustained series of actions over a considerable period of time. The goals are meant to be sufficiently broad to remain valid as people's values change over time. As these values change, the interpretation of the goals will change also.

**Objectives** are more immediate and specific in nature and are intended to be intermediate steps toward achieving the goals. Where possible, objectives are measurable and tied to specific time frames. For each goal, several objectives have been developed.

Goals and objectives are an important component of the Plan. Each Plan chapter or element describes the issues, trends and planning considerations facing the County in the context of the identified objectives, and provides specific recommendations in the form of policies and strategies which, if implemented, should facilitate accomplishing the future vision of the County. While Plan elements provide specific directional guidance, the goals and objectives provide a benchmark or reference point for the detailed decisions that will need to be made regarding the future use and management of County resources during the years following Plan adoption.

### The Plan concept and basis for direction

#### 1990 Comprehensive Plan

For the 1990 Comprehensive Plan, the process of determining goals and objectives for the future of Charles County was carried out by a Citizens' Advisory Committee, appointed by the County Commissioners. Broad support was given to the protection of many of the County's attributes valued by residents which, taken together, represent desirable components of Charles County's character and nature. These attributes included the County's:

- Natural resources and environmental features
- Waterfront resources
- Agricultural resources and industry
- Community character of existing smaller settlements
- Cultural or ethnic diversity (Amish and Native American communities)
- Historic features
- Rural character
- Affordable housing
- Proximity to employment and services in the Washington Metropolitan area

To protect and enhance these attributes the Committee identified nine broad goals (see Table 1-1):

The 1990 Comprehensive Plan's land use concept summarized the Plan's goals and objectives with respect to a vision of the future form of development in Charles County. It provided for future growth to be absorbed in concentrated form in the northern end of the County. In other areas, growth was to be concentrated in the incorporated towns and designated locations called Town and Village Centers.

The intent of the land use plan was for the County 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 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**

	<b>Comprehensive Plan origin</b>
1. Limit sprawl development.	1990
2. Limit multiple points of access to arterial roads.	1990
3. Improvements to the County road system to support transportation needs.	1990
4. Protect the agricultural industry and the land base necessary to support the industry.	1990
5. Increased opportunities and public access to the waterfront.	1990
6. Improved access to and community appearance in the Waldorf area.	1990
7. Greater opportunity for development of light industry and the tourist economy.  This objective is revised in the 2006 update to read: "Greater opportunity for development of higher wage jobs".	1990/2006
8. Better development standards for commercial development.	1990
9. Greater control and management by County Government over the rate, location, quality and cost of future development.	1990
10. Integration of economic and fiscal implications of growth and development into County planning.	1997
11. Achieve the objectives of the 1992 Maryland Economic Growth, Resource Protection and Planning Act.	1997
12. Greater attention to community character aspects of development, including urban design, quality of development and community image.	1997
13. Ensure regional and inter-jurisdictional coordination on regional issues.	2006

### **1997 Comprehensive Plan Update**

The 1997 Plan update reaffirmed the overall plan concept developed in 1990. The features and characteristics that made Charles County attractive in 1990 remained valid in 1997. To the nine objectives of the 1990 Plan described above, the Plan update's Citizens' Advisory Committee added three major recommendations, which were integrated into the 1997 Plan update (see Table 1-1).

### **How This 2006 Update Was Prepared**

This Comprehensive Plan update was developed through careful review of the 1997 Plan, its policies, and objectives. An important component of the process was the involvement of a 23-

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member Citizens' Work Group (CWG) that made recommendations on specific issues for the Plan update.

On October 15, 2003, an Issues Identification Workshop was held at the Jaycees building in Waldorf with over 100 people attending. The purpose of the workshop was to solicit public comment regarding:

- What participants thought about the directions the County had been moving in since 1997 for different policy areas.
- The relative importance of the different issues to be considered in the Plan.
- Whether participants thought the broad objectives identified for the 1997 Comprehensive Plan should remain the objectives for the Plan update.
- Whether there were specific issues they recommended be addressed in the plan update.

The Charles County Commissioners considered public comments from the workshop at a special joint County Commissioners – Planning Commission Issues Selection Meeting on December 1, 2003, and decided which issues should be considered by the CWG:

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 will be needed beyond 2020, and how can a more multi-modal system be encouraged?

The CWG held ten meetings between February and November 2004 to discuss these issues. As a result of the County Commissioners' Issues Selection Meeting and the CWG meetings, regional coordination was added as a new objective, and the 1990 Plan's objective for "Greater opportunity for development of light industry and the tourist economy" was revised to read "Greater opportunity for development of higher wage jobs" (see Table 1-1).

The CWG concluded its work with a final meeting in April 2005 at which it approved the incorporation of the results of its deliberations into the draft Comprehensive Plan.

The Planning Commission hearing draft was presented to the Planning Commission on May 2, 2005, following which the Plan was sent to the State, neighboring counties, and the Towns of La Plata and Indian Head for their review, as required by Article 66-B.

The Planning Commission held a public hearing on the Plan on July 18, 2005, followed by work sessions on September 26<sup>th</sup> and October 17<sup>th</sup>. On October 17<sup>th</sup> the Commission recommended the Plan be forwarded to the County Commissioners with the Planning Commission's comments and recommendations from its two work sessions.

The County Commissioners held a public hearing on January 30, 2006, followed by work sessions on March 21<sup>st</sup> and April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006. The County Commissioners adopted the Plan at the April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006 worksession.

### **Format for the Plan update**

The 2006 Plan update follows the same basic organizational format as the 1997 Plan. To make the plan more accessible and up to date, the update includes some format changes:

- The Framework and Plan Concept chapters have been combined.
- Material in some of the chapters has been reorganized, reworded, or deleted.
- Related plans and documents that are readily available, especially on the internet, are referred to by reference rather than described in the Comprehensive Plan.
- The Plan's goals and objectives are numbered.